

Christchurch livestream service 06 December 2020 at 10.45

Worship Leader: Jennifer Rogers

Reader: Trudy Hankin

Musicians: Mike Crowley, Mandy Pye, James Bainbridge

Technician: John Hamblin

Call to worship: *(based on words from Isaiah chapter 9)*

'A child has been born for us. We have been given a son who will be our ruler.

His names will be: Wonderful Advisor and Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace.'

Lighting the Advent Candles:

Today is the second Sunday in Advent, so Trudy is going to light 2 candles on our Advent Ring.

Hymn StF 205:

It came upon a midnight clear
That glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold
Peace on the earth, good will to men
From heaven's all gracious king
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing

Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring.
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing!

For lo, the days are hastening on,
To prophets shown of old,
When with the ever-circling years
Shall come the time foretold,
When the new heaven and earth shall own,
The Prince of Peace their King,
And all the world repeat the song
Which now the angels sing.

Prayer of Praise:

Praise God in the highest heaven! Peace on earth and loving mercy towards all people.

Almighty God, like the angels we want to lift our voices to praise you, for you deserve all the praise we can offer.

You brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, and there in that busy place you were present, doing something wonderful and unexpected.

You still work in ordinary places and situations to do extraordinary things.

You sent Jesus to be born as a baby, to be brought up in a human family.

You still use ordinary people to serve you and work for you.

You gave the message to the shepherds, working men, often looked down on by others

You still entrust ordinary people like us with the good news of Jesus.

Praise God in the highest heaven! Peace on earth and loving mercy towards all people.

Now and forever. Amen.

We pray the prayer that Jesus gave us:

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your Name,

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is 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 forever. Amen.

Introduction:

The season of Advent is often seen as a time of preparation leading up to Christmas. It is also a time of waiting – it requires us to wait for something that has already happened, as well as something that has not. It is a sort of double vision as we look both backwards with expectation as we wait for the birth of Christ 2000 years ago, and also forwards with anticipation to the end times.

Advent is a time of promise, when we look forward to what God is going to do in the world – both in terms of the coming of Jesus on Christmas Day and when Jesus returns at the second coming. It is also a time of celebration, when we acknowledge and rejoice at what God has done in the past, is doing in the present and will do in the future.

Today, in particular we are looking at the promise of peace.

The Bible readings we will hear are from Isaiah and Luke. The tone is set by Isaiah's vision of universal peace, and followed by the message to the shepherds from the angels, proclaiming peace on earth and goodwill to all men.

Isaiah 2: 2-4 (NIVUK)

²In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established

as the highest of the mountains;

it will be exalted above the hills,

and all nations will stream to it.

³Many peoples will come and say,

'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,

so that we may walk in his paths.'

The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴He will judge between the nations

and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into ploughshares

and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation,

nor will they train for war any more.

Luke 2: 8-14 (NIVUK)

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

Hymn MP 713: Tonight (Gory to God)

[Tonight \(Glory to God\) Lyric Video by Graham Kendrick from The Gift - YouTube](#)

Tonight, while all the world was sleeping,
A light exploded in the skies.
And then, as glory did surround us,
A voice, an angel did appear!

*Glory to God, In the highest,
And on the earth Be peace from heav'n!
Glory to God, In the highest,
And on the earth, Be peace from heav'n!*

Afraid, we covered up our faces
Amazed at what our ears did hear
Good news, of joy for all the people
Today, a saviour has appeared!

*Glory to God, In the highest,
And on the earth Be peace from heav'n!*

And so to Bethlehem
To find it was all true;
Despised and worthless shepherds,
We were the first to know!

*Glory to God, In the highest,
And on the earth Be peace from heav'n!*

Reflection:

They smelt like sheep, they were unshaven, dirty, and wearing their working clothes, yet the despised shepherds of Judea were the only people who heard the heavenly chorus:

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

Even though shepherds were economically important at the time of Jesus, and some of the great figures of Israel's past like Moses and David, had been shepherds, they had very low social status. In fact, as largely nomadic people, they would have been on the edge of their communities. People were expected to attend the temple on a regular basis and observe all the cleansing rituals, but because of the demands of their job, shepherds would have found this impossible.

I suppose, the status of the shepherds could be likened to bin men today. Modern societies could not function without them, but such workers are rarely accorded any great social status with the essential job they do for the many.

But God chose the lowly shepherds to be the first recipients of the greatest tidings ever revealed to mankind. A child has been born who is Saviour, Messiah, and Lord. A redeemer has been given to Israel, in the line of David – in David's very own town. A human child born in obscurity is at the same time a child sent from God, with angelic fanfare, to glorify God and to bring God's peace.

Isaiah's vision of God's universal peace is a powerful Advent message which begins with God's commitment to a new world. Isaiah conveys this through the radical creation imagery in which the mountain of God is pictured as reforming the shape and features of the world, as it emerges as the highest of all mountains.

Isaiah is not simply giving us a snapshot of the end-time but is also telling us that his picture of the end will endure. One day God will recreate this world and then all will live in peace by the light of God.

