**Sunday 5th December - Come, Lord Jesus**

Welcome, notices – no t&c, Bible studies ok, GB fayre 11th, carol service 19th (invitations available, **need readers**) – ask for LFT. ROCKS

Opening prayer

We are now in December, and in the second week of advent, so I get to have some Christmas songs! Our first song will be ‘from the squalor of a borrowed stable’ – I know we don’t know it very well, so I’m going to ask Mike to play it through for us while …… comes to light the advent candles, and then we will sing together.

1239 From the squalor of a borrowed stable

High points/low points – our lives and in the news – me: last day of term at college, bf brought girls up to share dinner… low point either tiredness of getting home at 11pm, inset day Friday, Natalie hurt finger

News: covid - worldwide☹ (Graham C-D in ICU?) vaccines seem to be working😊

Move into a time of prayer - Any other prayer requests?

Prayers – thanksgiving and intercession

251 It came upon a midnight clear

While we give thanks for and enjoy our high points, the problem is they don’t ultimately satisfy long-term, low points need some kind of solution. That might be… humanly speaking, education/vaccine provision, communication etc for covid; peace, justice, economic stability for immigration…

Ultimately, God’s solution is Jesus, who came to bring the whole world – people, situations, even nature, into a right relationship with him; to experience what we experience and to put all our joys and sorrows under his authority.

Isaiah 9:2-7 **2**The people walking in darkness  
    have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
    a light has dawned.  
**3**You have enlarged the nation  
    and increased their joy;  
they rejoice before you  
    as people rejoice at the harvest,  
as warriors rejoice  
    when dividing the plunder.  
**4**For as in the day of Midian’s defeat,  
    you have shattered  
the yoke that burdens them,  
    the bar across their shoulders,  
    the rod of their oppressor.  
**5**Every warrior’s boot used in battle  
    and every garment rolled in blood  
will be destined for burning,  
    will be fuel for the fire.  
**6**For to us a child is born,  
    to us a son is given,  
    and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
    Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
    Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
**7**Of the greatness of his government and peace  
    there will be no end.  
He will reign on David’s throne  
    and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
    with justice and righteousness  
    from that time on and for ever.  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
    will accomplish this.

742 Great is the darkness

Just a few decades earlier, another prophet, Amos, said this: Amos 5:11-13, 18-24.

**11**You levy a straw tax on the poor  
    and impose a tax on their grain.  
Therefore, though you have built stone mansions,  
    you will not live in them;  
though you have planted lush vineyards,  
    you will not drink their wine.  
**12**For I know how many are your offences  
    and how great your sins.

There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes  
    and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.  
**13**Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times,  
    for the times are evil.

**18**Woe to you who long  
    for the day of the Lord!  
Why do you long for the day of the Lord?  
    That day will be darkness, not light.  
**19**It will be as though a man fled from a lion  
    only to meet a bear,  
as though he entered his house  
    and rested his hand on the wall  
    only to have a snake bite him.  
**20**Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light –  
    pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

**21**‘I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
    your assemblies are a stench to me.  
**22**Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
    I will not accept them.  
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
    I will have no regard for them.  
**23**Away with the noise of your songs!  
    I will not listen to the music of your harps.  
**24**But let justice roll on like a river,  
    righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Amos warns the people of Israel that the coming of the Lord is not automatically something to be welcomed. For people who have mistreated one another, oppressed and stolen and deprived of justice, they could not long for the coming of God expecting him to be on their side! And sure enough, by the time Isaiah is prophesying to Judah, Israel has been defeated by the Assyrians.

Isaiah’s message in general is, “Look – the same thing is going to happen to you.” The people in Judah are also not behaving as they should. God is going to punish them, they will be taken off into captivity.

**But** we read from Isaiah 11:1-9:

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

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
    or decide by what he hears with his ears;  
**4**but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
    with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.  
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
    with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.  
**5**Righteousness will be his belt  
    and faithfulness the sash round his waist.

