

# ADVENT STUDY 2020

*'O that you would tear open the heavens and come down' Isaiah 64.1*

## For your own Reading

### Isaiah - background

Isaiah appears to fall into three sections. The first section (chapters 1-39) contains a large number of messages describing the judgement that will fall on the people of Judah unless they change their ways. This judgement is shot through with some beautiful passages of hope and promised salvation. This first section also contains some narrative sections, especially chapters 36-39 which are an exact copy of 1 Kings 18.13-20.19. The second section (40-55) is based almost entirely on the comfort that will come to God's people. It feels as though it is set after the judgement, promised in the first section, has happened and pledges a new future for God's people. The third section (56-66) also appears to be set at a different time, probably after God's people have returned to the land. It contains a mix of warnings about how they should behave alongside comfort and hope for the future.

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**Welcome!** This course has three sessions, each focussing upon the Old Testament reading from the first three Sundays of Advent, all from Isaiah - you can read some background on the book to the left. I have compiled the material from many sources and have acknowledged these along the way.

### You can choose how you do this course, you can either:

- Join Mike on Zoom on 7, 14 & 21 to do this as a discussion with others. Register at: [bit.ly/adventstudy20](http://bit.ly/adventstudy20)
- Do this course with your own household, on a Zoom meeting with people you know, on the phone or on your own
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### Each session has three elements to it:



**Stop** - an opportunity to focus on God

**Look** - read God's word, reflect on it, discuss it

**Listen** - as we prepare to leave an opportunity to listen to God, for his word in our lives and what he may be saying to us

### Stop

As we begin let us take some time to focus our minds [*a few moments of quiet*]. Heavenly Father we pray that you may take away the stress, worries and cares of this day that as we join together we may be able to focus upon you this Advent, to focus on preparing ourselves for the coming of your son in glory. Amen. As we listen to this piece of music [[Casting Crowns: O come, O come, Emmanuel](#)] take some time to think of a word which comes to mind when you think of Advent.

Write it down here.....

When the music has finished, if you wish to, let's discuss the words we've thought of. What do we learn from sharing these?

We read Isaiah 64. 1-9

### Reflection

Today's passage is part of a continuing lament, its tone is anguished, pleading, longing for God to be God. The prophet is tired of trying to justify God's anger with the people. The people have sinned of course they have - and the prophet has said so over and over again. They have nothing to offer God, but then they never did, but God loved them anyway.

Now God's continuing silence is beginning to be seen not as punishment but as absence. People are beginning to give up on God (v.7). Usually in the prophetic literature, that is seen as culpable, but now our sympathy is with these heart-broken, directionless people. How can they carry on believing in God when there is so little evidence that he cares about them?

Come on, God, the prophet shouts! Be God! We know you can do it, or at least that you used to do it. Remember how, when you and Moses used to talk, the mountain used to be covered in smoke, and the whole ground shook? Remember how, when Elijah prayed, you made soaking wood catch fire, so that the heathen prophets knew who was God? Dear God, that's what we so desperately need now, says the prophet.

*[Adapted from a Reflection by Jane Williams in Reflections for Daily Prayer 8 January 2013]*

### Some things to discuss...

1. How does this passage make you feel? Initial thoughts?
2. Have you ever thought something similar to Isaiah?
3. Can you think of any modern day equivalents where you would like God to 'tear open the heavens and come down'?
4. Is God ever really silent?
5. Discuss verse 8.
6. Anything else?

### Listen

**Let's take a few moments of silence before we depart, to...**

- Listen to God
- To his thoughts, to his ways (*Isaiah 55*)
- What is it that God longs for you to take away from this study
- Offer to him those things that may be in the way of you having a blessed Advent
- We wait on the Lord...

*Music: Casting Crowns: God is with us*



### Collect 1st Sunday of Advent

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### Let us bless each other

**The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you his peace. Amen.**

*Numbers 6:24-26*

# ADVENT STUDY 2020

*'Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed' Isaiah 40:5*

## For your own Reading

### The Word of God Stands Forever

**'The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures for ever.'** (v. 8). Like grass and flowers, humans wither and fade, but the word of God will stand forever. The word of God is the constant on which we can depend day in and day out. God gave his word to Abram and David and others in the form of a covenant that promised blessings to their descendants. The exiles we hear of in Isaiah are their descendants, and they can count on God to keep his covenant in spite of their sin.



The Word of God should be important in our lives too, as Timothy informs us (2 Timothy 3:16), '(Scripture) is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'.

What could your covenant be with God this Advent?

**Welcome!** We continue with session 2, focussing upon the Old Testament reading for the 2nd Sunday of Advent from Isaiah. Material from many sources and is acknowledged.

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**Stop** - an opportunity to focus on God

**Look** - read God's word, reflect on it, discuss it

**Listen** - as we prepare to leave an opportunity to listen to God, for his word in our lives and what he may be saying to us

### Stop

As we begin let us take some time to focus our minds [*a few moments of quiet*].

Heavenly Father we pray that you may take away the stress, worries and cares of this day that as we join together we may be able to focus upon you this Advent, to focus on preparing ourselves for the coming of your son in glory. Amen.

As we listen to this piece of music [[Taize: Ubi Caritas](#)] take some time to think of God's glory being revealed, how, when, where, are you a part of it?

