

## Prayers for the world

God, Ancient of Days, waiting is something we don't do easily. We want to hurry, we want you to hurry, forgetting that with you a thousand years is as a moment. We have learned there is no 'hurrying' way of dealing with Covid-19. We have to wait. Please draw near and help us to learn the value of Advent waiting, a time to listen, a time to read your word, to pray and to think about you, one another, your world, Jesus. **Amen**

Loving, consoling God of grace, we pray today for all who wait for news – for results of medical tests, for a missing family member, to hear from a loved one in a dangerous part of the world, to hear about an asylum application, job interview or the future of their employment. We pray for such situations, where people have no control over circumstances or outcomes. May we, in imagination, enter into their waiting, while praying for the best for them. **Amen**

We share together in saying **The Lord's Prayer**

As we conclude our focus on 'the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light', we rejoice in the hope we have in Jesus. Our closing hymn speaks of the transforming light of Christ coming to those who are waiting:

Hymn StF 188 **There's a light upon the mountain**

We say with confidence **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

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

Thank you to Rev Jean Hudson for her prayers.

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## **Darlington District**

### **Worship at Home Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

**"The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light."**

Isaiah 9: 2

We continue to explore the great hope expressed in Isaiah 9: 2.

#### Opening Responses:

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 162 **The prophets' voice comes down the years**

Prayers (*you might choose to light a candle at this time*)

**Merciful God, the hymn reminds me of my need to turn away from the 'things that tear life down' and to 'choose the path that Jesus chose'. I am sorry for the times when the demands of the world around me distract me from seeing you at work in the world. When I am distracted from following the path of Christ. Forgive me when I contribute to the noise and not to the light. I am sorry.**

*God waits until we turn, and offers us forgiveness and peace.*

**Forgive my impatience with the news and daily announcements. Teach me instead to listen carefully until I detect the voice of reason, the voice of compassion, the voice of clarity, of justice. Help me to trust, then, that I am hearing your voice, and live accordingly, for your kingdom, for you.  
Amen**

## Old Testament Reading [Isaiah 8: 1-4](#) Names and mysteries.

If we associate Advent with the bible announcements of babies to be born, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is unlikely to be the first to come to mind. In this fascinating story the prophet is told to inscribe these words on a tablet using ordinary lettering. This is a lasting message for all people, not just the elite or the lowly, all people. The words sit, a mystery without explanation, for nine months until Isaiah's wife 'the prophetess' (a title most likely given in reference to her husband's role) gives birth to their son and the child is given the name engraved on the stone.

On 29<sup>th</sup> November our worship sheet noted the importance and meaning of names. This name is a warning, the words mean

'speed-plunder-haste-spoil'.

Not names we are likely to choose for our children! They are a warning. Before this child can speak his first words the Assyrians will strike. We read last week of the devastation forecast in this invasion. We continue today our focus on the contrast between Isaiah chapter 8 with the early verses in chapter 9.

## Old Testament Reading [Isaiah 9: 6-7](#)

After the burning of military boots Isaiah breaks the news of another birth. This child, a son, carries authority. He too bears four names:

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

What a different vision these names offer. The wisdom of a Wonderful Counsellor. The incarnate deity of Mighty God. The eternal care offered by the one who gave us life. The deep peace which is beyond our understanding which comes from the centre of God's being. These names shine a light into the darkness.

Verse 7 gives us insight into the nature of the rule of this new Prince of Peace. It is a growing authority. When we think of

growing do we think of growing in size or growing in depth? Is there a challenge for each of us to ask ourselves and Jesus how far and how deep we are allowing his authority to rule in our lives? With the challenge of authority comes the promise of peace that does not end. When Judah submits once more to the rule of God (the throne of David and his kingdom) that rule is one of peace. Contrast again the prophesy in chapter 8 when the people of God turn away and seek rescue through the protection of other nations: the outcome then would be warfare, those neighbours overrunning Judah like a flood.

The mystery of the Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz was explained a few months later with the naming of Isaiah's child. It will take longer for the identity of the son promised in Isaiah 9: 6 to be understood. The link to Jesus is made most plainly in Matthew's gospel. Matthew begins by setting out the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. Then, in [Matthew 4: 12-17](#) a direct link is made to Isaiah 9 verses 1 and 2, Jesus moves from Nazareth to Capernaum and the prophesy spoken by Isaiah is fulfilled.

Read again [Isaiah 9: 1-7](#)

At the end of a challenging year we too look forward to the celebration of Christ's birth. We put lights up in homes and gardens as a symbol of the light of the world who shines in the darkness. Even when we experience the darkness we have hope, for Christ who experienced the darkness of the cross walks beside us in our dark times. Isaiah 9 verses 3 and 4 speaks of the burden being lifted from our shoulders and elated with joy as in harvest celebrations. It is with similar joy that we can look forward to marking the birth of Jesus this Christmas. As the flame of a candle stands out boldly in the darkness, the light of Christ draws us on in hope and expectation.

We say with confidence today:

**"The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not overcome it."** ([John 1: 5](#))