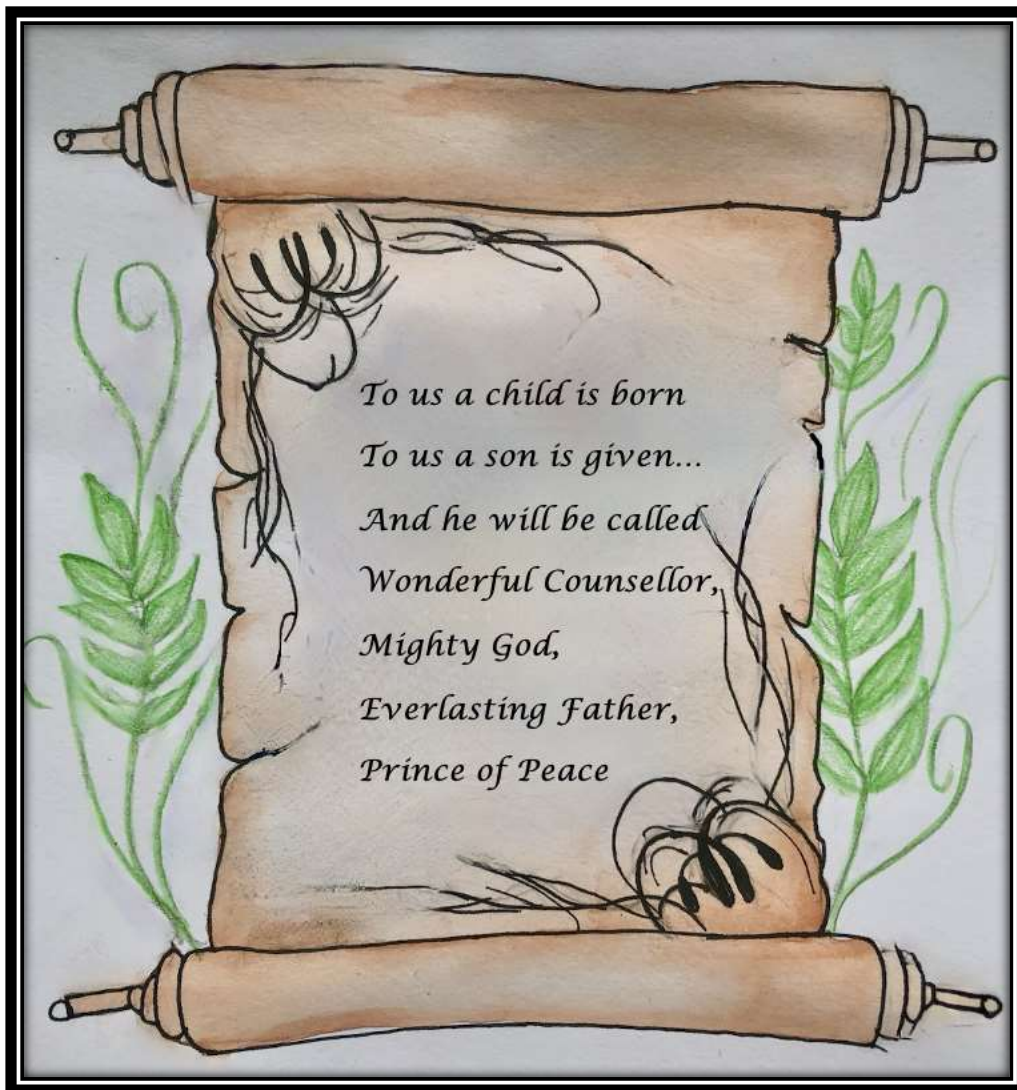


Angels...

Prophecies...

Fulfilment...

PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST



ADVENT 2024

Introduction

Preparing for the Coming of Christ

In the days of great prophets like Isaiah – hundreds of years before the birth of Christ - Israel was going through a time of great darkness: The darkness of the fear of invasion by more powerful countries and the darkness of falling away from God, of living in its own way rather than in God's ways. The people looked back to the glorious days of King David who had led them in successful battles and in worship of God. Then they had felt favoured by God. Then Israel had been a great nation. But now...How they longed for some sort of God-King, a Messiah or Christ to save them from oppression and make them great again.

Now – in all times of darkness there always has been and hopefully always will be a few men and women who stay close to God, who have spiritual visions, seeing the world through his eyes, who listen and hear him speak, who pass on his words and will to the people. Isaiah, among other prophets, was one of these.

He wrote mainly in poetic terms, sometimes of a glorious God-King Messiah, sometimes of a suffering servant Messiah. And sometimes he wrote of a Messiah who would bring his redeemed people to live in his redeemed earth - God's kingdom – to praise and worship God for evermore.

People interpret these prophecies in different ways...

Israel is going through a dark time right now as are so many countries in God's world.

What kind of Messiah do we want in our own dark times?

What kind of Messiah do we need?



December 1st

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...for you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. (Isaiah 9. 2,4)

*God of light and love,
you gave a vision of new light to your suffering people;
a light that would shine into their darkness.*

*Jesus, I will try this Advent to turn to your light...
to stay a little longer in prayer each day,
to know your presence, to absorb your light and love.*



December 2nd

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' (John 8. 12)

*Christ our light,
you come to us, reflecting the light of God
and reach out to us just as we are, to come into your light.
We may take a few steps - but cling to shadows of the past.
Jesus give me the courage to come to you in faith,
to stay with you - and let your light shine into my darkness.*

December 3rd

The word of the Lord came to Nathan (a prophet) saying, 'Go and tell my servant David, This is what the Lord says: ... 'When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons and I will establish his kingdom...his throne for ever...I will set him over my house and my kingdom for ever; his throne will be established for ever.'

(from 1 Chronicles 17)

God of the Scriptures,

Your promise to David of an everlasting kingdom appears again and again in the prophecies of the Old Testament.

He was a very charismatic, popular king who loved you and the people longed for another king like him.

But he was also human-and flawed...

Jesus was actually a distant descendant of David

but quite unlike him, being essentially one of the people.

Forgive us, Lord, for idealising charismatic leaders...

December 4th

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord – and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11. 1-3)

Eternal God of the past, present and future,

Jesus was a descendant of Jesse, David's father,

filled with the Holy Spirit, ever seeking your Presence.

Jesus, may I seek your Presence in every aspect of my life in love, reverence, awe – and delight.

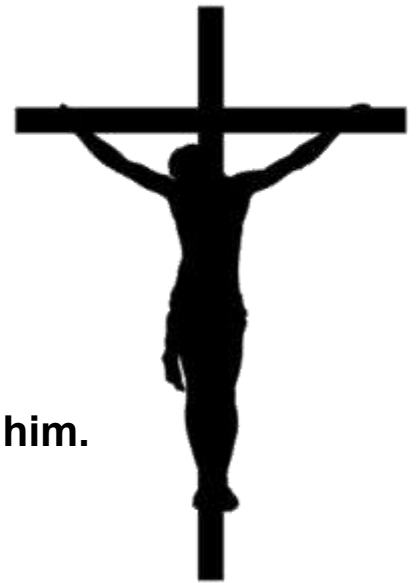
December 5th

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...and he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom...from that time on and for ever. (from Isaiah 9. 6-7)

Almighty God,

You gave your people a vision of the Messiah you promised - but they interpreted your words as a kind of God-King who would lead them to glory and make them great.

Jesus, may I always read your word with prayer that lifts me beyond my thoughts to glimpse your thoughts.



December 6th

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by the people, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering...

(Isaiah 53. 2b-3a)

God of Holiness, beyond our human understanding,

Is this the same Messiah - the God-King of those prophecies?

We confess that most of us do want leaders with 'charisma,' ones who are popular, successful and fortunate.

