

8th December 2024 – Morning Service

Rev Michael Payne

Advent Candle Liturgy

Preparations underway, shifting focus each new day,
Amidst the darkness looking for the light,
For the truth among the mess.

O hush the noise, **Let's hear the angels sing.**

Looking for the messengers who bring the light,
Isaiah – prophet and ancient poet
And John who came to point the way.

O hush the noise, **Let's hear the angels sing.**

Angels, messengers of today,
Truth tellers for this present age,
Those who now show us the way.

O hush the noise, **Let's hear the angels sing.**

Call to Worship

We come together in this advent season with hope in love. With people of old and present, prophet, priest and public, old and new, we come to celebrate the love of God spoken of and lived out. In his tender mercy, God calls us to be part of the great plan of salvation.

Prayer of Approach

God of all who speaks to us through creation, we come as part of your creation.

God of all who came among us in Jesus, we come to you with our physical presence.

God of all who comes to us in Spirit, we come to you in spirit.

God of all we come to you, as we are to worship and adore you, that your Spirit might speak to our spirits to assure us that we are your children, loved, cherished and of value. **Amen**

StF 178 – Long ago prophets knew

1) Long ago, prophets knew
Christ would come, born a Jew,
Come to make all things new;
Bear his People's burden,
Freely love and pardon:

*Ch) Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
When he comes, When he comes,
Who will make him welcome?*

2) God in time, God in man,
This is God's timeless plan:
He will come, as a man,
Born himself of woman, God divinely human:

3) Mary, hail! Though afraid,
She believed, she obeyed.
In her womb, God is laid;
Till the time expected,
Nurtured and protected:

4) Journey ends! Where afar
Bethlem shines, like a star,
Stable door stands ajar.
Unborn Son of Mary, Saviour, do not tarry!

*Ch) Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
Jesus comes! Jesus comes!
We will make him welcome!*

Prayer of Adoration

Lord God, imagination behind creation; power to bring creation into being; love enough to sustain what has been formed; **We worship and adore you**

Lord God, Source of Word, source of meaning, and source of truth; **We worship and adore you**

You expressed your being through the story of your people; in Jesus you made your nature fully clear;

Word made flesh, Light of the World, Saviour of Creation. **We worship and adore you**

We praise you for the Scriptures and the traditions of your Church, for the faithful Christian people who have demonstrated your love, **We worship and adore you**

We praise you that you call us to be witnesses in this age and place. **We worship and adore you. Amen**

Prayer of Confession

The Scriptures speak of people messing up on your plans and purpose; people journeying the wrong way full of self instead of love and grace; We are in their number. **Forgive us.**

The Scriptures speak of people who did not listen to your prophets. Amongst their number we are to be counted for we ignore your word to us; **Forgive us.**

Forgive us we pray and speak to our heart, so we can leave guilt behind and make a new start. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

StF 176 – Like candle flame

1) Like a candle flame,
Flickering small in our darkness.
Uncreated light
Shines through infant eyes.

Ch) *God is with us, alleluia.*
(God is with us, alleluia.)
Come to save us, alleluia.
(Come to save us.)
Alleluia!

2) Stars and angels sing,
Yet the earth sleeps in shadows;
Can this tiny spark
Set a world on fire?

3) Yet his light shall shine
From our lives, Spirit blazing,
As we touch the flame
Of his holy fire.

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Reading: Malachi 3:1-4

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like washers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years.

Reading: Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, ^[1]and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

StF 708 – O God of hope, your prophets spoke

- 1) O God of hope, your prophets spoke
Of days when war would cease:
When, taught to see each person's worth,
And faithful stewards of the earth,
We all would live in peace.
- 2) We pray that our divided world
May hear their words anew:
Then lift for good the curse of war,
Let bread, with justice, bless the poor,
And turn in hope to you.
- 3) Earth's fragile web of life demands
Our reverence and our care,
Lest in our folly, sloth and greed,
Deaf both to you and others' need,
We lay our planet bare.
- 4) Earth's rich resources give us power
To build or to destroy:
Your Spirit urges us to turn
From selfish, fear-bound ways, and learn
God's selfless trust and joy.
- 5) The Prince of Peace is calling us
To shun the way of strife:
He brings us healing through his pain;
Our shattered hope is born again
Through his victorious life.

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Reflection

...I am sending my messenger...

The book of Malachi may be one that you are not overly familiar with – you are amongst the many. Malachi, the title of the book, means “My Messenger.” The message of the messenger included that another messenger was to come – “*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me,*” and following that messenger was the coming of the one the people had been awaiting, the refiner, the purifier, the Messiah.

Malachi, along with other prophets, called the people to change their ways, to be purified. The sacrificial system was about repentance and renewal but was long-term ineffective. There was a belief that for the Messiah to come the people needed to be pure; for the liberator to be present there was a need for an obedient people. This thought carried on into what we call the New Testament times. The people of God were to avoid corruption through mixing with the faithless and the outcast; tax collectors and sinners as the Pharisees of the time of Jesus would refer to them.

