

# The Vine at Home - The Big Church Sing at Home

## Second Sunday in Advent

### Call to worship

Advent God, come amongst us.  
God of hope, shine your light upon us,  
Flickering, like a candle flame,  
Advent God, we put our hope in you.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

**Hymn: 212 StF – [O come, all ye faithful](#)**

### Opening Prayers

Holy God,  
Quieten our minds from their ceaseless chatter,  
Still us now as you calmed the storm...

*[Pause]*

We come before you today in awe and wonder

Knowing our words can never be enough,  
but aware that they will be acceptable in your sight.

*[Pause]*

We approach you with thankful hearts  
for reminding us that you are coming,  
that we are not forgotten...  
that despite the worst we can throw at you,  
you still come.

*[Pause]*

Our penalty is paid.  
Straighten our highways,  
raise up our valleys,  
and make our rough places smooth.

*[Pause]*

Help us to prepare a place for you...  
in our hearts, in our street,  
in our school, in our workplace,  
in our nation, in our world. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

### We say together the Lord's Prayer

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<sup>1</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Phil Craine

## Readings:

[Isaiah 40:1-11](#) - God's People Are Comforted

[Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13](#)

[Mark 1:1-8](#) The Proclamation of John the Baptist

## Reflections on the readings

Much like many of us might be at this time of year, this week's readings are full of anticipation. Each passage feels like it's teetering on the edge of a big arrival, anticipating a change to come. But, perhaps frustratingly, each passage leaves us just short. We are left waiting for the 'big moment' to arrive.

For many, this is the feeling we place ourselves in each year as we arrive at advent. A time of awaiting. This anticipation can be hard. Sometimes, instead of being able to fix our eyes on the change to come, we can get lost in the waiting. Anticipation without a sense of the destination is an anxious feeling.

But, as this week's passages encounter this same anticipation, they offer with it a reminder of the goal on which we fix our eyes.

Each passage talks about the arrival of God's kingdom. Isaiah 40 hears a voice say 'prepare a way for the Lord', and Psalm 85 believes that the Lord will 'give what is good'. In 1 Mark, we meet John the Baptist, a messenger tasked with going before Jesus, calling on people to anticipate his arrival.

In each of these circumstances, the writer speaks of what it looks like when God arrives. They paint a picture of the Kingdom of God that they are waiting for. What does this Kingdom look like?

In Isaiah 40, each challenge on the unstable path ahead is dealt with as it needs to be: 'every valley shall be raised up, every mountain shall be made low, the rough ground shall become level, and the rugged places a plain'.

In Psalm 85, we read that when God dwells in the land, righteousness is at the centre. That instead of instability, 'steadfast love and faithfulness will meet'. As a consequence, goodness will come, and the land will produce more and more. This is a picture of a world set right with itself, and abundance blooming as a consequence.

And, in Isaiah we read both at the beginning and end of the passage that all of this will be held in comfort. That God will meet us tenderly, and lead us gently towards this coming Kingdom. All of this is a picture of hope – that the land in which we dwell might be met and transformed by God into a land where in peace, love, faithfulness and righteousness might be at the forefront.

This advent, we might be finding it hard to anticipate a world that looks like this. After a year of so many changes, of fear and worry, it might feel as if we have become

untethered from this hopeful vision of God's kingdom come. As we head into 2021, how might we anticipate this 'good news' for the world we live in?

Once again, we can look to the passages to explore this. In each of these passages, as people wait for the coming Kingdom they're anticipating, they do so not passively but actively. In each, they are living out and declaring the good news upon which they are fixing their eyes.

In Isaiah, the writer invites the bearer of 'good news' to 'go up on a high mountain' and 'lift up your voice with a shout'! Those who see the vision of God's kingdom come are invited to make it known to everyone, that the 'glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together'. They are called to have a prophetic voice, to speak God's Good News to others.

Finally, in Mark 1, John the Baptist declares the Good News in his actions. He goes before Jesus, baptising people with water and declaring that soon, one will come who will offer so much more.

In each of these ways, we are shown how to live in Holy anticipation. To wait for the coming of God's Kingdom not anxiously, but by actively seeking to fix our eyes on the Good News God offers us.

How might we, as the Church, seek to live in Holy anticipation this Christmas? In today's world, where the future is uncertain, Isaiah 40 and Psalm 85 offer a vision of things set right that is Good News in uncertainty. And, churches around the country have been offering this vision to those around them practically. As churches have engaged in mutual aid, food provision, mental health support, provision for those who are homeless, they have helped people to see a reality of faithfulness and love. As the Methodist Church, together with others, has called on the Government to 'Reset The Debt' of those trapped by Covid-19 related household debt, we have offered a picture of a different reality, where each challenge is met with the response it needs, and all things are set right for all people.

By declaring the good news, living differently and acting for change, we are called to fix our own eyes on God's Kingdom. And, in doing so, we might be able to offer this vision to others, offering hope in anticipation this advent.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### **Prayers of intercession**

Leader: Gracious God,

Response: **Speak peace to us today.**

God, You have been favourable to your people

In your grace pardoning us for the times we have neglected you,  
Ourselves and one another.

In your endless love for us you have promised to speak peace over us,  
That we might turn to you in our hearts and seek to be faithful.

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<sup>3</sup> Reflection written by Hannah Brown from the Joint Public Issues Team

Gracious God,  
All: **Speak peace to us today.**

In your Kingdom, steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

As you seek to set all things right,  
Might we seek to fix our eyes on this vision of your Kingdom,  
Trusting in your promise that you will give all people what is good.

Gracious God,  
All: **Speak peace to us today.**

God, Sometimes we struggle to see your vision for the world.

In the midst of change and challenge,  
It can be hard to see where you are working for our good.

During this advent season,  
Might we come together as a community  
To support one another to catch glimpses of your kingdom,  
That our faithfulness might spring up from the ground in abundance.

Gracious God,  
All: **Speak peace to us today.**

God, We pray for those for whom the waiting is too hard.  
For so many, poverty, debt and hardship has made this year unbearable.  
For those families unsupported by our social care system.

For those whose mental health makes it hard for to see your goodness.

For those who need a reminder of your steadfast love and faithfulness.

May your righteousness go before them,  
Making a path for their steps so they will not stumble.

Gracious God,  
All: **Speak peace to us today.**

God, May we hear your voice of peace,  
And know that in your kingdom is abundance of life for all. Amen.<sup>4</sup>

**Hymn: 203 StF – [I had a dream that I was standing on a hillside](#)**

### **Blessing**

We go from this moment, into a week of many moments. Hoping for an encounter with your grace, with your Spirit. Come amongst us, Advent God, Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Hannah Brown from the Joint Public Issues Team

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<sup>5</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker