



Parish of
St Peter Woking
St Peter's · St Mark's · All Souls'



Sunday 6th December **2nd Sunday of Advent**

Welcome and opening prayer

Hymn 538 On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry

On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake, and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings

Then cleansed be every breast from
sin;

Make straight the way for God
within;

Prepare we in our hearts a home
Where such a mighty Guest may
come.

For Thou art our Salvation, Lord,
Our Refuge, and our great Reward.

Without Thy grace we waste away,
like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out Thine
hand,

and bid the fallen sinner stand;
Shine forth, and let Thy light
restore

Earth's own true loveliness once
more.

All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets Thy people free,
Whom, with the Father, we adore,
And Holy Ghost, forevermore.

Lighting of the Advent Wreaths – *Light a candle in your home*

Leader God our Father, you spoke to the prophets of old of a
Saviour who would bring peace. You helped them to spread
the joyful message of his coming kingdom. Help us, as we
prepare to celebrate his birth, to share with those around
us the good news of your power and love. We ask this
through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into the
world. Amen.

All Lord Jesus, light of the world, the prophets said you would
bring peace and save your people in trouble. Give peace in
our hearts at Christmas and show all the world God's love.
Amen.

Advent Reflection

Opening activity *Things we find comforting*

Confession

God our Father,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins.
For turning away from you,
and ignoring your will for our lives;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

For behaving just as we wish,
without thinking of you;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

For failing you by what we do,
and think and say;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

For letting ourselves be drawn away from you
by temptations in the world about us;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

For living as if we were ashamed
to belong to your Son;
Father, forgive us:

All **save us and help us.**

Absolution *(we are reminded that God forgives all who repent)*

Leader May the God of all healing and forgiveness
draw us to himself, and cleanse us from all our sins
that we may behold the glory of his Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Collect *(Prayer for the day)*

Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be
written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise
hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,
that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may
embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting
life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen. Amen

Hymn 921 Purify my heart

Purify my heart
Let me be as gold
and precious silver
Purify my heart
Let me be as gold, pure gold
Refiner's fire,
my heart's one desire
Is to be holy
Set apart for You, Lord

*I choose to be holy
Set apart for You, my Master
Ready to do Your will*

Purify my heart
Cleanse me from within
and make me holy
Purify my heart
Cleanse me from my sin,
deep within

Bible readings

Isaiah 40.1-11 Elliot Johnson, St Peter's

¹Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord 's hand double for all her sins. ³A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord ; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

⁹You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Mark 1:1-8– Caroline Harvey, St Peter's

¹The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" -- ³"a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "

⁴And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Sermon Jonathan Thomas ~ Comfort and Joy

What's your comfort food/drink when you've had a rubbish day at work or school your children are arguing with each other all day or you've just received some bad news about a friend? A whole bar of dairy milk, a tub of Ben and Jerry's, a large glass of wine or a tumbler of whiskey on the rocks? Mine would have to be a slab of cake, if I could find one in the house, or failing that I'd pop to the bakery near us and get a cream slice!



We all need comfort when life is a struggle whether it be food or drink or one of the other things Sam showed us in our opening activity. This year the Church of England's theme for Christmas is 'Comfort and Joy', the phrase from the chorus of the carol 'God rest ye merry gentlemen', and we are using it on our Parish Christmas Card that goes to all the homes in the area. Comfort and Joy are words that we all need at this time when so many of the things and people that usually bring comfort and joy have been stripped away by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying restrictions. And they were words that the people of Israel needed to hear in Isaiah 40, just after Isaiah had prophesied in the previous chapter that the Israelites would be carried off as captives to Babylon.



When I hear those opening words of Isaiah 40 "Comfort, comfort my people" I can't help but think of the uplifting opening piece from Handel's Messiah (if you have it play it now!). I spoke earlier of physical things that comfort us, but of course this is not the sort of comfort that God is speaking of through Isaiah to his people, which touches the soul. The word "comfort" is used many times in the bible. The Old Testament word for comfort is 'naham' which carries a sense of consoling comfort and is used many times in the book of Job when Job's friends went to sympathise with and console him after his devastating losses of family

and wealth, although as Job regularly says they were terrible at it, because they could only point the finger at Job saying he must have done something wrong to deserve it, which was no comfort at all.

