



Call to Worship – StF 165 (v1)

1 Advent candles tell their story, as we watch and pray; longing for the day of glory,
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say. Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness changed for gladness on that day.

Hymn 185 - Sing we the King who is coming to reign

Watch on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPSYEh240LU>

Sing we the King who is coming to reign;
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
joy to the nations when Jesus is King:
*Come let us sing: Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
this is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:

Prayer

Advent God, we praise and worship you;
You are God of the high places
And the onward journey.
You are God of the low places
And the need for rest and recovery.

Advent God, we thank you;
You saw us in our need
And made a plan.
The time came and your Son came,
Born among us and like us.

Advent God, we pray that you will bless us
As we start our liturgical journey.
Some have been this way before,
Some may be starting for the first time
While others may join along the way.

Advent God, Father, Son. Holy Spirit.
We adore you.

Amen.

Reading - Isaiah 2:1-5 - [The mountain of the Lord](#)

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:
In 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. Many 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. He 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.
Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Chorus.

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
doubt shall not darken his witness within;
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
love is victorious when Jesus is King:
Chorus.

Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
when this new song your creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King:
Chorus.

We confess our sins
Of forgetfulness and complacency,
Of over familiarity and lazy unpreparedness.
We confess that we lack the excitement
We once had for all that comes next.

Forgiving God, for Jesus Christ's sake,
Hear our repentance,
Grant us pardon,
Lift the burden of our guilt
And set us free.

Jesus, when you talked to those who came,
You said, 'your sins are forgiven',
And you also said, 'go and sin no more'.
May we be assured that these words are for us
too,
As we ask in faith, empowered by your Holy Spirit.

Reading - Psalm 122 - A song of ascents. Of David.

I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up – the tribes of the Lord – to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel. There stand the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.' For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, 'Peace be within you.' For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.

Reading - Matthew 24:36-44 - The day and hour unknown

'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. 'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Sermon - The attraction - Isaiah 2:1-5

So, it is Advent again. It is 'the run up to Christmas again.' There is familiarity in the landscape and yet it is entirely new. A risk to be avoided as we celebrate this season is that of assuming that all who are taking part know the story or have done it all before. Indeed, if we assume that no one has been this way in the past, how might we witness to, and preach from, the ancient scriptures in a way that brings them to life in 2022 Britain?

The prophet Isaiah is a central part of Advent with his message to people living a long while ago, whose circumstances were not like ours and yet we can relate to them. The short passage for today (Isaiah 2:1-5) is a study in presentation style. The way the verses flow could inform many a tedious presenter of secular lectures or business training. Why is that? It is because having read the verses we know where we have come from, what we are aspiring to and what will be the outcome. The need for direction and for connection with how humans tick, all delivered in five verses.

The address to Judah and Jerusalem was a vision; the prophet could see a picture of a future which was contemporary for those living in the reigns of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah. The vision was contemporary for people living under Roman occupation in Palestine and awaiting a Messiah. The vision was contemporary for Saint Peter, looking past Pentecost to a new age that began when the Holy Spirit came in a new way then. We who live in the reign of King Charles see a contemporary message too. We see a peak to aspire to; we hear a challenge to motivate us and we are made aware of a result that gives us stamina.

The Peak

The temple mount in Jerusalem was used as a metaphor for the Lord's Kingdom; above the surroundings and visible. The Psalm (122) is one of the Songs of Ascent which rejoices in going 'UP' to the house of God. If you listen to the Sunday Morning Service on BBC radio 4 you may have heard the series of four, celebrating the centenary of the BBC, set in the proximity of the four tallest peaks, one in each country in the United Kingdom. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all had different and moving things to say.

Looking up is essential for people inclined to be buried in today's anxieties. 2022 worshippers have plenty of anxieties. We enter Advent from a continent seriously affected, directly and indirectly, by war. We enter Advent with the cost of Covid coming home to roost. It is easy to apportion blame when all we see is feet, but if we look up into faces and the up again above and beyond them we are drawn on by a huge perspective.

In Isaiah's day, pagans worshipped their gods in mountain shrines, thus giving contest to why God's mountain needed to be seen as the highest, the most dominant peak and the one that would draw eyes.

The world's tallest mountain, Everest, is facing a growing challenge. So many people, from all nations and races stream to it that it is overcrowded in the busy season. Isaiah sees that, except that God's mountain is not limited by a short climbing season and for those with the right guide, the path is not dangerous.

Imagine the highest point or peak you have ever known, and fix your eyes on it as you start this year's Advent journey. Christ of the cross will walk it with you; even as you rejoice in him his Spirit's power will keep you safe and invigorate your rejoicing.

