



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION  
SUNDAY 3 DECEMBER 2023 – ADVENT SUNDAY**

**COLLECT**

Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;  
that on the last day,  
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty  
to judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Psalm 80.1-8,18**

- 1 Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, ♦  
you that led Joseph like a flock;
- 2 Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim, ♦  
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
- 3 Stir up your mighty strength ♦  
and come to our salvation.
- 4 Turn us again, O God; ♦  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- 5 O Lord God of hosts, ♦  
how long will you be angry at your people's prayer?
- 6 You feed them with the bread of tears; ♦  
you give them abundance of tears to drink.
- 7 You have made us the derision of our neighbours, ♦  
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.
- 8 Turn us again, O God of hosts; ♦  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- 18 Let your hand be upon the man at your right hand, ♦  
the son of man you made so strong for yourself.
- 19 And so will we not go back from you; ♦  
give us life, and we shall call upon your name.
- 20 Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts; ♦  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

**A reading from the prophecy of Isaiah, Chapter 64, verses 1 to 9.**

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—  
as when fire kindles brushwood  
and the fire causes water to boil—  
to make your name known to your adversaries,  
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!  
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.  
From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.  
You meet those who gladly do right,  
those who remember you in your ways.  
But you were angry, and we sinned;  
because you hid yourself we transgressed.  
We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
There is no one who calls on your name,  
or attempts to take hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.  
Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.  
Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,  
and do not remember iniquity for ever.  
Now consider, we are all your people.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*Gospel Acclamation (for Communion services only)*

**Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven.

**Alleluia!**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, chapter 25, verses 31-46.

**Glory to you, O Lord**

Jesus said, 'But in those days, after that suffering,  
the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,  
and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## **A Reflection from Peter...**

And so we begin again! For Christians this is our New Year: an opportunity for a fresh start and something of a reset. But it could hardly be less like the New Year celebrations we may well be caught up in when 2023 ends. That new beginning we associate with resolutions – what are our dreams and hopes for the year ahead?; and with renewing gym membership, or committing to ‘Dry January’ or starting a diet...

Advent is God’s new beginning and the invitation is to turn our gaze to what God is doing and what response that asks of us. It is a time full of hope: “People, look east!” – for a new dawn is breaking, new light is coming and the darkness will be overcome. But it is also an unsettling time. God is not like us and we do not know quite what to expect. In our first reading the prophet Isaiah captures some of this uncertainty when he says, “Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake at your presence...” – big, dramatic stuff. And the prophet goes on “When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways.” Isaiah here is both reassuring and challenging: God is very different from us, but God also comes near and meets us. There is a need for careful self-examination because we may well have become too reliant on our own ways of thinking and interpreting the world around us. We may need to take time to re-align ourselves with God – to ‘remember God in God’s ways’ as the prophet puts it.

We may be tempted to think that things change with the advent of Jesus, that the Gospel will be positive and cheerful, but when we turn to our Gospel reading from Mark we are in for a shock! The very first note is again one of puzzling, unsettling events: Jesus says, “In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken....” Yet these dramatic events are for a particular purpose: they are the trumpet call announcing the dawn of the new age, the coming of the Son of Man with great power and glory. And the Gospel passage ends with that familiar Advent refrain, “Stay awake!” – not the easiest thing to do in the depths of winter with the shortest day hurtling towards us! For us, Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are to be wide awake with our eyes fixed on two parts of God’s work. First, we are preparing to welcome the birth of the Christ child at Christmas – to do all in our power to allow God’s gift to be known and welcomed in the world. And secondly, we are to be readying ourselves in hope for God’s coming in glory: for the new creation that finally reveals God’s glory unclouded by the tangles and evils of this world. The new creation is not like the endless cycle of corruption and violence that brings us grief and struggle at every level – personal, national, international – and leaves us feeling helpless in the face of tragedy whether small and intimate or vast and incomprehensible, like Ukraine and the Middle East. Rather, the new creation is where, as Isaiah put it so memorably, “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.”