In the New Testament the Greek word translated 'comfort' is 'paraklesis' which is made up of 'kaleo', meaning to call, and 'para', meaning alongside, giving that lovely sense of someone being called to be alongside a person who needs them to comfort, encourage and cheer up. In the beatitudes Jesus says in Matthew 5:4 'Blessed are they who mourn they will be comforted' which conjures up this paraklesis meaning of someone coming alongside the mourner to bring blessing.

In 2 Corinthians 1 v3-7 Paul writes this lovely reassuring passage on comfort: " Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort." God provides a depth of comfort greater than any other source which we then pass on to those in need of it.

This biblical concept of comforting is far more than just a few consoling, well-meaning words affording only some calm endurance of affliction, or receiving a temporary emotional boost from something physical. It is an act of grace that through loving presence dispels sadness and imparts spiritual strength and hope. So with that in mind let's look at Isaiah 40. It begins with God's command to Isaiah to comfort his people, the Israelites, through the prophecies he is about to give him. A people who have abandoned him and been justly punished by being exiled to Babylon, but who have not been rejected by God. Just as we saw last week when Rachel was talking about waiting, here is a people waiting in exile in hope for God to act, but not knowing when. Here God brings a tender word of comfort to a bruised people to tell them that their hard service of exile will end, that they have completed their sentence.

Having received the comforting words that they will return from exile the passage then contains three voices that speak of further comfort. The first voice in v3-5, which Mark quotes in our gospel reading as fulfilment of prophecy in John the Baptist, brings the comfort of the glory of the Lord being revealed to all humankind, which we know to have been a Messianic prophecy about Jesus. It's a vivid image seen in modern engineering methods when building a motorway, where valleys are raised up through bridges, mountains lowered through viaducts, rough ground becoming

level through tarmac, the road being made smooth to ensure an easy journey with a safe arrival. God is coming to the aid of his people.

The second voice in v6-8 brings comfort through the enduring quality of God's word. It does so in a rather strange way by reminding humankind of their transience and fragility like grass that withers and contrasting their temporariness with the eternal and assured word of God. God will keep on speaking and what he says will happen, he is reliable.

The third voice in v9-11 brings comfort, and real joy, in revealing that the Lord is coming in power as King. The image in v9 of proclaiming good tidings to Jerusalem from a high mountain echoes our phrase "shout it from the mountain-tops", that exile is over. As God's people return to their homeland God is coming to be their king. But this is not a king who will come in military might, rather in the loving care of a shepherd for his flock, and particularly the gentle care for the vulnerable, the lambs. We see that picture lived out in Jesus the Good Shepherd who sought out the vulnerable, the outcast, the unloved and brought them healing of body, mind and spirit.

This comfort that God proclaims through Isaiah to the people of Israel is both in the encouragement in the near future of forgiveness of sins and return from exile and then of Him in the distant future coming alongside his people, in the person of Jesus, to shepherd them and, as we see in later prophecies in Isaiah 53, of bearing our sins and taking the punishment of them on himself. We can see in the way God brings comfort, that it is not a transient thing that consoles for a little while before its effects wear off, but rather a transformation of the whole self that leads to everlasting deep joy.

So in the midst of a pandemic in this season of Advent, when it is cold and dark, and our patience with the restrictions and lack of social contact is wearing thin, how do God's words of comfort through Isaiah speak to us? Can I suggest in 4 ways. Firstly, and importantly, our God of comfort comes alongside us in our struggles. We see this in Jesus, the Emmanuel – God with us, that Isaiah prophecies about in chapter 7, the son of God who came down from heaven and dwelt amongst us. And we experience it in our daily lives when we spend time with God in prayer or worship, when we sense his presence close to us. This may not be our experience all the time, but as James 4:8 says "Come near to God and he will come near to you." We need to prepare ourselves to meet with God, to give him time, rather than a quick 5 minutes, and I find so often when I do I know his presence and his comfort and a serene peace often comes over me. And secondly God comforts us, as he did the people of Israel, by saying "Know that your sins are forgiven, they don't need to weigh heavy on you. Jesus has paid the price for your sins, you are free." For many people, even though they know in their head that the bible says they are forgiven,

they don't always believe that God can forgive them, especially for certain things they have done, and so they live, consciously or subconsciously, trying to appease God, make it up to him by trying to be perfect and self-sacrificial. But it is tiring and wearing and weighs them down so they don't experience the true freedom God's forgiveness brings. Accept his forgiveness, stop striving and serve him out of love not duty.

