



SUNDAY 6 DECEMBER 2020 – THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
(This Sunday is also the Feast of St Nicholas)

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

Psalm 85.8-13

8 I will listen to what the Lord God will say, ♦
for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful,
that they turn not again to folly.

9 Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him, ♦
that his glory may dwell in our land.

10 Mercy and truth are met together, ♦
righteousness and peace have kissed each other;

11 Truth shall spring up from the earth ♦
and righteousness look down from heaven.

12 The Lord will indeed give all that is good, ♦
and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness shall go before him ♦
and direct his steps in the way.

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Isaiah 40.1-11

1 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 2 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.

3 A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 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. 5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

6 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. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. 9 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!" 10 See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 11 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.

Mark 1.1-8

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;

3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," "

4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 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. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 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. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Reflection ... from Mary-Lou

All the very best children's books have a truth in them that stays long in the hearts and memories of adults too, something beyond the story, however good that is. Some of you – perhaps many of you! – will remember one of the very best: *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, by CS Lewis. At the start of this exciting and enchanting adventure in Narnia, Lewis's strange and magical land, we discover early on that it has fallen under the evil spell of the White

Witch – and that it's '*Always winter, and never Christmas!*' There is constant snow and ice in Narnia, but Christmas never comes. And yet there is still hope! As Mr Beaver tells the children:

*Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.*

Aslan the lion, in Lewis's hands, represents Christ.

God's people had waited long, so very long, for the promised Messiah to come. Waiting through Exile and the coming home, waiting through oppression and the cruelty of conquerors, waiting for their true King to come and free them. They waited still.

Always winter, and never Christmas ...

And then suddenly John the Baptist bursts onto the scene! In Narnia, the first sign of hopes coming true and the imminent arrival of Aslan, is the arrival of Father Christmas. For God's people, here is John – definitely not a comfortable, jolly figure! But very definitely the sign from God that this is the beginning of good news. John comes to prepare the way for the Lord, God's Messiah is about to appear.

How did you feel when we heard the news just days ago that a vaccine had been approved? This long year of waiting, fear and terrible loss, has indeed felt like a winter that would never end, a time of deepest darkness. I know my heart lifted to hear the good news. Hope – real hope! - is rising that liberation from the pandemic is on its way. In Narnia, the first sign of hopes coming true is the sound of the jingling bells on Father Christmas's sleigh. For God's people, the sign that the Messiah is not far away is the voice of John, crying out in the wilderness – calling the people to turn back to God, to get ready for the coming of the Holy One. John was fierce and brave, challenging and faithful.

Do you know the line from an old nursery rhyme, *Can I get there by candlelight?* I read something by the priest and poet Malcolm Guite this week that reminded me of those words and of just how powerful our simple act of lighting Advent candles can be. They draw us in, to their flames, to the light, into mystery and wonder – as the writer says '*back to Bethlehem, and the silent stars.*'

In this, probably the darkest winter that most of us have ever lived through, light a candle for John the Baptist – and hear in his crying in the wilderness that greatest news of all. God is comforting his people! It will not always be winter, and never Christmas! Hope is rising – we shall have spring again.

May you be blessed with hope and light right now, in the love and expectation of Christ, our true Messiah.