

## **Worship at Home Sunday 8th December 2024, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent with John Atkin**

### **Call to worship**

We come together in hope and love. With prophets, old and new, we celebrate the love of God. In his tender mercy, God calls us to be part of the great plan of salvation. So, Lord, as we learn to know you better, may our love overflow more and more so that our lives may bring you glory and praise. **Amen.**

### **StF 157 God has spoken; by his prophets.**

God has spoken-by his prophets, spoken his unchanging word;  
each from age-to-age proclaiming. God the one, the righteous Lord;  
Mid the world's despair and turmoil, one firm anchor holding fast:  
God eternal reigns forever, God the first and God the last.

God has spoken-by Christ Jesus, Christ, the everlasting Son;  
brightness of the Father's glory, with the Father ever one:  
spoken by the Word incarnate, God, from God, ere time was born,  
light of light, to earth descending, Christ, revealing God to all.

God is speaking-by his Spirit, speaking to our hearts again;  
in the age-long word expounding. God's own message, now as then.  
Through the rise and fall of nations, one sure faith is standing fast:  
God still speaks, his Word unchanging, God the first and God the last.

[God Has Spoken by His Prophets \(Tune: Hyfrydol - 3vv\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] \(youtube.com\)](#)

### **Prayer of confession**

Dear God, when we mess up your plan when we go the wrong way,  
when we are so full of ourselves we miss what you say: **please forgive us.**

When we lose trust in your word, and we think you're not there;  
when we lose all our hope and believe you don't care. **please forgive us.**

Forgive us we pray and speak to our heart,  
so we can leave guilt behind and make a new start. In Jesus' name.  
Amen

### **Bible reading:**

**Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Luke3:1-6.**

### **Prayers of thanksgiving**

God of the old and the new, We praise you for the faithfulness that goes before and behind all your people:

We praise you for your compassion for all creation, big and small, rich and poor, near and far: and We praise you for this season of hope, of truth and of promise: **we celebrate your loving plan for the Church and the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

### **Prayers of intercession**

As we have lit candles to celebrate Advent and as we have reflected on your words so, Lord God, our thoughts turn now beyond our needs,

For those who trudge through strange lands looking for guidance with hope for a better future, for those who risk life and limb in fragile boats. Merciful, caring God. **Hear our prayers.**

For the homeless nearer to home who have no walls to shelter them, no safety to protect them, no warmth from the winter weather, no family to support them and little hope for a settled future. Merciful, caring God. **Hear our prayers.**

For those who live with hunger, not just of the spirit, but of the body; for those families who can't manage proper meals and nutrition, who eek out the pennies the best they can; for those who have the courage to seek foodbank help and for those who greet and meet them. For those who are cold and hungry, not just of body because they can't afford heating and food, but cold of friendship and the warmth of love. Merciful, caring God. **Hear our prayers.**

For countries at war with others and with themselves, where peace is a distant memory and a very distant prospect; for those who keep the candle of hope burning believing that in the end peace will prevail. Merciful, caring God. **Hear our prayers.**

For those striving earnestly for Climate change to be tackled with care and justice, acknowledging the inter-dependency of nature; for those nearer to home feeling the impact of climate change, snow and storms and gales beyond what is expected. Merciful, caring God. **Hear our prayers.**

For those who have never heard the message of Advent hope, who have never encountered the presence of the Christ child. May their lives be touched by those of us who meet them, whose lives touch ours and ours theirs Merciful, caring God. **Hear our prayers. And let our cries come unto you. Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer:**

## **Time to reflect:**

On this second Sunday of Advent, we explore how the prophets prepare the way for people to turn towards God and look at the loving plan of salvation that he has prepared. God's promise in Malachi is to send two messengers, the first is understood to be John the Baptist, the second is Jesus the Messiah. The prophet sees God's loving plan for his people taking shape in the re-establishment of the purified Temple worship at the heart of national life, following their return from exile in Babylon after 537 BC. Malachi's images of purification – using refiner's fire and launderer's soap, suggest that God is serious about forgiveness. God doesn't simply forgive, as if with a shrug of the shoulders. Forgiveness is demanding and costly, and it lies at the heart of worship that is 'pleasing to the Lord'.

Then we move onto Luke 1: 68-79. This passage is known as the Song of Zechariah. The elderly priest has been mute since he refused to believe the angel Gabriel's message that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son who would be 'great in the sight of the Lord'. Here, filled with the Holy Spirit, he breaks his silence and praises God for fulfilling his loving plan to free his people from their enemies. It is a mark of his confidence in God that he can celebrate the coming of the long-promised Saviour before he is even born, He knows that God's purposes for Israel are unshakeable and have deep roots in his promises to Abraham and the house of David. Notice how broadly-based God's salvation is: deliverance from foreign oppression and the fear this induces, so that his people can be free to serve God; forgiveness alongside political freedom. These often come together in the prophets, who see defeat and captivity as the consequence of Israel's repeated unfaithfulness like the prophets before him, Zechariah rejoices because God prefers to remember his ancient promises and plans rather than Israel's chronic failures. As God's messenger and prophet, his son John will herald the dawning of a new age. Its freedom and forgiveness will be like the light of a new day that rises on those who have lived for too long in the dark night of exile and foreign occupation. Light that shines by God's 'tender mercy' is a reliable guide for the coming new world that the promised saviour will bring, one that is at peace with itself because God's loving plans for all people are at last being revealed and realised.

In Luke 3:1-6 we see the ministry of John the Baptist that heralds the start of Jesus' ministry, Luke is careful to root John's proclamation in the period of Roman occupation. Tiberius rules through Pilate and the Herodian royal family. Annas and Caiphas owe their priestly authority in Jerusalem to the same emperor.

By contrast, John is directed by 'the word of God' a prophetic call. God's loving plans for the world are taking shape in unlikely places. The wilderness was a region of complaint, rebellion and testing, where God's people seemed to have lost their way to freedom.

But for one prophet at least, it would be a hopeful place of new beginnings, which is why John is there, preparing the way of the Lord by offering a simple ritual of washing to symbolise God's call to repent. John calls all peoples to prepare to meet Jesus, that includes you and me, no matter what your standings with religious organisations are, don't let feelings of being an outsider cause you to hold back. No one who wants to follow Jesus Christ is an outsider in God's Kingdom.

### **StF 736. In heavenly love abiding**

In heavenly love abiding, No change my heart shall fear;  
And safe is such confiding, For nothing changes here:  
The storm may roar without me, My heart may low be laid;  
But God is round about me, And can I be dismayed?

Wherever he may guide me, No want shall turn me back;  
My Shepherd is beside me, And nothing can I lack:  
His wisdom ever waketh, His sight is never dim,  
He knows the way he taketh, And I will walk with him.

Green pastures are before me, Which yet, I have not seen;  
Bright skies will soon be o'er me, Where the dark clouds have been;  
My hope I cannot measure, My path to life is free;  
My Saviour has my treasure, And he will walk with me.

### **A going out prayer:**

So now we go out with confidence in you.

Our loving God who leads us; You know our weaknesses and our strengths. Lord call us, guide us, and strengthen us with your wisdom.

**Amen.**