Thirdly, just as God promised the Israelites a return from exile to their homeland so God comforts us, especially during Advent, by reminding us that Jesus will return one day, that he will make all things new, that he will remove pain, sorrow and death and that those who love Him will enjoy being in his presence forever.

And finally we learn how we can be comforters to those struggling. As we saw earlier in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 "the God of all comfort, ... comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." We emulate God by coming alongside others in their struggles, not just offering a consoling word, but spending time listening, sharing what has helped us, sharing God's love in practical ways, giving a hug (when it's allowed again!). The bereavement support group discussed this last month and said how much that group provided comfort through being together, sharing experiences of grief and loss and praying together.

And as we receive God's comfort and pass on comfort to others it will lead us on the path of greater joy. I pray that we will all know God's comfort and joy over this advent and Christmas time. AMEN

Hymn **746 What a friend we have in Jesus**

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer
Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

*What a friend we have in Jesus
What a friend we have in him
For he knows us and he holds us
in his hands
And his grace is never failing
And his love without an end
What a friend we have in Jesus
What a friend we have in him*

Blessed Saviour, you have promised
You will all our burdens bear
May we ever, Lord, be bringing
All to you in earnest prayer
Soon in glory bright, unclouded
There will be no need for prayer
Rapture, praise, and endless
worship
Will be our sweet portion there

Apostles Creed

All I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Prayers ~ Pauline Wilde, St Peter's

Heavenly Father we thank you that you have brought us safe to the beginning of this new day. We thank you for your word which helps and sustain us in these strange and difficult times. We thank you for the ministry team who bring your word to us. We praise you for all the technology that helps us to take part in Sunday worship from our own homes and also give thanks for those who make it possible for us now to attend church services in our church buildings.

Christ be our light, shine in your church gathered today

We pray for all those who are struggling at the moment physically, mentally, emotionally or financially. We thank you for all those organisations who support people in need such as CAP, local food banks and for the York Road project as it supports those who are homeless. We pray for the government and the scientists who have the difficult job to balance getting the country back to normal working without increasing those infected with the virus and overwhelming the health service. We pray for all those who are concerned for their jobs especially in the retail, hospitality and leisure activities. The virus has affected all our lives and many of us are fearful as to what things will be like in the future and wonder when we will be able to do many of the various activities and

attend groups as we used to. Help us Lord when we have those moments to put our hope and trust in you.

Christ be our light shine in your church gathered today

We pray for our world for areas of unrest thinking especially for Uganda as they approach elections in the New Year. We pray for our government as they continue negotiations with the EU as the Brexit date fast approaches.

We bring before you our mission partners who serve you both in this country and abroad, Cherith Witherington in Forest Green Liverpool, Stephanie Cox in Gravesend, Malcolm Pritchard in Uganda and Mike and Safaa Cloud. Be with them as they engage with their communities during the pandemic that they will shine as beacons of light in these dark times.

Christ be our light shine in your church gathered today

We bring before you those who we know personally who are in need of your healing and comfort at this time. We especially pray for Eileen and Peter Bliss, John Hunter, Mary McKinnon, Olive Park and Joy Storkey. Ease their pain and fill them with the warmth of your love now and always.

We also pray for those who are bereaved at this time. We ask you to accept all these prayers for the sake of your son Jesus Christ Amen

We conclude our prayers by saying together the Lord's Prayer

The Lord's prayer

Leader Gathering our prayers and praises into one,
As our Saviour has taught us so we pray.

All **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Notices

Hymn **999 Jesus, You're my firm foundation**

*Jesus, You're my firm foundation,
I know I can stand secure
Jesus You're my firm foundation,
I put my hope in Your holy word
I put my hope in Your holy word*

I have a living hope (I have a living hope)
I have a future (I have a future)
God has a plan for me (God has a plan for me)
Of this I'm sure, of this I'm sure

Your word is faithful (Your word is faithful)
Mighty with power (Mighty with power)
God will deliver me (God will deliver me)
Of this I'm sure, of this I'm sure

The Blessing

May God the Father, judge all-merciful,
make us worthy of a place in his kingdom.

Amen.

May God the Son, coming among us in power,
reveal in our midst the promise of his glory.

Amen.

May God the Holy Spirit make us steadfast in faith,
joyful in hope and constant in love.

Amen.

And the blessing...