

Worshipping God Together

Call to worship

Minister: In the beginning was
the Word, and the Word
was with God, and the Word was God.

**All: He was with God in
the beginning.**

Minister: In him was life, and
that life was the light of
men.

MP 491

O come, all you faithful

Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer

"Be still, and aware of God's presence, Within and all
around us."

Let us pray:

As we begin our Advent journey of adventure,
may we not be so eager to reach Bethlehem
that we fail to see the fuller picture
of a God who has been with us throughout history,
and appears in the people we meet.

Gracious God, you have given so much: life and breath;
food and shelter and all those things we call our daily
bread.

You have given us all this and more yet - for without
our asking, or in any way deserving, you have also
given to us the supreme gift of your Son Jesus Christ;
and the love and the hope that we need for this life,
and for the next. We thank you, O God...

Creator God,
help us to be like John the Baptist.
May we find our joy in fulfilling your purpose in our
lives

and be humble enough to rejoice just because you know and love us.

When we are tempted to take power or glory for ourselves, remind us that our identity and well-being lies in you.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Isaiah 40: 1-5 & 8-11 (OT pages 723-724)

John 1: 6-8 & 19-28

(NT pages 1063-1064)

Reader: Andrew Coutts

MP 515:1,2
go

O Love that wilt not let me

Sermon

The text for the sermon is verse 9:

" The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. "

If there is one thing we will agree on then it is the fact that we are experiencing winter with all it brings namely the cold, the ice, most probably some snow and the dark nights.

It is fascinating that we that live in Scotland can appreciate the "coming of Christ" through the analogy of light. In the dark nights when you are driving you can see the lights of an approaching car quite in

advance and prepare yourself not to overtake another car and to dim your lights.

This is exactly what Advent means. The word is derived from the Latin word "ADVENTUS" WHICH MEANS ARRIVAL. The time of advent is the time where we prepare ourselves to celebrate the arrival or coming of Jesus to the earth.

We indeed have to prepare ourselves just as we have to do when we see an approaching car in the dark.

In Africa nature often prepares itself for the rain by doing different things. The foxes go into their holes. The ants start frantically to gather food - in preparation for when it rains and they cannot venture outside to eat.

There is even scientists who observed that before a Tsunami struck the east coast of Africa, the animals fled to higher ground. I read on the internet and I quote: "There have been stories in Sri Lanka and Thailand of elephants running for the hills up to an hour before the tsunami bore down on the coastal lands, wiping out entire villages and killing up to 150,000 people." We will never know for certain why but whatever the reason? They prepare themselves for the worst when they sense something like a huge storm is on the way.

Just like the animals who prepare themselves, so must we prepare ourselves for the coming of the light, namely the birth of our Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ. If we do prepare ourselves in a proper way - we will not be surprised by any storm that can erupt our lives this Christmas.

We need to ask ourselves:

- Are we ready to receive the light of Christ in our lives and homes in these dark days?
- Are we prepared to sacrifice everything we have for our faith in him?

- Are we capable to live up to his challenges of love and hope?

These questions must be our questions this advent while we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ - the Light to our dark world. A world that is full of wars, murder, brokenness, violent crimes, and all our lies..

In the first chapter of John's Gospel it is said that John is not the light but the one who had to tell everyone of the light that is coming. When John was asked if he was the Christ, the expected Messiah he emphatically denied this claim.

John quotes from two passages in the Old Testament namely Isaiah and Malachi to bring his readers into the picture. In this passage it was prophesized that the Messiah will have a messenger that will prepare the way for him. It is striking that both these prophecies actually refer to Elijah who would appear as the Messenger. There are a lot of resemblances between John and Elijah. Both of them lived in the desert, and both wore clothes of animal skins, tied with a leather belt. We also know that many Jews in John's day believed that Elijah was not dead but alive since he was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot. It is no wonder that the representatives of the Jewish authorities asked him directly if he is Elijah. John replied that he is not Elijah.

Then they asked him if he is the Prophet? Many scholars assumes that the Prophet they are talking about is Moses because in Deuteronomy 18:15 a prophet like Moses was predicted in the future to speak on behalf of God. In Mark, Matthew and Luke the Gospel writers used Elijah and Moses almost in the same breath when they reported the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. It seems then logical to assume that the representatives are actually referring to Moses. Again John says he is not the Prophet.