**6**The wolf will live with the lamb,  
    the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah+11%3A1-9&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-17891a)] together;  
    and a little child will lead them.  
**7**The cow will feed with the bear,  
    their young will lie down together,  
    and the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
**8**The infant will play near the cobra’s den,  
    and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest.  
**9**They will neither harm nor destroy    on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord  
    as the waters cover the sea.

This other leader will arise, in the Spirit of God, and he will rule with justice and righteousness and wisdom.

The contrast between the rule of Jesus and human rule was startling even in those days. But as we look at the world around us now, which side do we fall on? We can see, can’t we, poverty, injustice, conflict, suffering. Is this the way God wants things to be? These passages would suggest not!

So, does the prophecy of the reign of Christ then mean that we can sit and wait, secure in the knowledge that one day this will all happen? Does it, by holding out to us a picture of another way, inspire us to long for that to become a reality – to work towards it, to try to live by Jesus’ standards even in a world ruled by other standards?

Let us sing again 664 Beauty for brokenness

We sometimes think that advent is a time of preparation for Christmas. In fact, traditionally advent is a time of preparation for Jesus’ return. When he came the first time, he became human like us to identify with us in weakness and difficulty. The story of Jesus’ life is a story where we see flashes of the power and might and authority of God, but primarily we see the love and compassion of God, the weakness and helplessness of God, the pain and suffering of God. This is a God who came into a dark world not with a bright light to terrify and overawe the darkness but with a small candle, to bring hope and revelation.

A small candle, that baby in the manger. It could easily have been snuffed out – and many tried. But it grew. It lit sparks. Until the darkness of Good Friday gave way to the brightness of Easter Sunday and the fire of Pentecost. The light came into the world with Jesus, and is in the world today. But even now the light doesn’t shine everywhere. That part waits for Jesus’ return, when he will come in power and restore all things, when these prophecies of Isaiah will finally be fulfilled in all their glory. When darkness will be totally defeated. But while we wait, as I said, there is work to be done, to share that light in the darkness of the world.

Those of you who have been following my interests these days will have noticed that I have been talking a lot about mission. And you haven’t heard the last of that, I’m afraid. Because I strongly believe that as Christians and as Church, we are not here to just sit and congratulate ourselves on being children of God. That was the attitude of the guys Amos was talking to – **we’re** alright, we’re God’s people, we can just enjoy that and do what we like. God says, no. God says, if you’re my people, then act like it. That doesn’t just mean coming to church on a Sunday, or having daily quiet time, or singing your worship songs, however great those things are. It means caring for people, acting justly and seeking justice for others. It means caring for God’s creation. It means telling people about Jesus as the only person who can offer them life.

I will ask those who have been involved in Wednesday night Bible studies over the past few months to excuse me if I recap a bit for those who were not there. This is a statement created by the Anglican church, about what they think the church is actually here for. What is it we are meant to be doing, while we wait for Jesus to come and take his throne?

These are called the 5 Marks of Mission.

1. **To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom;  
   (ii) To teach, baptize and nurture new believers;  
   (iii) To respond to human needs by loving service;  
   (iv) To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;  
   (v) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.**

As we discussed this in our studies, we came to the conclusion that these apply both to the church as a whole, and to each of us as individuals. We can (and should) **all** tell people about Jesus – through our words and through the way we live our lives. And the church should be telling people about Jesus, through its place in this community. We can (and should) all nurture one another, and teach one another, and (to use the Anglican idea of baptism) welcome one another into the family; just as the church nurtures, and teaches, and welcomes – and baptises. We can (and should) all care for those in need; all stand against injustice; all care for creation. And the church should be involved in these things too.

How that looks for each of us as individuals will be different. There will probably be some items on those 5 that you think “Yes! That is me! I love to do that!” – there may be others you think, “aargh!” It might be that the way you naturally proclaim good news is through words, or it might be through service. It might be that the way you serve is through helping your neighbour, or it might be through donating to the food bank. It might be that the way you seek justice is through writing to your MP, it might be through prayer, or even protest. It might be that the way you care for creation is through recycling, or using a certain type of product, or the choices you make about your energy supply. My point is, there are things we can all do in all of these categories to try to live up to the calling God has placed on us.

