

Sunday 6th December 2020

2nd Sunday in Advent

Haddington West with Garvald and
Morham

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

**“The Prophet of the Most High will be
the Lord’s forerunner, to prepare his
way and lead his people to a
knowledge of salvation through the
forgiveness of their sins.” Lk.1,76-77**



Advent

Collect: Almighty God, you sent your servant John the Baptist to prepare your people to welcome the Messiah. Inspire the ministers and stewards of your truth to turn our disobedient heart to you, that when the Christ shall come again to be our judge we may stand with confidence before his glory; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN

The Servant King

1 From heaven You came, helpless babe,
entered our world, Your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give Your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

2 There in the garden of tears
my heavy load He chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,

‘Yet not my will but yours,’ He said.
This is our God . . .

3 Come see His hands and His feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.
This is our God . . .

4 So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone Him,
each other’s needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we’re serving.
This is our God . . .

Words and music by Graham Kendrick

Mk.1,1-8:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way – a voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”’

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the

forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

Dear friends

His coming stands announced. This opens up the need and the opportunity to prepare for it. Are we prepared for Christmas? His coming is certain. Whether we partake in it, whether it is with or without us, that is a matter of whether and how we prepare for it.

There are those who take no interest in the One who comes from the Most High – this great movement from heaven to earth -, they make no preparation and let his coming go past them, thinking it much of a non-event. And a non-event, in a sense, for them it must prove: for the lack of being prepared things must continue to pass much as they always have, without the light of hope and renewal, but with the verdict that it was rejected when it came.

He who comes says: *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."* (Rev.3,20) What of these words and the preparation they imply?

Do we not tend to want to be prepared for that knock on the door that announces the coming of our visitors? And conversely, do we not stand shamefaced when our guests find us unprepared for their coming? Or, in a different context, where is the family that does not turn their thoughts to preparing for it the moment the arrival of a new member is announced? Indeed, it is no undue generalization to say that we all spend an awful lot of time preparing and getting prepared for what is coming. It is a basic mode of life and of living. Whether our receiving of something that is coming makes for something fitting depends a lot on the manner of our preparation. Should this not serve to drive home the truth that for a fitting reception of the One who is coming there is a preparation to be done?

But how do we prepare *for the coming of the Most High*? How do we prepare for this? How do we prepare when we realise that he is coming to such as are the least high? And we cannot even begin to prepare until we realise that that is the case. How do we prepare if we have every bit as much reason, if not more, as John had, to say of this coming: It is that of *"one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie"*?

We cannot prepare nor be prepared, dear friends, that is the truth of it! We all have to cast down our eyes before his coming and tremble at what we present to him.

In the bright light of his coming all that is left for me is to confess my utter unworthiness; in this light nothing is hidden of all the things, even those of my innermost thoughts, that make me unprepared for his coming, unfit to receive him. I must know that his coming is my judgment.

I cannot prepare a path for him – for his coming to me -, for surely I must own the words of Isaiah: *"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."* (Is.64,6)

Dear friends, we cannot prepare, for we have to be honest and say: "I am unprepared". Yet, we are only truly unprepared when we think that we are prepared and cannot see, or won't see, that we

aren't. For when we know that we are unprepared – that our sins lie in his way like a mountain on the path running along a valley, that our sins bend his way unto judgment – then we learn that the Lord's coming is such as to prepare us for it and make us fit for him! This is a most wonderful turn (which only the poor in spirit perceive): The Most High Himself provides the way for the least high to dwell with Him!

There is nothing else that teaches so clearly what the coming of the Lord actually is: That it is the love of God, in search of those who are unprepared for him, to cleanse them from their sins and take away their reproach and give them life through fellowship with him; prepared to fulfil what they could not, to bear himself the judgment due their sins and forgive.

The Lord sends his messenger ahead of his coming to "*preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*". And there you have it in a visible sign and event. The confession of being unprepared for his coming and dwelling with us, is the preparation for "getting" what otherwise we wouldn't – the glory of the love of God which searches us in order to bestow on us all its glory through cleansing us by the forgiveness of our sins and opening up to us life in him (path to life, to heaven).s

And the point of John the Baptist in the wilderness and the people coming out to him to be baptised as they repent of their sins, is that it prefigures the coming of the love of God in Christ Jesus. To him, away from the figure towards what it prefigures, he points saying: "*I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.*"

Dear friends, the love of God is coming – restoring, all-giving – in power to cleanse us from all our sins, to free us from the fear of death and give us life, even life everlasting. Its name is Jesus Christ, in whom all of this is complete and for us, and he is received in power through repentance and faith (of which baptism in his name is the seal and sign). Let us receive him with joy, for he is our peace.

AMEN

God whose love is everywhere

1 God whose love is everywhere
made our earth and all things fair,
ever keeps them in His care;
praise the God of love!
He who hung the stars in space
holds the spinning world in place;
praise the God of love!

2 Come with thankfulness to sing
of the gifts the seasons bring,
summer, winter, autumn, spring;
praise the God of love!
He who gave us breath and birth
gives us all the fruitful earth;
praise the God of love!

3 Mark what love the Lord displayed,
all our sins upon Him laid,
by His blood our ransom paid;
praise the God of love!
Circled by that scarlet band
all the world is in His hand;
praise the God of love!

4 See the sign of love appear,
flame of glory, bright and clear,
light for all the world is here;
praise the God of love!
Gloom and darkness, get you gone!
Christ the Light of life has shone;
praise the God of love!

by Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

Lord God, you come for judgment, in grace and mercy to give us what we are lacking, free us from what binds us and take away what oppresses us and weighs us down. How wonderful is your love which does not wait for us to be worthy of it, but comes to redeem us; how sweet the words of you Son: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"; how comforting the knowledge that the power of grace is made perfect in weakness. Lord God, we praise you, and pray make us ready always by the power of your Spirit, through a true sense of our sins to know the beauty and power of your forgiveness and grace in Christ and to cling to him in faith.

- time of prayer / intercession –

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen'

Look forward in hope to the coming of your Saviour, prepare the way for Christ your Lord; welcome him with love and faith when he comes in glory.

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

AMEN