

Advent 2; Isaiah 40:1-11, 2 Peter 3:8-15a, Mark 1:1-8

During **Advent** we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth.

Christmas has been saved this year, so we are told, a mini-Christmas, we can form Christmas bubbles, a season to be jolly.. *careful*, as our Prime Minister tells us....

Whatever our plans, and however cautious we plan to be this year, one thing that nothing can take away is the **joy of celebrating the birth of our Saviour**, that in Jesus Christ a light has come into our world, a gift from God, our Saviour, and because of this we can know real joy, peace, love and hope this Christmas time, whatever our circumstances.

**So, how are you preparing for Christmas?**

It may be much simpler for you this year, perhaps in simply sending Christmas cards, and staying at home... The Government want us to go out and spend our money, to save our remaining shops and stores. Some will do so, with all out shopping!

Perhaps you are more considered. Did you stir your puddings/cakes last week on 'stir-up' Sunday? Thoughtful gifts are a lovely thing, good food shared with family and friends can be a blessing, there are still many good aspects to Christmas celebrations that we can enjoy... But, as Christians, we are called to think beyond these, to also think about **our lives** as we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth.

Advent Sunday's readings were about being prepared for the coming of our Lord and the **judgment** that will come, today's readings are about the **prophets** who pointed people towards God's coming to his people, calling them to get ready, especially Isaiah.

Isaiah uses figurative language, to be applied to God's people's lives

**v1** The Church of England's Christmas advertising campaign this year is called, 'Comfort and Joy' (from the Carol, 'God, rest you merry') This echoes the words of Isaiah.

This year many need words of **comfort** after the challenges that have confronted us all, and still challenge us. It is God who comes among us in Jesus, who can truly offer real comfort and hope for the future, and it is to God we turn as we prepare for Christmas.

In Isaiah's time, God's people were living in **exile**, away from the promised land.

Isaiah speaks tender words, deliverance is coming, God is returning to help his people.

**v3-4** Isaiah speaks of making a **highway** for the Lord to come back to his people.

*(perhaps this is where Santa riding on his sleigh in the sky comes from!)*

Isaiah sees God coming in glory, perhaps surrounded by crowds of angels. So he needs a level path, a wide space to travel on.

This message of creating space in our lives for God was echoed by John the Baptist as he challenged people to repent, and be ready to recognise God coming among them. Isaiah's figurative language speaks of reflecting on our lives, addressing any barriers to welcoming God once more into our hearts, as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour.

As today's epistle says, 'what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.' (2 Peter 3:11-12a)

**v5** When all is ready, at the right time, God is to be revealed **in his glory**.

As in that traditional Christmas reading, (John 1:14) 'the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his **glory**, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth'... Isaiah pictures God as coming in all his glory. But the fulfilment of these hopes comes unexpectedly, in a baby lying in a manger. The Christmas story is a surprising one, and even though it is so familiar, each year we try and recapture the wonder of God coming among us in the infant Christ.

**v6-8** Isaiah's message is a reminder of our **mortality**, we pass through this world, but God's word, his truth and faithfulness, remain forever. The coming Jesus *is* that Word, *full of grace and truth*, constant through all time and eternity.

**v9** The Lord is coming. Isaiah is told to **shout it** on the mountain tops! Let everyone know. This is also our calling, to tell others that God is among us, full of glory, and to come and worship him. Perhaps we can do this through a Christmas card or greeting, or an invitation to come to a Christmas service...

Finally, Isaiah returns to a tender image of God as the **Good Shepherd** with his lambs:

**v11** There need be no fear for us in our Lord's coming, rather great rejoicing, as he comes as the Shepherd, who knows his sheep, and loves and cares for each one.

So, let us make space in our hearts and lives to recognise and receive the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ this Christmas time. Amen.