Writing in the time of the second temple period after the return from the exile, this Malachi, this messenger, was concerned that people should live in the right way. He uses metaphors of fire and soap to convey the sense of cleansing that people will need to get back on track. As we are aware fire is used to melt metal and remove impurities, soap to remove dirt, both restoring the item to a purer state.

...the word of God came to John son of Zechariah...

In the passage we have read from Luke today we found “*the word of God came to John son of Zechariah...*” This is the only New Testament example of the ‘word of God’ coming to an individual, combined with the title ‘son of xxx’. This reflects the style of introduction of Jeremiah and Hosea indicating that John is a contemporary prophet but with Old Testament style and credibility. John is portrayed as the one coming before the true refiner; the “Messenger” Malachi spoke of. He, like Malachi, had a task of preparing the way for another; this time the way of the true Messiah. John came “*proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,*” get yourself ready for the Messiah, the liberator. The baptism of John was symbolic of cleansing but did not get deep down into the heart and soul.

In 2003 I went on a charity Trek in Kenya along part of the Rift Valley. It was hot, dry and dusty. On our final day of walking I put on a clean tee-shirt; by the time we had ascended and descended Mount Longonot, 2776Ft high, it was filthy with dust and sweat! Most of the clothes worn during the 5 days trekking were very similar. Some clothes we just left behind to be washed and given to people in the community. One of our group, a lass called Sam, was moving on to do some volunteering work at a Ugandan orphanage. We had one night in a hotel in Nairobi before our homeward journey – apart from Sam – so that we could have a good shower before sitting by others on a plane. That evening Sam put her clothes into the hotel laundry and the next morning received them washed and pressed and the whites were bright white. When I got home my clothes were placed in our washing machine and came out grey – some can get things cleaner than others. Ultimately it is Christ who can cleanse us in heart and soul we cannot do it ourselves..

...in the wilderness.

John came proclaiming his message from God in “The wilderness”. The wilderness was a place of expectation for the coming age, the age of liberation, referring back to the time spent wandering in the wilderness. The people had hope of a new exodus from slavery, slavery to Roman oppression.

The theme for this year’s advent services in the Methodist Church is “Hush the noise.” The wilderness is a place with less noise. It is a place where the people of Israel had to rely on God for their supplies and well-being. As we move on further into this advent season may we find our own place of wilderness, a place where we have quiet, less distraction, a place where we remember that it is God who is our ultimate provider. In that place let us listen for the voice of God, what message he may deliver to us. The picture/image for this week is a light bulb, often a sign of a moment of revelation, a fresh idea, a light-bulb moment. Perhaps as you sit with a Bible passage in your wilderness this week you may receive a light bulb moment, a fresh understanding of God’s nature, love and grace for you. Perhaps you may get a message regarding an area of your life that needs deep-cleaning the God way; perhaps a message reassuring you of God’s deep love for you. I will “perhaps” no more and leave you time to find your place of healthy wilderness where you can journey through the remainder of Advent with some “Hush from Noise.”

StF 163 – When listening prophets dare to speak

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| 1) When listening prophets dare to speak,
Love thunders like an ocean wave,
Old wineskins burst, stone columns quake,
And dry bones rise up from the grave | 3) True prophets challenge us to change,
To wake and wonder, risk and grow,
And when the way ahead seems strange,
To name the fear and let it go. |
| 2) When prophets feel their strength is gone,
As Churches add to people's pain,
A prophet's question lingers on,
'Can dry bones ever live again?' | 4) God bids us rise to speak and move
Like prophets on a lighted stage,
Unmasking fear, revealing love,
And making peace from age to age. |

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Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the prophetic voice of God to be heard by people of faith and shared into communities of need.....

Let us pray for the leaders in society, in the life of faith, government and business that they may lead in the ways of love and grace not profit and power.....

Let us pray for those whose lives are difficult through the environment in which they are living, Lord we pray that relief may come to the needy and strength given to those offering and taking aid.....

Let us pray for those unwell in hospital or home, remembering before God those who we know particularly as we name them before him.....

Let us pray for ourselves as individuals and congregation that we may follow the way of Kingdom and not the way of self.....

We bring our prayers together as we say with each other the prayer Jesus taught his disciples,

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 407 – Hear the call of the kingdom

1) Hear the call of the kingdom,
Lift your eyes to the King;
Let his song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God, rich in mercy,
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in his unfailing grace.

2) Hear the call of the kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven,
The humility of Christ;
Walking justly before him,
Loving all that is right,
That the life of Christ may shine through us.

*Ch) King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
Filled with passion,
Filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name.*

3) Hear the call of the kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross,
Bringing peace and forgiveness,
And a hope yet to come:
Let the nations put their trust in him.

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A sending out prayer and Blessing

Lord, may we go out from here renewed in hope and love, that through our actions and words, your loving plan of salvation will be shared with those we meet. And may the Blessing of you our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with us every step of our way. **Amen**