

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

The Second Sunday of Advent  
Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2024  
The Revd Dr Elaine Colechin

## Words of Scripture

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare this ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people.”

*Luke 1:76-77a*

## Call to Worship

*which could include the lighting of the Advent wreath*

Make ready! Prepare the way!  
Our God comes near with refining fire the prophets declare!  
Do not fear, come close and listen,  
glimpse the purifying light of Christ growing ever brighter.

*Second candle on Advent wreath could be lit here*

Therefore, come and worship with open hands and hearts  
ready to receive the Word  
who is God incarnate—God-with-us—  
then, now and always.

Let us worship God.

## Prayers of Adoration, Confession and Supplication

*including the Benedictus*

With all of creation, mighty God,  
we praise and thank you for the good news that is ours through Jesus Christ.  
Thank you that through your grace and the work of the Holy Spirit within us  
we can know your love more deeply and be inspired to share it with others.  
However, we know our hearts are not always pure,  
that at times we are far from our best selves and our actions and words do not tally.  
Forgive us as we sing with Zechariah your promise to us and pray for our deliverance:

Blessed by the Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to his people and set them free.  
**The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, born of the house of his servant David.**

Through the holy prophets God promised of old to save us from our enemies,  
from the hands of all who hate us,

**to show mercy to our forebears, and to remember his holy covenant.**

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:

to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

**free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous before him,  
all the days of our life.**

And you child shall be called the prophet of the Most High,

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

**to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.**

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

**to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

*Luke 1:68-79*

Righteous God, wake us with the dawn

free from fear and doubt of the sins that holds us back from living our best lives for you.

Unseal our lips and fill us with the Holy Spirit

so that we might praise you with our whole beings and share that eternal hope

you have given us through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you

as Saviour of all. **Amen**

## Readings

*Malachi 3:1-4 | St Luke 3:1-6*

## All Age / Introduction to the Theme

On a large sheet of paper make a “to do before Christmas” list. The only instruction to give is that should cover everything, anything that people think is needed to be prepared should go on the list. No comment or discussion should be had on items included.

On a separate large sheet of paper make a “to do in preparation of Christ’s coming” list. Again, all thoughts should be listed without comment or discussion.

Compare the two lists:

- Is one list more extensive than the other? Why?
- Highlight any items that are on both lists.
- Should the two lists be more alike? Why?
- Which list should the church be focused on before Christmas?

## Conclusion

When we prepare for Christmas we should be preparing for the coming of Christ. Today’s Bible readings suggest different ways we can do this including making ourselves right with each other and God, prayer, bringing hope to places where there is despair and suffering,

and challenging cruelty and injustice. Ideally, we should be trying to most of these things in our preparation for Christmas, but to make things easier, which might we focus on this year?

## Notes for A Sermon

### *Malachi 3:1-4*

Malachi was one of the minor prophets and an unknown prophet. Malachi is not a name; it is the mere transliteration of the Hebrew word for “messenger”. Yet, what the prophet says in these few verses was far from minor or insubstantial. The message of the prophet in these verses share a commonality with the words of the prophet Isaiah that are quoted by John the Baptist in Luke 3—a messenger would be sent by God to prepare the way for God’s coming. The prophet’s message, however, goes a little deeper into the obstacles that the messenger would clear out of the way: the impurities of the priesthood! The disobedience of Israel was happening at the heart of the Temple; it was ripe in the lives of those who should have known better and should have been setting an example to the people. Therefore, first the priesthood needed to be made clean and then the people, if on the day of the Lord there was to be restoration. These verses throw up some searching questions for the church about right living and what the world sees when they look at us. What does the church need to change in its life to make its worship a righteous offering to God? As it is the season of Advent, a question to consider might be how worthy, ready and willing are we as individuals and the church for the coming of Christ?

### *Luke 1:68-79*

This is the song of Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father. He sung this on the day John was presented in the Temple for circumcision. It is full of joy and thankfulness to God. It also had a message within it for John and those who hear it—the call of God’s on John’s life and what ultimately God would/will do in the world through those God calls. This song has been adopted as a Canticle, a hymn of praise, by the church which it weaves into its liturgy. This is because although they were very personal words of Zechariah, they are words that should echo true in the life of the church. Yet, if we sing them, to whom do we address the phrase “and you child?” How is the church going before the Lord to prepare the way?

### *Philippians 1:3-11*

In the opening verses of this letter to the church in Philippi, we have the apostle Paul at his pastoral best. He knew there was things he needed to point out to the church about what they were doing to help them better understand their life in Christ. However, he also knew they were trying their best and he needed to honour and encourage that. So, he prayed for them. He gave thanks to God for them and all they were striving to do. He then prayed for the Holy Spirit to support them, guide them, strengthen them in their faith of Christ. Amid the soul searching that the other scripture readings for this Sunday inspire,

Paul's words remind us that none of what we do, we do alone. God does not want to see us fail; God wants us to be our best selves.