He is only the "voice" like Isaiah 40 predicted. The significance of the voice was not to be found in the speaker but in its message. He is fulfilling a task by clearing the road for Christ.

Then they asked him about his reasons for baptizing. In those days when the Non - Jews repented and turned to God and His laws, they then - as a symbol of their repentance - had a One once-for-all ritual baptism designed to purify them of pagan impurity. It was also known as the "proselyte baptism".

Most Jewish people thought that if they were born into a Jewish family and did not reject God's law, they would be saved; John told them instead that they had to come to God the same way that non-Jews did. The point of John's baptism is that everyone has to come to God on the same terms. Everyone that believes in Christ must turn away from their sinful ways.

John then says that Christ is standing among them whom they do not know. He is only the Messenger, preparing the way for Christ. John actually says he is nothing compared to Christ. He uses a strong metaphor from his time to stress this point. Disciples often served their teachers in the same ways that slaves would serve their masters, performing the most basic odd jobs like taking off their masters' sandals. John feels unworthy even to do this basic job in other words he feels unworthy just to be the Messiah's slave!

What does this mean for us today?

The time is running out. We should be like the ants, doing everything in our power to be prepared in faith when we celebrate the birth, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ready to meet up to the challenges of believing in him in an ever increasing

non-believing world. In Proverbs 6:6 we read that: "Go to the ant and learn a lesson from the way ants live."

How do ants live? In Africa they make huge nests out of mud almost like a pyramid. Although some ants are so small and cannot easily be seen, their nests stand out from afar. They know how to plan for the rainy or cold day. They gather and store their food so that they as a colony can have enough food for the winter months or when it rains. In Africa, the summer rains can last for weeks. They are good team of workers. Sometimes you will see how a piece of food is carried by more than one ant. They help each other out. When one ant experience difficulties, you will see how the rest will return and try to help. They know what sacrifice means. Some of them do not return to their nest. Some will be the prey of birds and humans. But although and despite the dangers they go out and do their best to gather food..

We as Christians can learn from the ways of the ants. Although we as Christians may be small in numbers, we should also stand out in the way we speak, act and think as believers. Sometimes we as Christians tend to prepare, celebrate and live the good news of Christ *only* during Christmas and Easter time. No - We must gather enough spiritual food for the whole year. It is one thing to have a beautiful tree, lots of food, presents and a merry atmosphere but quite another to live in a constant relationship with the Lord.

We must also become more and more like a team, helping each other to carry the burdens of this life. We must always be on the lookout for the Christian Brother or sister that:

- Suffers financially because of the credit crunch or the loss of a job,
- Suffers physically from disability, constant pain, sickness or old age,

- Struggle spiritually because of a beloved that has died
- Struggle from some form of addiction
- Struggle with broken relationships in their family life
- Struggles with the pressures of life
- Struggles at work because of a "bully culture"

We must help each other where and whenever we can. We must carry the message in our actions that in faith we are never alone and without the constant care and love of God. We must make time to enter into a living relationship with God and share it with our brothers and sisters in everything we do. Not only this Christmas but very moment of each day.

Our faith in God through Jesus' birth and sacrifice on the cross made us travellers on a new way. A way that will lead us to a new kingdom of peace, love and happiness. A new life where there will be no more tears and suffering.

The ants also make sure their nest is safe and sheltered for the raining season. We must also make sure our houses of faith are ready and prepared to celebrate the birth, life and sacrifice of Christ.

- If our houses of faith are untidy we must start cleaning it again,
- if our walls of hope are crumbling under the onslaught of life, we must fix it by reading the Good News again,
- if our windows of love are filled with the dirt of our selfishness or pride, we must wipe it clean so that other can see the love of God,
- if our doors of reaching out to others are closed we must find the courage to open it again in order for others to feel the welcoming presence of our Lord..

May we all gather enough spiritual food of faith, love and hope not only this Christmas but also for the new year to come... Amen

Responding to God's word

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing **MP 857: "Here I am, Lord"**.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Janice Anderson

MP 1039

Colours of day as printed on the back of the order of service.

Benediction Receive the blessing of God and go in peace:

Advent God,
your creation inspires our journey;
your Son is the life-map we follow;
your Spirit the light we travel by.

And The blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Be with you all
Now and for evermore

Sung Amen