



# KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

## Second Sunday of Advent

10am – Sunday 6 December 2020

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Music to prepare us for worship “*Wachet Auf- Sleepers Wake*” J S Bach (1685-1750)  
“*Angel Gabriel*” K Knudson (2013)

## Welcome

**Music of approach** “*Quem Pastores Laudavere*” German 14th Cent carol, arr. John Rutter

## Call to worship

(based on Isaiah 40)

Kia noho a Ihowa ki a koutou. May God be with you.

**Ma Ihowa koe e manaaki. May God bless you.**

Listen! The voice of God calls out across the ages.

**We hear and respond. We rise up to worship God from the valleys, the mountains, and the plains.**

Like a shepherd God leads us and tenderly gathers us together.

**Comfort, comfort O my people says our God of love. The grass withers and the flower fades; But the word of our God will stand forever!**

## Hymn

(tune: Winchester New) CH4 334 - Charles Coffin

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

2 Then cleansed be every heart from  
sin;  
make straight the way for God within;  
prepare we in our hearts a home,  
where such a mighty Guest may come.

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

4 Stretch out your hand, our health  
restore,  
and make us rise to fall no more;  
once more upon your people shine,  
and fill the world with love divine.

## Children

### Lighting the candle of peace

The glory of the Lord will be revealed, for God has spoken.

**Grass withers, flowers fade, but God's Word lasts forever.**

We wait with HOPE for the Word of God to come into the world.

**We light this candle as a symbol of our HOPE.** [*first candle is lit*]

God's glory is known when love & faithfulness meet, righteousness and peace kiss.

**We long for the day when peace and goodwill is real across the world.**

**We light this candle as a symbol of PEACE.** [*second candle is lit*]

## **Sung response**

(tune: He came down) CH4 359 - from Cameroon, John L Bell

He came down that we may have hope; (x3)  
hallelujah for evermore.

He came down that we may have peace; (x3)  
hallelujah for evermore.

## **Prayer, assurance of forgiveness**

E te whanau, in Christ we are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

Kia tau te rangimarie o te Karaiti ki runga i a koutou. May the peace of Christ be with you always. **And also with you.**

## **Readings – Listen for God's Word to us ...**

### **Isaiah 40:1-11**

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

### **2 Peter 3:8-15a**

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him.

## *Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church Thanks be to God*

### **Mark 1:1-8**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptised you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

*This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ Praise to Christ the Word*

**Music** *"Quittez Pasteurs (Come leave your sheep)"* French carol, arr. John Rutter

Calla Knudson-Hollebon/ soloist

### **Reflection 'The grass withers, the flower fades ...'**

Scripture often surprises us. Familiar passages that dull over time because of their familiarity can break out and hit us in the gut, and wake us up. It happened to me last Sunday night at the Advent Processional here as I sat in the congregation. I was sitting down here listening to the readings and the music. The readings had the Advent spirit of hope and joy. And then we got part way through Isaiah 40 where there was a discordant note. I had heard the words before, but perhaps because of the year we have had, I heard these words afresh. We heard them this morning ... A voice says "Cry out!" and I said "What shall I cry? All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows upon it ... The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

In Advent of all times, this time of expectation and hope, how strange to be reminded of our mortality and fragility and vulnerability. We are born. We live. We die. There are other Advent passages that sound a similar note, 2 Peter for example - "But the day of the Lord will come and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire ... Since all of these things are to be dissolved in this way ..." The very thing in which people put hope for a kind of elongating life, heaven, even heaven will pass away. We are temporary beings, grass that withers, flowers that fade, part of a dissolving earth, part of the dissolving heavens.

We know it physically. I like Prince Phillip's typically blunt response to a question about how he was going – there are bits growing where they have never grown before, and bits falling off where they have never fallen before ... or something like that. COVID has reminded us of our vulnerability, even in New Zealand, even with a vaccine.

Why in Advent though? Last Sunday I said that at the start of a new Christian year, we begin at the end, in order to be reminded of the purpose of it all ... that at the end in the emerging patterns of our world, there will be the revealing of the Christ, and that is the future that is coming towards us. Well, today, we are given another dimension of the birth of Christ, we are reminded of is temporary, that Christmas is about new life and new hope, but it is also about the dissolving, the ending of what has been, to enable the new. Ashes to ashes and dust to dust. And from the dust, from the earth, in the detritus of our fading and wilting, from our very humanness, Christ is born, who is in himself the ushering in of a new world. As at Easter, new life emerges from what ends.

This says something about what we live for and what we give ourselves to and how we see our lives. Years ago I read that the peculiar temptation of old age is melancholy, the disappointment that what we have given ourselves to comes to nothing or does not achieve what we thought it would, melancholy that our hopes remained unfulfilled and at its worst, that we have wasted our lives. There is a sense in which that is true for every person, no matter how marvellous we are – none of us have all our hopes fulfilled. Even Nelson Mandela did not achieve all he wanted. Even the most apparently successful person has to come to terms with the fact that what they gave themselves to does not work out as they thought it would. Donald Stuart, the first minister of this church, might have looked at the enduring institutions he helped establish, the University, the schools, the societies, but we read that he was also very troubled by the tragic lives of some of his family.

“The grass withers, the flower fades ...” That is true of every human enterprise, no matter how worthy. It is true of every human being, no matter how good. A friend of ours had oesophageal cancer, a terrible form of cancer. As he lived with the cancer, he infuriated his family by speaking theologically of his impending death – reflecting second Peter he would say – “My ego is going to be dissolved.” They said your death means much more than that, but he kept saying it. He was acknowledging his part in a bigger story and was pointing beyond himself. In his terrible dying, he pointed to what endured. He was a John the Baptist.

