

Worship at Home service Sunday 17th December 2023 with Revd Ian Forsyth

Today is the third Advent Sunday, and we are following the Out of the ordinary service. Preparing for the extraordinary. Theme 'Pointing to the Light'.

Opening liturgy

Our Advent candles flicker, casting shadows spreading light, giving witness in the everyday, telling stories old and new. Advent God, **shine from us today.**

When we've encountered God, we have a truth to tell. When we have seen God's light, we have a light to share. Advent God, **shine from us today.**

When our lives seem ordinary and full of faltering steps, God's light still shines and bids us go and tell. Advent God, **shine from us today.**

We share our very ordinary, our sorrows, joys and faith, and trust that those we share with will glimpse the light of God. Advent God, **shine from us today.**

Advent God, we may feel we are not worthy to share your extraordinary message. We may feel we'll get it wrong; we don't know all the answers. We may feel we do not have the words; not erudite enough. Shine upon us, light our path that we may speak and show and tell what you have done for us. **Amen.**

A call to worship:

The third Advent candle could be lit.

We come to worship with our questions.

We come to worship to discover something new.

We come to worship to find truth.

We come to see God's light shine in the world today. **Amen.**

A gathering prayer

Father God, thank you for your presence here today.

Thank you that you speak to us through our worship.

Thank you that you speak to us through your Word.

Thank you that you speak to us through each other.

Help us to listen to your voice as we worship.

Help us to listen to your voice as Scripture is read.
Help us to listen to your voice as we seek your truth. **Amen.**

StF 264 Make way, make way, for Christ the King.

Make Way, Make Way, for Christ the King, In Splendour Arrives;
Fling Wide The Gates And Welcome Him, Into your lives.

Make Way! (Make Way!), Make Way! (Make Way!)
For the King Of Kings! (For the King Of Kings!)
Make Way! (Make Way!). Make Way! (Make Way!)
And let His Kingdom In!

He Comes the Broken Hearts To Heal, the Prisoners To Free;
The Deaf Shall Hear, The Lame Shall Dance, the Blind Shall See.

Make Way! (Make Way!), Make Way! (Make Way!)
For The King Of Kings! (For The King Of Kings!)
Make Way! (Make Way!), Make Way! (Make Way!)
And Let His Kingdom In!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrcujPWE4KQ>

Bible readings

Isaiah 61 v 1 – 4, 8 – 11. John 1 v 6 – 8, 19 – 28

Prayers of intercession

We pray today for all who are downtrodden, all who are oppressed, all who know the heavy hand of marginalisation on them. God, we turn to you, remembering the words of Mary, praying that you will lift up the lowly, you will raise the voice of justice, and you will scatter oppression. May all who are oppressed be set free. We ask this, in joy and gratitude.

In your name we pray.

We pray that we might find rhythms of life that sustain us here. Rhythms for cultivating and renewing the earth; human community; justice; and creativity. We ask this, in joy and gratitude.

In your name we pray. Amen.

Time to reflect:

Today is the third Sunday in Advent where we are looking at the Out of

the Ordinary preparing for the extraordinary, and today's theme is pointing to the light.

Just the other day we were looking in the Bible at Roade we read out these verses where Jesus was handed the scroll to read from the lectionary, which was given in the Jewish Law. 'The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the broken hearted and to proclaim that captives will be released, and prisoners will be freed'.

During the COVID pandemic I had many telephone conversations with everyone in our church and I used to say every conversation is church, as we can all share our faith with and pray with, and for other people. How true it is today; we all have Faith stories to share. This is why I include good news times in our services, giving us a time to share something we want to share.

Here are some questions to reflect on.

When was the last time you were inspired by someone else's God story?

When did you last encounter God's presence recently?

How do you feel about telling your Faith story?

We are currently aware that there are many refugees who are fleeing conflict. Last year I heard of a minister in Poland who is helping refugees who have left Kiev and have provided accommodation in a summer camp helping many hundreds who have been displaced. When I was in Lowestoft, prior to coming to Northampton, all denominations including, Methodist, Baptist, Anglican, Catholic and Free church worked together to provide facilities, clothing and food for refugees arriving from the Ukraine.

This project not only brought the churches together but provided support and friendship for those needing help.

John's Gospel is one of the most challenging theological books I know. One key that unlocks this Gospel is in John chapter 20 v 31 which says, 'But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name'.

The word believe in the Greek suggests that we should continue to believe, John wanted his listeners to go on believing.

In John's gospel when he says 'He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. I remember looking at Stained glass windows in a Cathedral on a dark grey day and light was still coming through the window to brighten up the inside of the Cathedral. Our lives can reflect our beliefs as we go about our daily lives, whether it is a dull day or bright sunshine.

To conclude today I recall playing a CD called 'Come to the Cradle' by Michael Card to our sons David, Andrew and Matthew when they were very young and one of the songs talks about Jesus as the light. This could be used as our prayer today.

You are the Light of the World oh Lord. You make Your servants shine
So how could there be any darkness in me. If You are the Light of the World. You are the Light of the World. You are the Bread of Life oh Lord Broken to set us free. So how could there be any hunger in me
If You are the Bread of Life, You are the Bread of Life You've overcome the world oh Lord And given us victory **Amen**

StF 186 – Tell out my soul.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice; tender to me the promise of his word –
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name! Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done; his mercy sure, from age to age the same –
his holy name: the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might! Powers and dominions lay their glory by; proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word! Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure: tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srkfvhANW7Y>

A sending out prayer:

Lord, help us to reflect you at work.

Help us to reflect you at school.

Help us to reflect you at home.

Help us to reflect you when we're out.

Help us to reflect you with our friends.

Help us to reflect you to our neighbours.

Shine your light so all may see your love this Christmas.

Amen.