And as church, we work together. This is something we will be looking at in the New Year, but I want to introduce it to you now – we are not just a collection of individuals, we are the Body of Christ. Singular. And how does Christ act? Well, he is filled with the Spirit of God. He does not judge by appearances but with righteousness. He cares for the poor. He brings about peace, transformation even to creation itself, so that the wolf will lie down with the lamb. And the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. This isn’t just what the church is commanded to **do** – it is who we are. What we are called to do is to live in accordance with our nature as the Body of Christ.

And in that respect, we use our strengths and our passions to fulfil these areas of our calling. We are all called to evangelism, but perhaps among you is someone who says, “Yes! I want to make sure the church is spreading the gospel!”. We are all called to love and nurture, but perhaps there is someone who says “We should nurture like this…”. We are all called to serve, but perhaps there is someone who knows that service is their absolute heart, and wants to encourage the church to join in. We are all called to act and to fight for justice, but perhaps there is someone who thinks, “The church should be concerned about… or should take action on…”. We are all called to care for creation, but perhaps there is someone who says, “I want to prompt the church to take action on this topic.”

As an individual, as a Christian rather than in my role as minister, how many people can I tell about Jesus in my lifetime? Well, there are my friends and family… But I can’t reach your friends. I can’t reach the people in India that Samuel reaches. How many people can I nurture, and teach? A few… but I can’t be everywhere, all of the time. There are acts of service I can do, but my time and resources are limited. I want justice, but I have no influence. How much does my one person’s worth of recycling change the course of the planet? But maybe, as well as doing what I can do by myself, what if I took the responsibility to help the church with just one of these things?

What if in the church there was a group of people who would encourage us in our evangelism? Show us opportunities we might have missed? Bring to our attention the works of evangelists and organisations outside these walls? What if there were a group of people who would join in the care and nurture of those in the church, and on the edges, through listening, or hospitality, or teaching; through sharing resources and ideas and situations? What if there were a group of people who would prompt the church to serve the community, pointing out needs, thinking about how we could help? What if there were a group of people who would bring to our attention issues of injustice, keep them in our minds in our prayers and our consideration? What if there were a group of people overseeing our effects on the environment, trying to find better ways of doing things that would help us to care for this world?

Would we then make this church, this Body of Christ, more like the Christ of the Bible? Would the world see a little bit more of the love and justice of the reign of God, in anticipation of Christ’s return? And would he, on that day, be able to say to us, “Yes, you have been doing what I have called you to do.” Would we be a little bit closer to showing the light of Christ in the darkness of the world?

In a moment we are going to sing our final hymn. During this hymn I am going to distribute some papers, you will notice these contain the 5 marks of mission. I want you to write under each heading how you are fulfilling this part of your calling; this is for your own benefit and not mine, so don’t feel pressured to exaggerate or make up something when you should just leave an empty space! It is good to do this just to be able to note to ourselves where our areas of strength and weakness are. Underneath, there is a piece to tear off. I want you to mark on this one area of the 5 marks of mission in which you have a desire to help the church to fulfil its calling, and give it back to me. I’ll give you a couple of minutes after the hymn to think about these things.

Let us pray.

Lord God, at this time as we celebrate your coming to earth as a baby, your revelation to us in flesh and blood, your living among us as one of us so that we could become one with you, help us to look forward to the day of your return. Not just to look forward with hope, but to live and work in anticipation of that day, showing your light as far as we can, bringing love and peace and justice and blessing as well as we are able in your power. Teach us to serve you and to care for each other, that your name might be known and glorified in this church, in this community of Langdon Hills and in the wider world. We long for people to come to worship you, for you are God. Amen.

1047 These are the days of Elijah

…

May the peace of God rule in your hearts; the mercy of God direct your relationships; the strength of God sustain your service. May God bless you and keep you today and throughout the week, until we meet again, in Jesus’ name. Amen.