*Help me to know, deeply, that Jesus saves **by** his suffering, that he is 'God-with-us' now, through the Holy Spirit in me.*

December 7th

**Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...
He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities...
And by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (from Isaiah 53. 4-6)**

*God, our Saviour in Christ,
You gave Isaiah a picture of the Messiah we needed;
And Jesus, you are everything we all really, deeply need.
You are God saving us, reaching out to us in tender love,
holding us, healing us, giving us creative gifts,
giving us the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, goodness...
You suffered everything for us; you are our Light and Life.*

December 8th

**The wolf will live with the lamb...the cow will feed with the bear...
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea. (from Isaiah 11. 6-9)**

*God of the past, present and future,
you gave Isaiah a vision of the future - to the Messianic age
when Christ will come again to bring your kingdom to earth
the kingdom of gentle rule, building up, never destroying.
Jesus, may I know you more and more in this age,
that I may know you fully in your glory, in your kingdom.*

December 9th

You, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me the one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times...He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God...And he will be their peace.

(from Micah 5. 2-4)

*God of the Beginning, Alpha - and Omega,
the Son whom you sent existed long before his birth -
the Word, who was Life and Light, who became flesh;
a shepherd who would care for his people -
who would bring inner peace to those who believed.
Lord, let me know your love and your peace.*

December 10th

Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?'...King Herod called together the chief priests and teachers of the law and asked them where the Christ was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet (Micah) has written... (Matthew 2. 1-5)

*God of the people,
the religious leaders knew the prophecy, in theory,
but did not bother to go and find out for themselves.
O Lord God, I read the Bible and know about Jesus;
give me the hunger to know him for myself and love him.*

December 11th

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet (Isaiah); ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel – which means ‘God with us’ (Matthew 1. 22-23)

*God of the Scriptures,
you revealed how the birth of your Son would take place
and who he would be: ‘God-with-us.’ Who could believe it?
The religious leaders didn’t get it. Yet some people did –
the humble, the unlearned, many of those in need.
Lord, give me the heart to recognise Jesus in my life.*

December 12th

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah...They had no children because Elizabeth was barren and they were both well on in years. Once...when he was serving as priest before God...an angel of the Lord appeared to him...and said, ‘Zechariah...your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you are to give him the name John...He will be great in the sight of the Lord...and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Zechariah asked the angel, ‘How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well on in years.’ (from Luke 1. 1-18)

*Lord God,
Zechariah was a good and faithful priest
but even he doubted you at first.
May I never be so concerned with serving the church
that I fail to be open to you in wonder and worship.
Only let me serve you in faith , obedience and love.*

December 13th

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins... (Luke 1. 76-77)

Heavenly Father,

you gave Zechariah this prophecy about his baby son, who would grow up to be John the Baptist.

So John did bring the people to realise their sins.

Lord, make me aware of my sin - of living without you, not loving you, not loving my neighbour, my evil thoughts.

Jesus, I need forgiveness; come to me as I come to you...

December 14th

‘In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert: ‘Prepare the way for the Lord; make straight paths for him.’ (Matthew 3. 1-3)



Jesus, our way to Father God,

as John prepared the way for you, preaching repentance, so may we prepare ourselves for you, by repenting.

May I be willing to change, to refocus my life on you, to give up my selfish ways, to love you with all my heart.

December 15th

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes...and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.
(Isaiah 61. 1,3a)

*God of the poor and suffering,
you gave Isaiah the vision of another side to the Messiah –
his compassion, comfort, freedom-bringing and hope.
Jesus, I come to you and ask you to heal my hurts,
to forgive my wrong-doing, to know your beauty in me.*

December 16th

Jesus went to Nazareth...into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...' He began by saying to them, 'Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4. 16-18a,21)

*God of our salvation ,
did this reading just 'happen' to be the passage for the day?
Some were open to the truth, others closed and rejecting.
Lord, it is sometimes hard to reveal our faith to unbelievers.
Open my ears to listen to you; open my lips to speak of you;
and open the hearts of many to realise you and believe...*