Isn't that what these discordant passages are about - “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God will stand forever.” The Word of God is the living Christ, and what endures is what participates in his life in the world, what is part of the Christ-life into which we are drawn by the Holy Spirit, in which we share every day. Over time much might fall away from our work, our life, all our effort, but what endures is what is part of the work of Christ in our world. We cannot add to it. We cannot take away from it. And often we do not know what is part of the Word and what is not.

So what does that call from us? 2 Peter - “We wait for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is our home.” Righteousness is not about a narrow personal moralising but about right relating to God, to ourselves, to each other, to creation itself. Where right relating seems far distant for people who never have enough food, or enough warmth or enough of anything, the ending of this world and the promise of a new one is what gives them the most hope of all. A burden lifts from us in knowing that all things wither, that the world fades, that we fade, and that the Christ, the Word of God, and what shares in the life of Christ, stands.

Let me finish with part of a verse from what I think is one of Colin Gibson's greatest hymns

...God's heart is love, and that love will remain,  
holding the world for ever.

No impulse of love, no office of care,  
no moment of life in its fulness;  
no beginning too late, no ending too soon,  
but is gathered and known in God's goodness.

Advent affirms that the grass withers and the flower fades, and the Word of God endures. We point beyond ourselves, with John the Baptist, to the enduring Christ, trusting that God will make of our lives what God wills, praying that what we do will be at least part of the enduring Word and relieved that we are not the judges of the worth of our lives.

## Hymn

1 Wild and lone the prophet's voice  
echoes through the desert still,  
calling us to make a choice,  
bidding us to do God's will:  
"Turn from sin and be baptised;  
cleanse your heart and mind and soul.  
Quitting all the sins you prized,  
yield your life to God's control."

2 "Bear the fruit repentance sows:  
lives of justice, truth, and love.  
Trust no other claim than those;  
set your heart on things above.  
Soon the Lord will come in power,  
burning clean the threshing floor:  
then will flames the chaff devour;  
wheat alone shall fill God's store."

## Prayer for others and the Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the  
glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.

(tune: Aberystwyth CH4 133) GtG 163 - Carl P Daw, jr.

3 With such preaching stark and bold  
John proclaimed salvation near,  
and his timeless warnings hold  
words of hope to all who hear.  
So we dare to journey on,  
led by faith through ways untrod,  
till we come at last like John  
to behold the Lamb of God.

*Anglican prayer book*

E tō mātou Matua i te rangi  
Kia tapu tōu Ingoa.  
Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga.  
Kia meatia tāu e pai ai  
ki runga ki te whenua,  
kia rite anō ki tō te rangi.  
Hōmai ki a mātou āiane  
he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.  
Murua ō mātou hara,  
Me mātou hoki e muru nei  
i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.  
Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia whakawaia;  
Engari whakaorangia mātou i te kino:  
Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha,  
me te korōria, Āke āke āke. Āmine.

## Communion

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

...

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,**

**God of power and might,**

**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is the one who comes in your name.**

**Hosanna in the highest. ...**

Great is the mystery of faith: **Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.**

Distribution: *"The Holly and the Ivy"* traditional carol, arr. David Willcocks

*"Rejoice Greatly"* G F Handel (1685-1759) from *The Messiah*, Calla Knudson-Hollebon/ Soprano

## The Advent Calendar and Advent Prayer

### Hymn

1 This Christmas we will celebrate under  
a summer sky,  
when kowhai trees burst out in leaf and  
bellbirds sing on high,  
and under giant ferns a lazy stream is  
rippling by.

*O Lord of our summer Christmas, come,  
come again,*

*O Christ of all seasons, come again.*

2 This Christmas we will celebrate upon  
a sunny shore,  
when waves are lapping on the beach  
and giant breakers roar,  
and sand is soft beneath our feet and  
seagulls wheel and soar. [*Refrain*]

(tune: God Rest You Merry, WOV 233) - Jan Chamberlain

3 This Christmas we will celebrate  
among the lofty trees,  
when red pohutukawa flowers are  
sighing in the breeze,  
and sunset touches red and gold upon  
the silver seas. [*Refrain*]

4 This Christmas some will celebrate in  
wind and rain and snow  
in places poor and dirty, where we  
would not want to go.  
O Lord, may all your children  
everywhere your caring know. [*Refrain*]

**Offering** – *Please place your offerings in the offering bags held out for you at the door  
as you leave. Please do this as soon as you are able.*

## Benediction

Go forth from this place an awakened people, aware of the world's darkness, yet reaching for the light. **We see God at work in our world, bringing light.**

Go forth from this place an expectant people, conscious of judgment in our midst, yet welcoming God's new order and justice.

**We welcome God's new day, believing that Christ will set us free.**

Go forth from this place a serving people, sensing anew the pain so many bear, yet confident God will bring healing, even through you.

**We open ourselves as channels of God's grace, for we have heard good news and we have been empowered to share it.**

Music for our leaving "*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*" David Willcocks (1919-2015)

## Serving

Minister - Kerry Enright

Associate Minister - Jordan Redding

Organist and Choir Director - Karen Knudson

Reader - Peter Matheson

Prayer for others - Russell Thew

Welcoming team - Patsy Mason's team

Counting team - Paul Crack's team

Sound - Vanessa Sinclair

*In relation to your monetary offering, you may:*

- *Make regular automatic payments (which are tax deductible) - contact Helen Thew at [plannedgiving@knoxchurch.net](mailto:plannedgiving@knoxchurch.net)*
- *Give online to the Church's bank account at 03 0903 0016425 00 - our charity number for tax rebate purposes is #CC52318*
- *Give at the conclusion of the service.*