

Worship@Home 15th December 2024 With Revd David Speirs Third Sunday of Advent

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for your presence here with us this day. Thank you that before time began You were singing over us. You welcome us, accept and love us in every season of life. Thank you for this Advent season of preparation and waiting. Help us to open our hearts to you this day, Help us to bring our whole, unfiltered, honest selves before you now. **Amen.**

From prayers prepared by the Church of Scotland's Mission Support Programme Group for Sunday 15 December 2024 Third Sunday of Advent – Year C. Accessed at:

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/weekly-worship/monthly/2024-december/sunday-15-december-2024-third-sunday-of-advent-year-c>

STF 182 – On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8POKmbK5IF4>

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
awake and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin;
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

For you are our salvation, Lord,
our refuge, and our great reward;
without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out your hand,
and bid the fallen sinner stand;
shine forth, and let your light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.

To God the Son all glory be
whose advent sets his people free,
whom, with the Father, we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

John Chandler (1806-1876)

Please read:

Luke 3: 7-18

<https://bible.oremus.org/?q1=218258782>

Time to Reflect

On the third Sunday in Advent, we focus on this passage which outlines John the Baptist's ministry of proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. The passage begins with John encouraging his listeners to "Bear fruits worthy of repentance" and not to rely on their Abrahamic heritage (Luke 3:8). John then issues a series of metaphors which emphasise the urgency of his message and in the action which his listeners need to take.

In response to the question from the crowd "What should we do?" (Luke 3:10) John offers practical advice for the crowd and specifically advises the tax collectors and soldiers who are asking him the same question. His advice is based around the sharing of clothing and food with those who have none (Luke 3:11) that tax collectors should only collect what is prescribed (Luke 3:13) and for soldiers not to extort money by threats or false accusations but to instead be satisfied with their wages (Luke 3:14).

John makes clear in his responses that an allegiance to God, and alignment with Kingdom values, involves practical steps in which our inward devotion to God is reflected in our outward practices in everyday life. John's advice is based around ethical and moral action towards the poor and the vulnerable, which reflects the concerns of the Hebrew prophets who sought to emphasise this on God's behalf. We can therefore see that the good news that John is sharing has particular relevance to these groups. His preaching in the desert is a reminder, to those willing to listen, of what God's priorities are and how we should be aligned with them.

John makes it clear that repentance is not just about how we feel but how we behave and act. It involves making decisions that have practical and measurable outcomes which demonstrate that we are living faithful lives with changed priorities that align more closely with God concerns and purposes.

In the final section of the passage John makes it clear to his audience that he is not the coming messiah but that the one who baptises with "fire and the Holy Spirit" was on his way

(Luke 3:16). Here John is referring to the coming of Christ Jesus, who in the next chapter will be publicly affirmed by God as his beloved Son at his baptism (Luke 3:21-22).

The whole urgency of John's message is based around the imminent coming of the messiah. For early Christians this urgency was reflected in a similar outlook which sought to emphasise the imminent return of Christ. This urgency may seem somewhat alien to us today. However, the need for the world to be transformed by an outpouring of divine love in Christ, shown in changed priorities, is as relevant today as it was 2000 years ago.

In this Advent and Christmas season Northampton Methodist Church and Circuit has been offering a small group study based around the Holy Habits materials and specifically those on 'making more disciples'. Holy Habits seeks to look at the early Church in Acts 2:42-47 and encourages us to develop the way of life formed by the first generations of Christian disciples. Just as John, and then Jesus, encouraged people to repent and change their priorities Holy Habits intends to help us to align our priorities with those of God's Kingdom shown through the Word.

As we journey through Advent and into Christmas, I encourage you to consider how you might welcome the coming of Christ into your hearts and minds this festive season. In what ways could we change our priorities to reflect God's concerns and how might we practically demonstrate the love of God in our everyday lives as we welcome him?

Prayer of Intercession

You are invited to pray silently for:
The needs of the world...
The Church and its calling...
Loved ones going through difficult times...
For peace, justice, and reconciliation...
In Jesus name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven...

StF 172 – Hills of the north rejoice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXj-RjKuP5w>

Hills of the north, rejoice,
river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice;
valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love,
he brings salvation from above.

Isles of the southern seas,
sing to the listening earth;
carry on every breeze
hope of a world's new birth:
in Christ shall all be made anew;
his word is sure, his promise true.

Lands of the east, arise!
He is your brightest morn
greet him with joyous eyes,
let praise his path adorn:
your seers have longed to know their Lord;
to you he comes, the final Word.

Shores of the utmost west,
lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest
in whom the dawn has come:
he brings a never-ending light,
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.

Shout, as you journey on;
songs be in every mouth!
Lo, from the north they come,
from east and west and south:
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.

Charles Ernest Oakley (1832-1865) and Editors of English Praise

Final Prayer

God for whom we wait and watch,
you sent your servant John the Baptist
to prepare your people for the coming of the
Messiah. Inspire the ministers and stewards of
your truth to turn our disobedient hearts to you;
that, when Christ shall come again in glory to
be our judge, we may stand with confidence
before him, who is alive and reigns with you, in
the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world
without end. Amen.

The Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent in the Methodist Worship
Book © 1999 Methodist Publishing House. p. 524.