When the music has finished, if you wish to, let's discuss what we've thought about.

Write one word below as you think of God's glory....

Is there common ground in our thinking?



**Look**

We read Isaiah 40. 1-11

**Reflection**

One of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets begins his song with his life's message from God: 'Comfort, O comfort my people' (v.1). His songs continue (most think) until the end of Isaiah 55. These 15 chapters are the most powerful words of hope in Scripture, addressed to the second generation of exiles to prepare them for salvation.

We do not know this prophet's name. He values gentleness and humility in God and God's servants. Perhaps for that reason he refers to himself only as 'a voice' (vv.3,6). I like to call him 'Col' (from the Hebrew q'ol meaning voice).

Col's words throughout are full of contrasts. In this opening song he contrasts past and present: we are at a crisis, a turning point in God's dealings with his people. He contrasts the weightiness and permanence of God's power and glory breaking in (vv.4-5) with the lightness and fragility of human lives (flowers and grass, vv.6-7). The Hebrew word 'glory' means something heavy, dense and immensely powerful.

The Christian's task and calling in Advent is to prepare the way of the Lord: to so witness to those around us that a way is opened for them to hear God's message of comfort and forgiveness and come home.

*[Adapted from a Reflection by Steven Croft in Reflections for Daily Prayer 21 November 2016]*

**Some things to discuss...**

1. Initial thoughts on the passage/reflection.
2. God is calling out today, how can we make straight the paths?
3. How is the Church doing at proclaiming the Good News?
4. Discuss verse 11.
5. What will your life message be?
6. Anything else?

**Listen**

**Let's take a few moments of silence before we depart, to...**

- Listen to God
- To his thoughts, to his ways (*Isaiah 55*)
- What is our life's message, what legacy do we leave?
- What paths can we make straight this Advent?
- We wait on the Lord...

*Music: Taizé - Wait for the Lord*

**Collect 2nd Sunday of Advent**

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

**Let us bless each other**

**The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you his peace. Amen.**

*Numbers 6:24-26*

# ADVENT STUDY 2020

*'... he has clothed me with the garments of salvation' Isaiah 61.10*

## For your own Reading

### The Year of the Jubilee

The word "jubilee" in the Old Testament is from the Hebrew word "yobel" or "yovel" meaning "a ram's horn, trumpet" or "coronet." If someone announced the Jubilee, they would be actually blowing a trumpet and all of the congregation of Israel would be able to hear it. The Year of Jubilee was special to Israel as you can read about in Leviticus.

The Jubilee came every fifty years. When the trumpet sounded on the fiftieth year, and specifically on the Day of Atonement, liberty would be proclaimed "throughout the land to all its inhabitants" and then all of the property that had been taken by others for unpaid debts would have to be



returned to the original families. What a celebration that must have been. Everyone that had been indebted was then released from that debt and able to start over again by having their land returned to them. Perhaps the world is in need of this today?

**Welcome!** We continue with session 3, focussing upon the Old Testament reading for the 3rd Sunday of Advent from Isaiah. Material from many sources and is acknowledged.

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### Stop

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As we listen to this piece of music [[Hillsong : Cornerstone](#)] take some time to think of God's favour and perhaps upon whom it rests.

When the music has finished, if you wish to, let's discuss what we've thought about.

How can the Church help to fulfil this prophecy today? Oh look, an empty space, why not jot something down to remind you?



**Look**

We read [Isaiah 61](#)

**Reflection**

When Jesus sets out on his ministry, it is to these words in Isaiah that he turns as an announcement of what is to come. What is it about this song that makes it so apt for Jesus' purposes?

In spirit, it belongs with what are usually called the 'servant songs' earlier on in Isaiah (see Isaiah 42, for example). These earlier songs suggest that the suffering that the people of God are undergoing is part of their 'service' to the nations, somehow. The nations may despise the 'servant' and write him off, but God is using him, even in his distress.

Here in Isaiah 61, the anointing that was usually reserved for kings, priests and prophets is now poured out on the whole people; all are 'ministers of God' (v.6), repairing and restoring the devastated land.

Their ministry is part of the 'year of the Lord's favour' (v.2), a time of jubilee, when the whole earth is given back to its creator, so that it can flourish again. Just as in the first garden at the beginning of time, so in this new garden earth, everything is good, plants and people alike. The results of the 'fall' are undone, so that people wear the garments of righteousness and salvation, not the shoddy leaves that Adam and Eve sewed to hide their disobedience.

*[Adapted from a Reflection by Jane Williams in Reflections for Daily Prayer 4 January 2013]*

**Some things to discuss...**

1. Initial thoughts on the passage/reflection.
2. Can all things be made new again? Can the earth flourish?
3. What do garments of Salvation look like to you?
4. What may a reward from God look/feel like?
5. Anything else?

**Listen**

**Let's take a few moments of silence before we depart, to...**

- Listen to God
- To his thoughts, to his ways (*Isaiah 55*)
- What is my part in proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour?
- Let God's Sovereign Spirit rest upon you
- We wait on the Lord...

*Music: [Stuart Townend - How deep the Father's love for us](#)*

**Collect 3rd Sunday of Advent**

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

**Let us bless each other**

**The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you his peace. Amen.**

*Numbers 6:24-26*