

Prayers Light in the darkness

In these strange and sometimes dark, deeply unsettling days, we thank you, gracious God, for all who inspire us, like the young people on the Country File rambles; Marcus Rashford, footballer pressuring for child poverty to be taken seriously; Sir David Attenborough, still tirelessly trying to energise the rest of us at 94; all those who have done a virtual Great North Run and London Marathon in order to raise money for struggling charities. Thank you for all of them and countless more who reflect your light. Bless them all. May we take our cue from them and from you to be creative, compassionate and positive. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Leader: Dear God, into the world's menace and strife

ALL: Let us welcome the Prince of Peace

Leader: Into the world's despair and sorrow

ALL: Let us welcome the Christ of Hope

Leader: Into our busyness or our loneliness

ALL: Let us welcome our Servant King

Leader: Among carols and candles

ALL: Let us welcome the Word made Flesh

Hymn StF 180 / H&P 85 **O come, o come Immanuel**

Blessing Go in peace, and may the light of Christ illumine the way before you. **Amen**

With grateful thanks to Rev Jean Hudson for her prayers.

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Darlington District **Worship at Home Sunday 6th December 2020** **“The people who walked in darkness** **have seen a great light.”** Isaiah 9: 2

On the second and third Sundays in Advent our printed worship explores the great hope expressed in Isaiah 9: 2.

Call to Worship:

I, O LORD, cry out to you; Psalm 88: 13

With the psalmist we come before God just as we are.

We bring our joys, our worries, our hopes and our fears in the certain promise that God welcomes us as we are. God welcomes us and cares.

Psalm 88 is written from a place of deep darkness. Take time to read it all if you are able. On the face of it the author, Heman, had everything to be thankful for: wisdom, status, family. Yet he ends his lament with one of the saddest lines in all biblical poetry, “darkness is my closest friend.” Heman’s psalm reminds us that times of darkness can be very real and totally devastating, even for the most faithful followers of God.

In this dark valley, Heman repeatedly calls to God (verses 1, 9, 13) – at night; in the morning; every day. When the trappings of our lives let us down, God is still waiting to listen.

Prayers *(you might like to light a candle as part of your prayers)*

Take time now to recognise God’s presence with you and to honestly share how you are feeling with God. You might choose to read Psalm 88 again and to notice which verses draw you in. Offer those words and your response to God.

Lord, in your mercy, hear the prayers of all your people.
Amen

Old Testament Reading [Isaiah 8: 5-10](#)

To fully appreciate light you need to experience darkness. We are told that you can see a candle burning up to a mile and a half away in the right conditions. During a power cut we do not need to light a candle in daylight, but in the dark hours the light of a candle can enable us to proceed with confidence.

To appreciate the light prophesied in Isaiah 9: 2 it is helpful for us to consider the darkness revealed by the prophet in chapter 8. The people of Judah are resisting the tyranny of King Ahaz and are even willing to look to their expansionist neighbours for help to escape his rule. In verses 6-8 Isaiah speaks a message he has been given by God, it paints a graphic picture of the attitudes of the people using images of flowing water. The stream or brook known as Shiloah was sourced by an intermittent fountain near to Jerusalem and it flowed to a pool which provided water for the people of the city. It is a picture of a gentle brook and the gentle provision of God. By contrast the major rivers of the region, Euphrates, Nile and Tigris are all associated with human empires and the trappings and pomp of human glorification. Will the people turn to God or to human forces for their rescue? The description is stark. When the way is open to the rivers they quickly overflow the channels, run over the banks, sweeping and swirling into Judah until the people are up to their necks. The prophet warns that rejecting God's way and turning to other powers will end in disaster for them.

In case the picture of the flood is not sufficient, Isaiah then spells out the realities of choosing warfare to resolve their problems. In verses 9 and 10 it is not the battle preparations or strategic plans which will protect the people it is 'Immanuel' – God with us.

The Hebrew word 'Immanuel' means 'God with us'. It appears at the end of verse 8 and verse 10. We will think more about names next week. May you know God with you in this second week of Advent.

Old Testament Reading [Isaiah 9: 1-2, 5](#)

The opening verses of chapter 9 are often read in Advent or Christmas. In total contrast to the darkness of floods and warfare of chapter 8 the early verses shine brightly with the hope and promise of a better vision. In verse one there is both a change of tone and a shift in geography. The vision moves from the humbling of lands to the honouring of Galilee and focuses attention on a different river, the Jordan. The people walking under a rule of tyranny and reaching out to unlikely allies for help can see by a new light, a great light.

Which gospel passages come to your mind when you hear 'Galilee' or 'River Jordan'? Perhaps you are reminded of the ministry of John the Baptist in [Mark 1: 1-8](#) preaching repentance and baptising in the Jordan? Mark quotes Isaiah 40: 3

A voice of one calling:

'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'

A passage which continues;

⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

Total transformation occurs when God is recognised.

Returning to Isaiah 9: Verse 5 continues the contrast with the previous chapter. The equipment of warfare is to be destroyed, burnt as fuel for warmth or cooking. Chapter 8 described armies flooding the land, now they can no longer march because their boots are gone forever. That is the change which comes when light fills the darkness. The difference the man of Galilee will offer.