December 17th

...But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name, Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end.' (Luke 1. 30-33)

*God, our Father, All-knowing, All-loving,
How you must have loved Mary, so open, devoted to you,
knowing the scriptures, waiting for your Messiah -
yet so young, poor, humble - and so ordinary - socially.
She knew what you were saying - that she, Mary,
was to be the human mother of the divine Son of God...
'Blessed are you who believed what the Lord said...'*

December 18th

'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God' Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a baby in her old age...'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered, 'May it be to me as you have said.' (Luke 1. 34-36a,38)



*Lord God,
you knew that Mary was practical and down to earth -
and would bring up your Son to be perfect man.
But she needed to know how it would come about...
O Lord help me to live with an earthly practicality,
but a spiritual openness to you - in love and obedience.*

December 19th

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the baby leapt in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1. 39-41)

Father God,

At the time when Mary probably faced misunderstanding, shame and rejection you gave her Elizabeth, who 'knew,' and rejoiced with her in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, may I have that joy as I know you at beautiful times; may I have the joy of your forgiveness, love - and presence

December 20th

**My soul magnifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant...
He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts...
He has lifted up the humble and filled the hungry with good things.
(Luke 1. 47 from the Magnificat – Mary's song)**

Heavenly Father,

you filled Mary with your Holy Spirit to thank you for the blessing of making her the mother of your Son; to praise you too for your blessings on all those who know their need for you, their God - and Saviour. Lord, I know I cannot live a worthy life without you. I need to receive your grace, your love and your Holy Spirit.

December 21st

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph...was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

(Matthew 1. 18-19)

*Father, you must have chosen Joseph too
to bring up your Son, to support and protect Mary.
Yet I have to ask - 'Why did you not prepare him too?'
He must have gone through agonies of disbelief and hurt.
We just don't know, perhaps he could not hear; perhaps...
Lord, we cannot always understand your ways;
I do trust you; help me to trust you perfectly...*

December 22nd

But after he had considered this an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins...When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

(Matthew 1. 20-21,24)

*Father God,
you did speak in the end; and Joseph accepted your word
and became the husband and father you had planned.
He was ready now; your timing was right. Forgive me...
Lord, you know us perfectly; you see the whole picture.
You are my God and I am your child. And I love you.*

December 23rd

So Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth...to Bethlehem, the town of David because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2. 4-7)

Loving Father,

your Son has been born; yet there was no room...

*There isn't much room for him today, in the world,
or in our country or in our local community.*

*But there is room - a great hole - in our hearts
which needs to be filled by the loving presence of Jesus.*

*O Lord, I open my heart to you; come, Lord Jesus,
live in me as I live in you and may your presence
shine out into my community, the country, the world.*

For you are the Way, the Truth and the Life - and my Light.

December 24th

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by keeping watch over their flocks by night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were afraid. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the city of David a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger...So the shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2. 8-12,16)

*Father God,
there must have been such rejoicing in heaven
as what you had planned for your disobedient people
came to be: a Saviour who would bring them back to you -
and give them eternal life in your kingdom.
Let us go with the shepherds, excited, but aware of our sins
to find God's baby Son, 'God-with-us,' 'Light from Light.'
Jesus, we worship you; come and live in our hearts forever.*



Christmas Day

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not overcome it... He was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John 1. 1-5,10-14)

*Almighty God, Creator and Father of all,
And so the Word became your Son, born to Mary,
bearing the sin of the world - our sin - on the cross
and giving us eternal life in his kingdom, where he is king.
You sent angels to bring about your plan,
you told us beforehand through the prophets.
Yet so many did not believe, did not want to hear.
Father, we thank you for this divine act of saving us
at the great cost of the sacrifice of your dear Son.
This Christmas Day we offer you ourselves, our whole selves,
to worship Christ, to realise his life and light in us,
and to praise you for ever, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*