### *Luke 3:1-6*

The second Sunday of Advent is not John the Baptist Sunday. Yet in Year C of the lectionary, he is introduced to us this week, or at least what he was called by God to do. Half of these verses from the gospel of Luke are words that can be found in Isaiah 40 and so the impression is formed of the fulfilment of prophecy—the Messianic hope was on the horizon. It opens up the excitement of what is to come as reflected earlier in the gospel of Luke with Zechariah's song. Yet, like all prophetic words, within them there is a deeper need for reflection by those who hear them, illustrated by what we are told John was doing in the wilderness on the banks of the river Jordan. We do not find John in the Temple calling the people to repent, he was in the wilderness. This was not because the priests had acted on the prophetic words from the book of Malachi. Rather, for the people the wilderness was a place of confusion as well as a place where in the past God had reorientated the people. Therefore, when wrestling with owning one's own impurities and repentance, the wilderness was symbolic. This opens up for us the question what Advent is all about for us. There is that sense that this is the time to remind the world about the coming of Jesus, sharing the joy of what that meant and means for the world. Yet, as suggested by the reading from the book of Malachi, it is a time when we need to purposely reflect on our own relationship with God and how things stand between us.

## Affirmation of Faith

'Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great ...' (1 Tim. 3:16a)  
yet this Advent, let us proclaim the faith of the church universal  
which the coming of Christ made possible.

**We believe in God as parent,  
creator and protector,  
root of all being.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ—  
God in our midst—  
coming as that fragile promise  
of a baby yet to be born  
and whose birth was heralded with hope.**

**Who John the Baptist announced  
would turn the world upside down  
seeing deep into the human heart  
separating the wheat from the chaff  
and the sheep from the goats.**

**Yet who passed through the grip of death  
so all might know justice and peace—  
God's gifts of mercy and compassion  
far beyond our human understanding.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
implanter of truth,  
who brings us to birth as the body of Christ,  
holds us together,  
and empowers us to confront and transform  
all that is wrong in our lives and the world  
for the glory of God  
who draws near, who is always near  
and who promises to come near again. Amen**

## **Prayers of Intercession**

*including the Lord's prayer*

Gracious God,  
as your Church strives to be better,  
as it endeavours to be the true example,  
Jesus commissioned it to be,  
of right living in you,  
we pray that you will shine on those who find themselves in darkness  
and in that land of shadows between life and death.  
We pray for the many conflicts of this world,  
for the innocent lives that are being destroyed  
because of corruption, a hunger for power,  
in justification of a position whether true or false.

*Silence*

We pray for the communities of which we are a part,  
for those difficult relationships, hidden realities,  
the mountain which is injustice within society.

*Silence*

We pray for all those who are ill,  
close to death, grieving,  
or who find themselves in one of life's deep valleys  
unable to see the way through.

*Silence*

You call your church to be that voice in the wilderness of life,  
to tell of your mercy and love, speak up for justice,  
making your way in the world clear.  
Therefore, we pray for all those  
with political and financial power in the world;

our nation's governments,  
local councils and assemblies.  
May a heart for change use knowledge wisely  
to bring about equity and understanding.

### *Silence*

And we pray for ourselves as your church,  
for the unconscious bias that is within us  
and how that can shape our openness to the world.  
As we prepare to celebrate your coming,  
Jesus Christ, pour your Holy Spirit upon us  
to refine our view of the world  
and guide our feet on your path  
leading others to a life with you and in you.

All these prayers, and many more that will go unsaid today,  
we offer in and through the prayer you taught the disciples  
which as your church we pray together:

**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**

## Offertory Prayer

Aware of God's power—  
God's ability to change hearts and minds—  
we prepare to make our offering to God.  
Refining God,  
you can take all that we offer  
and turn it into something better.  
Though what we bring might feel limited,  
not worthy of your greatness,  
as we prepare the world and ourselves for your coming,  
make these offerings mighty  
proclaiming your glory for all  
through Jesus Christ. **Amen**

### Hymn Suggestions

	R&S	CH4	StF	MP
Angel voices ever singing	405	498	39	34
From the breaking of the dawn			156	
God who made the stars of heaven			7	
Hills of the north, rejoice			172	
Make way, make way, for Christ the King	141	279	264	457
On Jordon's bank the Baptist's cry	134	334	182	538
Purify my heart, let me be as gold			508	921
The Lord will come and not be slow	128			
The prophet's voice came down the years			162	
The voice of God goes out to all the world	131	283		
Wild and lone the prophet's voice			189	

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