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**Sunday 10th December**

**Advent 2**

**The Rev’d**

**Nicola Furley-Smith**

**Call to Worship**

Now is the time of new beginning.

Now is the time of watching and waiting;

Now is the time of expectation;

now is the season of unfolding hope.

So let heaven be silent, and earth be still.

God is coming in power to judge the earth whether we are ready or not.

Let hearts leap with joyful anticipation, for God will rule with justice,

and from the least to the greatest, his people will rejoice.

**Prayer of Approach, Confession and the Lord’s Prayer**

Good News!

Advent is a time of preparation - with trees and decorations

presents and family, tinsel and lights.

We prepare for the busyness of Christmas.

Good News!

Advent is a time for preparation –  
for the future, for thinking about what our lives with Jesus will truly mean:

transformation from the bleakness of winter to be beacons of hope.

We prepare for the busyness of Christmas.

Good News!

Advent is a time for preparation –  
preparing for the Saviour’s birth as a tiny baby,

swaddled in his mother’s arms full of expectation and promise.  
We prepare for the busyness of Christmas.

Loving God, help us to prepare our hearts well,

to clear a way through the wilderness of our world with joy,  
for Christmas, for the future, for your coming. For your sake. Amen.

Loving and forgiving God, we come before you now  
to confess that our lives are not what you would want them to be.  
If we are honest, they are not what we would want them to be either.  
In so many ways, through what we say, what we think, and what we do,  
we fail to live out the reflection of your Son, Jesus Christ.

And for this we are sorry.

We make no excuses, we have no reason,  
we don’t even know why we are the way we are,  
but we recognise we are not as prepared for your coming

as we should be. Please forgive us.

May we use this time of preparation during this Advent season

to rid ourselves of all that keeps us in darkness

and turned away from your light.

Renew us today with the brightness of your Spirit’s presence.

All because of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Good News! Our loving and merciful God forgives our sins.

Go and be Good News to the world! Amen.

And we say together the prayer Jesus taught his followers, Our Father

**All Age and Advent Wreath**

[You will need 2 x empty small water bottles, a bowl and 2 wooden skewers. Full one bottle with rice but you will need to make sure this is really packed as full as possible. Fill the second bottle with rice to the same level but don’t pack it tightly].

[Ask for a vounteer]: Do you think we can pick up these bottles with a skewer?

[Put your skewer in the compacted bottle at a slight angle – you should be able to pick it up. However, your volunteer’s skewer should just come straight out]

These bottles are the same, right?

So put your skewer in again [Try again and lift the bottle. The volunteer skewer should come straight out].

Try at an angle? [Try again and lift bottle. The volunteer skewer should come straight out].

The bottles are the same, right?

Let’s make sure [take the skewers out and empy the rice into the bowl].

There’s just rice – nothing else. So how come I can lift mine and you can’t.

The key is in the preparation of the bottle [start putting the rice back into your bottle and make sure it is compacted]. I put rice in but there is much more rice in mine because I made sure I prepared it well.

Advent is the time of preparation, to get ready for Christmas and coming of the baby born in Bethlehem who would be the Saviour of the world.God prepared by sending messengers to spread His word to his people to get ready. These people were called prophets, and they would give information to God’s peopleabout what they should be preparing for. One of these special messengers was named John. He was called John the Baptist, because he baptized people and called them to listen to God.

John also brought an important announcement. He had good news for the people. Someone was coming to save them! The people of Israel had waited a long time for God’s promised saviour. They were having a hard time but knew God had promised someone to save them. Some people asked John if he was the Messiah, but he was quick to point the attention away from himself. His job was to let people know the awaited one was coming, and to remind them that God kept His promises. John was the announcer, the newscaster, the messenger sent by God. He pointed people to the One who was to come, and he let them know that good news was on the way!

We have a similar job to John the Baptist. We can “prepare the way” by telling other people about Jesus. But first we have to prepare our heart so that when God calls we are ready. We need recognise that good news is for us too.

In our prayer of confession we said that our lives do not always reflect the goodness and kindness of Jesus. If we are truly sorry we need to turn back to God and prepare ourselves for his coming so that we can prepare others to know him too.

Ask a younger person to light the first two Advent candles as you pray:

Preparing God,

help us to listen to those who prepare the way for You,

to understand all You ask of us,

that we may prepare Your way for others to know and believe. Amen

**Readings** *Isaiah 40 vv.1-11* **|** *St Mark 1vv.1-8*

**Prayer for Illumination**

On this second Sunday of Advent,

Almighty God, the giver of light

and the source of all peace,

illumine our hearts

that we receive every word you speak to us today. Amen

**Sermon Notes**

Beginnings are important. They set the tone for what is to come. They clue us in on what to expect. Mark’s first words are: *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* Mark does not begin with the “story” of Jesus Christ as Matthew and Luke door the doctrinal claim of John. Behind the “good news” is the very Gospel of God. Behind Mark’s interpretation of what God is up to is what God has been about all along — good news.

Beginnings also make us consider endings. And you cannot consider the beginning of Mark without thinking of its ending. *They said nothing to anyone for they were afraid…*The original unsatisfying ending had the scribes and scholars scrambling for alternate closings and theoretical explanations so they added verses 9-20. Yet, the real ending of Mark is not really an ending at all. It’s a beginning.

*Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here…*

He is not here, is perhaps the best ‘good news’ of all. Not even a tomb can hold God, not even death. There is no tidy conclusion or tying up loose ends for this story of God. The end is the beginning and in this season of Advent, this season of preparation, everything for which we wait, everything in which we hope will not be what we imagined. I know I can’t imagine any better news than that.

