**“Light to the Nations”; An Advent course based on the prophecies of Isaiah**

**Opening Prayer**

Come Holy Spirit

and open to us the treasures of God’s word.

Grant us a readiness to listen

and an openness to learn;

that through the riches of your gifts

we may better understand the needs of ourselves and those around us

and the good news to be proclaimed.

We ask this in the name of Jesus

who came as a light to the nations.

Amen.

**Opening responses *(based on Isaiah 40 and 43)***

Creator God, who made the sea and sky,

who measured the waters in the hollow of your hand,

**You are a God of justice.**

Great God, who weighed the mountains in a scale

and the hills in a balance,

**You are a God of justice.**

Righteous God, who accounts the power of nations as but dust,

and brings corrupt rulers to nothing,

**You are a God of justice.**

Loving God, in whose sight all people are precious and valued,

honoured and redeemed,

**You are a God of justice.**

God, who calls us each by name,

come among us, give us understanding.

**You are a God of justice.**

**Introduction**

I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,
    I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
    a light to the nations,
   to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
    from the prison those who sit in darkness.

*Isaiah 42: 6-7*

The Bible is full of imagery of light and dark, and Advent itself is set in the Church’s calendar in the dark winter days that look forward to and long for the coming of the light – the birth of the Christ child, the light of the world. It is a preparation of the spirit to welcome the coming of the one whose light is rescue, salvation from all that darkness holds. But the darkness and the deeds of darkness have first to be recognised for what they are, to be repented of, turned from, so that one might delight in walking in the light.

Without preparation, we cannot recognise the light of Christ for what it truly is, and we cannot live by this light either without the season of Advent. That such a season comes round on an annual basis reminds us that the life of faith, the walk with Christ who is the light, is not a single event but a journey with its delights and its doubts, its times of closeness to our Lord and its time when we feel far away. It is a time of checking out our spiritual well-being, a time to reflect on the places where the light has not yet reached and where darkness has crept in.

The prophecies come from the part of Isaiah known as ‘Second Isaiah’. Most of the Advent readings are in this section because it is looking forward to what God is going to do.

They can be precisely dated because we know when Cyrus was ruling, from the period of the Exile in Babylon around 540BC. It is a period of emerging turmoil, one in which there was good reason for hope and in which the people were called to renew their faith in the promises of God. And more than that, God’s purpose was not restricted to the rescue of his own people from exile, but for all people. God’s people therefore become not only the recipients of salvation but the proclaimers of it for the well-being of others.

The task of the people is to bring light into the social, economic and personal darkness. They are to be proclaimers of the good news that God’s promise will not fail, that there is rescue for the oppressed, that light will be given to eyes that cannot see, that a time of prosperity and spiritual well-bring is coming through the activity of God.

**Week 1: Good news to the poor**

**Isaiah 61**

**61**The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
    because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
    to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
    and release to the prisoners;
**2**to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,
    and the day of vengeance of our God;
    to comfort all who mourn;
**3**to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
    to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
    the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
    the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
**4**They shall build up the ancient ruins,
    they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
    the devastations of many generations.

**5**Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
    foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;
**6**but you shall be called priests of the Lord,
    you shall be named ministers of our God;
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,
    and in their riches you shall glory.
**7**Because their[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah+61&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18851a)] shame was double,
    and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot,
therefore they shall possess a double portion;
    everlasting joy shall be theirs.

**8**For I the Lord love justice,
    I hate robbery and wrongdoing;[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah+61&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18852b)]
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
    and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
**9**Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
    and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
    that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.
**10**I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
    my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
    he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
    and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
**11**For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
    and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
    to spring up before all the nations.

**Psalm 113**

Praise the Lord!
Praise, O servants of the Lord;
    praise the name of the Lord.

**2**Blessed be the name of the Lord
    from this time on and forevermore.
**3**From the rising of the sun to its setting
    the name of the Lord is to be praised.
**4**The Lord is high above all nations,
    and his glory above the heavens.

**5**Who is like the Lord our God,
    who is seated on high,
**6**who looks far down
    on the heavens and the earth?
**7**He raises the poor from the dust,
    and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
**8**to make them sit with princes,
    with the princes of his people.
**9**He gives the barren woman a home,
    making her the joyous mother of children.
Praise the Lord!

**John 12:1-8**

**12**Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. **2**There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. **3**Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. **4**But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, **5**“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” **6**(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) **7**Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. **8**You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

**Isaiah 61:1**

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
    because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,

**Luke 4:18**

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
    because he has anointed me
        to bring good news to the poor.

**Litany of hope**

When politics and polices are biased to the poor,

**Then shall light shine forth like the dawn.**

When none go hungry and good food is for all,

**Then shall light shine forth like the dawn.**

When all have a safe place to call home and feel welcome,

**Then shall light shine forth like the dawn.**

For the riches of God’s gifts **we give thanks;**

for his love and his mercy **we give thanks;**

for the promise of his Son **we give thanks.**

For all who live in poverty of possessions **we pray to the Father;**

for all who live in poverty of spirit **we pray to the Father;**

for all who proclaim the gospel of hope **we pray to the Father.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**

We look for the coming of the Lord of light, the Child of Bethlehem, the protector of the poor.

**Come, Lord Jesus.**