But Advent is not simply about the future, for aspects of this new world are already taking place. We celebrate a past incarnation that provides light for the present. Peace on earth has already come 2000 years ago with the birth of Jesus. But it has not fully come. It has only come as a glimpse of what can be. In Jesus, God brought heaven and earth together; in his second coming, the joining together will be complete. That is the Advent hope and so we dream Isaiah's dream again. We celebrate Jesus' first coming and use that to fuel our hope for his second coming and to strengthen us to work for signs of his kingdom in the present.

We live today in the reality of what he has showed us, and what he has promised. We know that he has come into this world as Jesus and has sent his Holy Spirit to be with us now and we believe he will come again. When he comes, may he find us hard at work hammering our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning hooks, playing our part in bringing peace and justice on earth?

But in 2020, in the middle of a pandemic, this is a real challenge for us living in a world where people are full of worry and anxiety. Relationships are strained and full of stress. The world is full of turmoil, conflict and wars. We all long for peace in our lives, in our relationships, and in our world and yet peace seems sadly lacking wherever we look. Two thousand years down the line from the angels declaring peace on earth, we still find it hard to locate the peace they revealed to the shepherds, in the world today.

But we tend to forget that Jesus was born into a world of turmoil and persecution. In our telling of the nativity story, we often miss out Jesus' family fleeing into Egypt to escape from Herod's tyranny. Throughout his life Jesus lived under a ruthless colonial power but in his ministry he placed huge emphasis on peace. Ultimately, of course he was put to death by the Roman authorities. And yet by dying on the Cross for us he took our sins upon himself, so we could be forgiven and we could be restored to a right relationship of peace with God.

When Jesus bids farewell to his disciples, the message he chooses to leave with them is one of peace:

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

I don't think Jesus just meant that he was leaving his disciples with a feeling of being at peace, although certainly the presence of Jesus in our lives does bring that inner peace. But I think he also meant that he left them and us to be a part in his work of peacemaking. With his own body, Jesus restored our broken relationship with God, so that we could be at peace with Him. And maybe, Jesus also left us with the task of making peace in the world and in our relationships, of giving and forgiving, of repairing and making good.

You see, if Jesus is the Prince of peace, then we, as followers of Jesus are subjects of that peace and that isn't something that we can just feel smug about but should be actively working for peace on earth.

We may feel that we can do very little, especially when we think of the seemingly endless wars in many parts of the world. So many people live amidst conflict, and for some they have known nothing else. Even so we can play our part in the call for justice through prayer and actively supporting policies and initiatives for peace.

We can start in our relationships with others, especially in the way we think about and treat those who are different from ourselves. That's where we need to ask Jesus, the Prince of Peace to break down barriers, to reconcile and to restore peace to our damaged relationships.

The story is told of a wise old Rabbi who instructed his students by asking questions. He asked, 'How can a person tell when the darkness ends and the day begins?' After thinking for a moment, one student replied, 'It is when there is enough light to see an animal in the distance and be able to tell if it is a sheep or a goat.' Another ventured, 'It is when there is enough light to see a tree, and tell if it is a fig or an olive.'

The old Rabbi gently said, 'No. It is when you can look into a man's face and recognise him as your brother. For if you cannot recognise in another's face the face of your brother, the darkness has not yet begun to lift, and the light has not yet come.'

In this Advent season may we be people of light in a dark world and people of peace in a troubled world. And may the words of promise the angels proclaimed to the shepherds ring in our ears as we worship and adore Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Prayers of confession and intercession:

Lord, we confess that we are part of the tension and injustice of the world.

Forgive our human selfishness, to which we contribute,

Heal the resentment between people, of which we are a part,

Break down the barriers between people which with our prejudices we erect,

And come into the world's conflicts, in which we share by being human.

Take our unworthiness and sorrow and use them in your great work of healing and restoring humanity and bringing peace on earth.

We pray for peace in our world: that all people may live free from violence, in safety and security, and with hope for the future.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all people who are working to build peace in their communities: that they may inspire others by their example and be strengthened to carry on, even in the hardest times.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all people who have been affected by violence as they rebuild their lives: that they may find it in their hearts to move forwards in peace and forgiveness.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are sick at home or in hospital, for their loved ones and those who care for them. We pray also for the bereaved, and those separated from their families at this time. May they all know the peace of your presence within them?

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, may Christmas this year be good news for millions of your anxious and troubled people in the world. May the angels sing for them? May Christ be born in them? May your love and peace come home to them? **Amen.**

Hymn StF 706:

Longing for light, we wait in darkness,

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people;

Light of the world to see.

Christ be our light!

Shine in our hearts,

Shine in the darkness.

Christ be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

Longing for food many are hungry.

Longing for water many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,

Shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,

Walls made of living stone.

Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.

Closing Prayer & Blessing:

We are on our way in our Advent journey. The Second Advent candle has been lit. Let peace and light continue with us; the peace and light for a waiting world.

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.