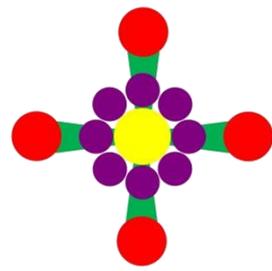


The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme



6 December 2020
The Second Sunday of Advent

Our liturgy today is led by Liz Moy

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

We will be lighting the Second Advent Candle today

People of God: be glad!
Your God delights in you,
giving you joy for sadness
and turning the dark to light.
Be strong in hope therefore;
for your God comes to save.
You are God's children.

**Lord, make us one in the love of Christ
today and for ever. Amen.**

Prayers of Penitence

A voice cries out in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord.'
So let us listen, and turn to the Lord in penitence and faith.
**Lord God, we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Heavenly Father,
you call us to repent of our sins:
soften our proud and stubborn hearts.
Lord, have mercy: **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus,
you declared the forgiveness of God:
teach us to forgive one another.
Christ, have mercy: **Christ, have mercy.**

Holy Spirit,
you search our hearts and show us the truth:
direct us in your way of righteousness.
Lord, have mercy: **Lord, have mercy.**

Almighty God,
who in Jesus Christ has given us
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed,
forgive us our sins,
open our eyes to God's truth,
strengthen us to do God's will
and give us the joy of his kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God,
purify our hearts and minds,
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as
judge and saviour
we may be ready to receive him,
who is our Lord and our God. **Amen.**

First Reading: **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.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his word

Gospel reading: **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 baptizer 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 baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Thanks be to God for the gift of his Word

Reflection from Suzy

Have you ever travelled up a mountain road that is just constant S bends? Did it have a terrifying drop at one side too? I have vivid memories of being driven on a slightly slushy road by my parents and the road became a series of switchbacks; the drop on the driver’s side was terrifying. We all prayed the whole time that we wouldn’t meet another car coming the other way because we didn’t want to get too close to the drop. Climbing into the mountains a fine mist descended making visibility worse and worse until we could barely see to the end of the headlights and my Dad was almost guessing which way the road was going to go. There was a tense and tetchy atmosphere inside that car, nerves were jumping and we all wanted to blame someone else for us being in that precarious situation. Thankfully, we arrived safely at the top of the pass and proceeded to gently descend out of the mist – suddenly it cleared. In one of those glorious moments. The car emerged from the mist and the sun was blazing down and the valley was spread out below us with a wide and smooth and beautiful drive down into it. Joy and relief all round – we had made it.

Whenever I hear this passage “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,” I remember that journey up the mountain with its endless bends and terrifying drop. Some of us live our lives like that don’t we. We live on adrenalin with a constant fear of the unknown future before us. The insecurity of doubt dogs our progress. We doubt our own abilities, we lack confidence in there being a positive outcome, we fear plunging down in free fall into a mire of failure, loss of image, loss of respect, loss of income, loss of employment, loss... There are terrifying statistics about the number of people who are living on anti-depressants and those numbers have been rising as people struggle with mental health issues during this difficult year.

John the baptizer came to people who were plagued by doubts and fears. People who were struggling to live up to other people’s expectations and knew themselves to be unable to meet the strict standards required by the Law. People who were worried about the mistakes they made and frightened of the consequences of failure. John’s message was like that moment when we emerge into the glorious sunshine and see the whole beautiful creation spread out before us. He brought them hope and swept away the insecurities and fears. John promised them that God would forgive them if they turned away from sin, turned away from all the idols of love of money, ambition, desire to keep up appearances and impress the neighbours and repented. He asked that they repent and ask for forgiveness and promised in return a new life with God in the bright light of God’s love and support.

When the weight of insecurity, doubt and fear is lifted the road becomes so much smoother and brighter. As Christians we can be the heralds of good news. We are called to make the paths straight for ourselves and those around us and enable people to encounter Jesus and receive that transformational forgiveness and lightening of burdens. Once you walk with the Lord it becomes possible to imagine that there is a bright creation spread out before you. A straight and smooth path leading into a hope filled future. As Christians we are called to affirm others, to be positive and energising, we can pass on God’s love and remind people that they are precious and have value and worth regardless of economic levels or work related success or material ‘image’. In the social media driven world of the future we can remove the adrenalin fuelled fearful stress of

people's lives by bringing a reassuring, loving message of guaranteed acceptance and loving welcome. We will serve God by 'making the paths straight for the Lord' and helping people to find their way into the light of Christ. As it said in our reading from Philippians 2:15 a few weeks ago, 'shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.' This Advent instead of dwelling on the sins we need to repent, let us help others to see the stars and find their way into the light.

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercessions led by Astrid

As we come together in prayer, we have so much to be thankful for, including so much that we often take for granted. Perhaps the difficulties and constraints of the last months have reminded us of the blessings of living in a beautiful place, of the wonders of nature that we have taken time to see and hear, of the kind and generous support we have experienced within our communities, of the

human skills that have given us technology to keep in touch with each other more than has been possible for any previous generation. So, as we bring our prayers of intercession to you, our Father, we thank you for all you have given and all you promise.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

John the Baptist brought the news of the coming of Christ. We pray for all who continue to bring that message today, for those who preach and teach and lead our worship and fellowship throughout the benefice and all who try to live out the good news. We pray for all who are called to serve as missionaries, some, like those we support through the Leprosy Mission, in exotic and possibly dangerous places, some like our mission partner Awais in a not very exotic suburb of Leeds. Her work may not sound exciting but she is bringing love and hope to people who have often come through great hardship, only to find themselves safer, but lost and lonely in a strange culture.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

Let us pray for the needs of the world beyond our parish boundaries. Let us hold before God the countries where repressive regimes, war, rebellion or terror attacks continue to bring so much misery. We pray for refugees and for those struggling to cope with desperate people crossing their borders, for our fellow Christians in Sudan and the Sudanese government as they work to bring about peace and justice while coping with the serious economic situation, refugees from fighting in Ethiopia, the aftermath of floods and fighting Covid with extremely limited resources. Aware of how little we can do in our own strength, we offer these needs to the Lord of all the world.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

Let us pray for those around us and those we know who are suffering from the effects of the pandemic, whether directly through illness, through bereavement or loneliness or anxiety about employment, education or future prospects. Help us all to hold on to the promise of this Advent season, both the immediacy of celebrating afresh the gift of Christ who came to live among us and the glory of things to come.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord, grant us a glimpse of your glory. Open our eyes to your coming to us, that we may know you are with us always, and that you are a very present help in trouble. Lord, as you abide in us and we abide in you, may we show traces of your glory in our lives, and so glorify you, Lord Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

We wait for your loving-kindness, O God,
in the midst of your temple.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Blessing

May God the Father,
who loved the world so much that he sent his only Son,
give you grace to prepare for life eternal. **Amen.**

May God the Son,
who comes to us as redeemer and judge,
reveal to you the path from darkness to light. **Amen.**

May God the Holy Spirit,
by whose working the Virgin Mary conceived the Christ,
help you bear the fruits of holiness. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Sending Out

As we await our coming Saviour,
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.