The Challenge

In Isaiah's vision, people encouraged one another. Come on, look at that, let's climb it, they said. We do that – have you seen – shall we go – that will be good...we even do it over challenging things. I am surprised by the number of people who are prepared to take on physically arduous and mentally exhausting challenges like the Three Peaks Challenge in order to raise money for charity. Is it not interesting that sponsorship for doing things that are stretching is a sure way to raise money for good causes.

Isaiah's vision saw increasing popularity in the attraction of the mountain. He saw people making the temple a focal point as later the manger, the cross and the spirit filled church have become focal points. Stand back from the mirror this Advent Sunday and look at your own demeanour. Does it exude excitement and enthusiasm for the exciting journey to the peak of Christ the King that is beginning again?

If you have been here before are you saying, 'come on, let us go, this will be great'?

If you are setting out for the first time, revel in your excitement; it is justified. There are not one, but several peaks and all of them show another and greater view of God. What is the murmuring; oh yes! That is the praise of the millions making the journey simultaneously, people who, sometimes despite desperate circumstances in human terms, have learned to lift their eyes and see beyond the now to the then.

The Result

At a time when world peace is marginally more tenuous than before. As the economic aftermath of COVID is compounded by global inflation, it is easy to get tetchy with each other. Climbers on a mountain know that to quarrel in a harsh environment is to greatly increase the risk of injury and death. Isaiah's modern vision sees God helping settle cultural challenges and resolve international differences. Focus on the mountain and it is less easy to see the irritations at your feet.

The image of the weapons of war being converted into the implements of agriculture is powerful. Technology has changed but we do still use ploughshares and we do still prune. Swords and spears have given way to guns and bombs in many cases. Isaiah may not have had a glimpse of cyber warfare or the threat of economic sanctions but you can imagine his vision there too. The internet will be uncorrupted and the world monetary systems free from fraud.

I am sure you can build your own contemporary vision against this backdrop; God will help too – the world of visions, of dreams, of mysterious inspiration has not died out. Far from it. How else could we ordinary people become witnesses to and preachers of the word?

The Conclusion

Isaiah ended with the invitation, 'let us walk in the light of the Lord'. Jesus said, in our Gospel reading, that the moment of his Second Coming was unknown so keep walking in the light. Some see the talk of judgement as frightening. At face value it is. Many of you will have stood on one or more of the United Kingdom's peaks – or far higher ones elsewhere. A climb may make you nervous but as you press on you are driven by the sense of achievement and the lure of success.

Wallow in the mess of today and the fear of today linked with that of looming, potential judgement is, indeed, scary. Set out in excitement and hope for the top and fear gives way to an assured feeling of energy and controlled exhilaration.

Come on, let's go – let's walk in the light of the Lord!

Amen.

Hymn 741 - We pray until the hour

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| 1 | We pray until the hour,
that awesome hour unknown,
when, robed in majesty and power,
you shall from heaven come down, | 3 | Art last may we be found
obedient to your word,
attentive to the judgement sound,
and looking for our Lord! |
| 2 | O Christ our souls prepare
for that tremendous day,
and fill us now with watchful care,
and stir us up to pray. | 4 | To those who shall endure,
Christ gives his promised rest,
we watch each moment to secure
our place among the blest. |

Prayers of Intercession

As we reflect on the extraordinary miracle behind the advent message, as we are quiet in our praying against a background of the noise of life, help us hop off the fashionable bandwagon of popular media excitement and join the slow, but unstoppable train of God's journey into light.

Father God, we pray today for people around us who are busy going in circles, jostled and hassled by the noise of the moment in the news and politics. We think of those who are so beset by predictions of tax rates and inflation rates that they lose all sense of proportion. For those with plenty, but who say they have little, we pray for the grace to be honest. For those who struggle, but who say they are fine we pray for the courage to ask for help.

Christ of the Advent message, help us to see the needs of the world around us as you would have seen it when you walked it in our flesh. The big needs for peace where there is war, food where there is famine and health where there is illness and disease.

Holy Spirit of great power, breath your life into us that we may be reinvigorated in our faith, enlightened in our vision and made hopeful in our hearts.

Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bind us together in love and worship with the whole Church on earth and in heaven.

Amen.

Hymn - 696 - For the healing of the nations

Watch on Youtube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dc-2tiAfSyY>

The definitive version is given at verses 1-4. Verse 2A from the original version is a permitted, but not preferred, variant.

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| 1 | For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord,
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word. | 3 | All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned:
pride of status, race or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span. |
| 2 | Lead us forward into freedom,
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase. | 4 | You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find. |

Benediction

From *The Greatest Commandment* (Methodist Prayer Handbook 2022-2023)

Let our souls rejoice in your power, O God, and our hearts in your love. As our mouths are filled with your praise, may our lives testify to your grace.

Sarah Crosby, Methodist Preacher (1729-1804)