

Advent 2

“We respectfully acknowledge that we are located in the traditional and treaty territory of the Michi Saagiig (Mississauga) and Chippewa Nations, collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations which include Curve Lake, Hiawatha, Alderville, Scugog Island, Rama, Beausoleil and Georgina Island First Nations,”

“We respectfully acknowledge that the Williams Treaties First Nations have been stewards and caretaker of these lands and waters, and that today remain vigilant over their health and integrity for generations to come.”

The Opening responses:

Peace on each one who comes in need,
PEACE ON EACH ONE WHO COMES IN JOY.
Peace on each one who offers prayers,
PEACE ON EACH ONE WHO OFFERS SONG.
Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,
PEACE OF THE SPIRIT, THE TRIUNE ONE.

The Collect:

God of timeless grace,
you fill us with joyful expectation.
Make us ready for the message that prepares the way,
that with uprightness of heart and holy joy
we may eagerly await the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ,
who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

The Readings:

Baruch 5:1-9

5:1 Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God.

5:2 Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting;

5:3 for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven.

5:4 For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory."

5:5 Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them.

5:6 For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne.

5:7 For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.

5:8 The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command.

5:9 For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Luke 1:68-79

1:68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

1:69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,

1:70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

1:71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

1:72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant,

1:73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us

1:74 that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,

1:75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

1:76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

1:77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

1:78 By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,

1:79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Philippians 1:3-11

1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you,

1:4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,

1:5 because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

1:6 I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

1:7 It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

1:8 For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

1:9 And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight

1:10 to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless,

1:11 having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Luke 3:1-6

3:1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene,

3:2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

3:3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,

3:4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

3:5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth;

3:6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

The Sermon:

I find it hard to believe that it is already the second Sunday of Advent. I really don't want Advent to go by too quickly as the lessons of this season are so important. We are still living in challenging times and there is more uncertainty than we had hoped for by now. My daughter's boyfriend is from Ireland and it has been over two years since he has seen his family. After vaccinations ramped up they thought travelling to Ireland for Christmas this year would be safe. Now with the Omicron scare and heightened restrictions they are anxious not only about travelling but whether Darren will be able to actually visit his Grandmother. I have encouraged them to move forward and that is what our Advent scripture does. Moving

forward in hope is never about certainty but rather embracing the possibilities beyond our grasp.

Our first lesson is written in Baruch. You would not be alone if that name is unfamiliar. Earlier Biblical scholars argued against including Baruch in the Canon of scripture. Surely Baruch's voice is not necessary when you have the prophetic giants like Jeremiah and Isaiah. But this is one way Advent surprises us. The voice that was regarded as less important, is the voice we need to hear. Baruch focuses on what God can accomplish beyond our humanity. Humanity will always be imperfect and we are kidding ourselves to think we can find the answers. No matter what self help strategy we embrace; deep hope and possibility lies beyond. No matter how weighed down by sorrow; Baruch points to reaching beyond our self to the self of God. God has the capacity to further hope and righteousness through God's glory. We commit to building a vision beyond ourselves, with hope and joy, because God can make things possible.

Why did scholars want to sideline Baruch's message as being less important? Who are the less important voices in our community that are sidelined by the powerful? Maybe this Advent is about attending to the voices on the edges of our community and world. And maybe Advent is about building a vision that goes beyond human understanding and endeavour. God's creation might be a more powerful possibility than we can ask or imagine. Let's not quell the small voices at the edges, clamouring for justice and right living.

In the Canticle we hear the song of Zechariah. This is the wonderful joy at the birth of a child. The event is celebrated with universal significance. Somehow one family's joy at the birth of a child becomes the vision of a whole nation of people. We sing it now, today, to encourage us to believe and have hope for the future. No matter how weighed down we might be with sorrow, anxiety or fear; God is birthing new life, light and hope. There will be powerful voices that say it is not possible to reduce our carbon footprint; eradicate homelessness or poverty; to live without guns or hate: but there will soon be a small cry from a manger that will inspire people to believe in something beyond themselves. Advent, this Advent, we prepare ourselves to renew hope and vision even in the midst of struggles.

I like to think that yesterday St. George's spread a little of the Gospel referred to in Paul's letter to the Phillipians. Paul was encouraging their community to look beyond themselves to embrace others. So often the word church becomes synonymous with what happens in a building. Yesterday we gathered on the street in Grafton to give children beautiful handmade angels and gingerbread houses. No one was asked to donate. It was an act of pure joy, no strings attached. We can dare to share such joy because that is how God treats us. When love overflows in our streets, hope springs forth and any vision is possible.

The image in our Gospel reading begins with a picture of the most powerful people in the government and the synagogue. A very impressive list that might remind us of power lists in our own time. John pushes away the recognition that some want to impose on him. John's mission is much bigger than building human structures or human glory. Prepare the way of the Lord. The call is clear; our attention drawn. We are being asked to act for the whole community, the whole world. It is not about us; it's about God. It is not about our own self development; it is about being part of God's vision for all humanity. Our fears and anxieties

can be overwhelming and life struggles be very real. What our scripture and Advent lifts up is the assurance of God's presence and glory.

Whatever we do as a church, we do for the sake of the Gospel. It is not about us; it is about sharing the mutual love shown to us by God. In the midst of difficult times, our Advent light is growing brighter. Let us be daring in hope and vision.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Confession:

Creator of light and darkness,
we so often chase shadows
and fail to walk in the light.
Forgive us, O God.

A time of stillness

We travel through Advent
as forgiven people,
lifting our faces towards the light.
Let us walk together
in hope and in faith.

Amen

The Prayers:

We bring to God
someone whom we have met or remembered today
and for whom we want to pray:
For Jane Hodder, recovering at home and for Roy and their family
For Ann Dutton recovering from surgery
For those facing the challenges of chronic illness: Renate, Carla, Pat

Come, God-with-us
Come, God-with-us:
who braves our rejection and hurt,
who holds us in acceptance and love.

Come, God-for-us:
who whispers
in our ears
that we –
each of us –
are beloved children.

Come, God-under-us:
who cradles us in arms that never grow weary;

whose lap has room enough
for all.

Come, God-over-us:
who watches
in the long silence of the night,
that we might rest in peace.

Come, God-beside-us:
who steadies us
when we falter,
who lifts us up
when we fall.

Come, God-behind-us:
who picks up all the faded dreams
we drop along the way
and patchworks them into hope.

O Come, O Come, Immanuel:
and we will rejoice for ever!

The Blessing:

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your
hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of the Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
And the Blessing of God, Father (Creator), Son(Redeemer) and Holy Spirit(Sanctifier), be
with you and remain with you; and those you love, now and forever. Amen