Our first reading from Isaiah 40:9-11 provides us the basis for such a claim. Here is the one who brings good news. Not here is the one who has brought good news. But here is the one brings good news - present participle of the word evangelism). The good news is that God is doing something new.

The chapters following Isaiah 40 address a tired and weary people who have some trouble imagining a new future.  At the beginning of Isaiah 40, the call goes out to comfort the people who have been exiled from their homeland and for a desert highway to be built for their return. The prophet proclaims it is God’s power which will make this vision a reality. But will the exiles recognise God’s creative power? And if they do, how will they respond? Imagining a new future, physical travel toward Jerusalem, and rebuilding a city still largely destroyed are activities that require energy. God may not be tired, but the people of God are.

In the midst of their devastation and despair, their hopelessness and certain destruction, the exiles hear the good news: Here is your God! God is here, God is victorious, your God, our God reigns. Good news, the Gospel, is at the heart of who God is. And for Mark what God is up to now in Jesus is nothing other than to say, *Here is your God!* Our reading from Isaiah reminds us that God has been about Gospel all along and that the good news is not only at the very heart of who God is but also at the heart of what God calls us to be. This is the Good News of Great Joy of which the angels sing!

Mark’s beginning announces God’s intention to visit God’s people. God gives directions for the way to be prepared. God does not say, Tell the people to get ready and when they have done so, I will come to them. God says, Prepare the way! I am coming to my people (whether they are ready or not).

Like the voice of God in our Isaiah reading there is a sense of urgency: I will come to my people, and nothing will keep me from them. Mountains will be torn down, valleys will be filled in, rough places made smooth — whatever it takes!

Preparation is so important. You really do want to be ready to face the day and any challenges you might encounter. And depending on the situation, you’re going to do different things to prepare.

In all the hustle and bustle of Christmas preparations we must remind ourselves again today that Advent is a season about preparation. John the Baptist leads us to see that the most important preparation to celebrate Jesus’ first advent is that we prepare our hearts. And Mark wastes no time telling us for whom we are to prepare our hearts. God had promised through the prophet Isaiah that a messenger would come to prepare the way for the Messiah, to make roads ready and paths straight.

In response John the Baptist didn’t embark on a public works project to get ready for Jesus. He wasn’t literally building roads and filling in ditches. Instead, he went out to the Jordan, the “wrong” side of the Jordan, the opposite banks from Jerusalem. He’s on the margins. He’s in the wilderness, living and thriving unlike almost anyone else. He’s trying to get people to see that they have fallen short of what God wanted, the danger that that falling short posed for their eternal well-being, the need turn back to God and to know the joy in God’s forgiveness. Because the source of that forgiveness was coming, and soon John proclaimed this message by offering a baptism of repentance as a means of ‘getting ready.’ How can we get this real Christmas present so that we, in turn, are ready to deliver it to the people it is meant for?

**Prayers of Intercession**

Loving God

Source of Good News, prepare our hearts,

that in the wilderness places in our world

mountains will be torn down, valleys will be filled in,

rough places made smooth,

that in word and deed we may proclaim his kingdom of peace.  
**By your Spirit** **send us ahead as messengers**

**of your kingdom of new beginnings.**

We pray for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
for those who are marginalised and rejected  
that we may hear their voices and to speak boldly on their behalf.  
**By your Spirit** **send us ahead as messengers**

**of your kingdom of new beginnings.**

We pray for those whose lives are weighed down

by past hurts and wrongs,  
for the abused and for abusers.  
that we may bring healing, reconciliation

and repentance to troubled hearts.  
**By your Spirit send us ahead as messengers**

**of your kingdom of new beginnings.**

We pray for those who speak for us,  
for politicians and for leaders.  
that we may speak clearly to them of true justice and mercy

and they may listen.  
**By your Spirit send us ahead as messengers**

**of your kingdom of new beginnings.**

We pray for those who are unwell,

those who are suffering and for those who have died;  
for those in pain and those who mourn  
that we may offer comfort.

**By your Holy Spirit, send us ahead as messengers**

**of your kingdom of new beginnings.**

We pray for our Church,  
for all who serve and worship here.  
that in the wilderness places in our world

mountains will be torn down,

valleys will be filled in,

and rough places made smooth,

as we prepare the way of the Christ-child in our hearts  
and in the hearts of others.  
**By your Spirit send us ahead as messengers of your kingdom**

**of new beginnings. Amen.**

**Blessing**

Now is the time of new beginning.

Now is the time of watching and waiting;

Now is the time of expectation;

Now is the season of unfolding hope.

Go now into the world to proclaim the Good News.

that God himself is with us and among us,

made flesh for us and for the salvation of the world.

And the blessing of God Almighty

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Be amongst us and remain with us

This day and for evermore. Amen.

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|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Hail to the Lord’s Anointed | 127 | 474 | 228 | 204 |
| Comfort, Comfort Ye My People |  | 274 |  |  |
| On Jordan’s Banks The Baptist’s Cry |  | 334 | 182 | 538 |
| Our God Reigns |  |  |  | 249 |
| The kingdom of God is justice and joy | 200 |  | 255 | 651 |
| Make Way Make Way | 141 | 279 | 264 | 547 |

RS – *Rejoice and Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Another Idea

Why not play *Prepare Ye* from *Godspell* to start the service – the blowing of the Shofar certainly gets people to stop their pre church conversations!