

Readings for the Second Sunday of Advent

8th December 2024

First Reading: Malachi 3:1-4

Thus says the LORD God: 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 fullers' 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.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:3-11

My brothers and sisters, I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Gospel: St Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, 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, 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.'"

A Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent

From Rev'd David Higgon

Heavenly Father,

you are the God who gives peace.

Help us to remember that, because of Jesus, we can experience a Christmas free from turmoil and chaos.

Regardless of our circumstances or our situations,

you offer us peace that passes understanding.

Father, keep us in perfect peace as our mind stays

on the truth of your powerful love.

Help us to trust fully in you

and rest in the peace that you offer. Amen.

Our advent prayer for the second Sunday in Advent (above) is a prayer for peace. It is a prayer that includes our wish for peace for others when faced with the violence that we witness in places such as Gaza Lebanon and the Ukraine, when we ask God to intercede and to bring peace to these places. But it is more than that. Our advent prayer specifically asks God to keep us in perfect peace, for us to trust fully in God and to rest in the peace that is found in the peace of Christ.

This is the peace we speak of every time we meet to worship God in the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine, when we share the peace of Christ with each other. When we share the peace, we are doing something more than wishing our own peace on one another, we are first and foremost sharing God's peace with each other, and we do it or we should do it, as a sign of reconciliation, of love, and of renewed relationships. When the celebrant says, We meet in Christ's name. We respond, "**Let us share his peace**".

We then greet one another in the name of the Lord. How we do this has changed over time. It has certainly been affected by Covid, because we now avoid physical contact, which is perhaps a blessing to the less tactile amongst us, but originally it would have been a kiss on the cheek, an embrace. Later it was a handclasp, or a bow.

The sharing of the peace is an ancient Christian practice. It has been associated with Paul's Letter to the Romans, "Greet one another with a holy kiss," and the earliest references to the peace may be found in writings concerning the baptismal liturgies going back to the 1st century. From the second century, the peace ritually took place before the presentation of bread and wine at the eucharist.

So, when we share God's peace it is something more than just sharing our own peace. The Peace points towards the divine purpose to bring all things into unity in Christ. Advent is a time when we prepare for the incarnation, where God in Christ enters into human history, but it is more complex than this, it is about a deep incarnation where all things are brought into the unity of Christ. If I can try to explain it simply, it is how God not only enters human history but also how he enters ecological history in a profound way. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit the history of the whole earth is changed as well as that of human history. It is changed in the direction of God's purposes for the whole of the universe. So the presence of God that we celebrate in our sacrament of the Eucharist is not restricted to that of the church community, it also includes the community of all creatures on earth.

Peace is a gift from God; it is one of the fruits of the spirit, the character traits of the Spirit of God that is in us. of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The fruit of Peace is to be shared with the whole of creation, and it is found through Christ, and like the plants that bear fruits for us, it needs to be cultivated and nurtured.

I have just recently planted a blackthorn hedge to be a living memorial to people whom I have loved but who are no longer with me. The young saplings that will make the hedge will take time to grow and they will need protecting, especially from deer who are fond of fresh green shoots, I know that I can protect them from deer and I can water and feed the saplings, but I realise that I have no real control over the life force that will bring growth, season after season in their flowering and their bearing of sloe berries. Some poets, who are not particularly religious poets, have expressed this better than I can. Dylan Thomas pondered on this miracle of life itself and wrote this,

“The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age that [blasts](#) the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.”,

For us, as people of faith, it is the Holy Spirit that produces the fruit of peace in our lives. Everything depends on the work of the Spirit. Through baptism and the Eucharist, the Spirit draws us into the distinctive way of life that makes possible reconciliation between humankind and nature, and reconciliation between warring enemies. The peace we share today points us towards the divine purpose to bring all things into unity in Christ.

In the Advent season, we prepare for the incarnation, of God being manifest among us. We should see the incarnation as something much bigger and much more deeply rooted than the story of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. God has been with us since the very first instance of creation, when God joined the Divine Self in unity with the physical universe and became the spark of divinity inside everything, from the tiniest subatomic quark to the largest galactic cluster. The incarnation is about the continuous opportunity to encounter God in other people, and in the natural world; in a blackthorn sapling, in the robin who was my companion when planting, and in the bright warmth of the sun on a cold winter's day. Ordinary matter is the hiding place of the divine spirit. it is a unity within each of us, and a unity that runs deep into all the elements of creation. In our modern age, this understanding of a deeper incarnation may seem to be a novel idea, but to those who in the early church who worshiped God in and around this place, it would have been how they understood their relationship with God and with God's creation. They saw themselves as belonging to God's creation, as part of it, and in it, and not somehow as being outside it or above it, as something to be used as a resource for their convenience, without any thought of the impact of that use on the rest of God's creation. God was seen as being immanent in all living things, and all living things were to be respected and cared for. Yes of course, people hunted and fished, they kept animals for food and clothing, but all things were seen as being part of a natural order that was God's creation and where God is present; where the physical world and the spiritual world touch each other.

The Peace is an invitation for us today—to share not just our peace with each other, but to share the peace of Christ that dwells in each of us with the rest of creation and with the world that is outside the church, where wars

rage and people suffer , where the voice of the peace of the Lord needs to be heard above the clamour of violence and the voices of those who justify the use of violence to bring peace.