

Sunday 20 December 2020 Awe-Struck Anticipation - Revd Martin Beukes

Advent Crown Prayer

[Invite the congregation to hold up four fingers]

LEADER: The fourth candle we light today shines bright like Mary's willing heart. She thought herself weak, and yet she obeyed, was strong and brave to play her part. Jesus, we welcome you into our lives,

ALL: O come, O come Emmanuel. Make us brave to share your love, O come, O come Emmanuel.

Prayer

God of Grace, king of all creation, we gather together in anticipation to worship you today. We wait for your coming. We wait for you to restore us. We wait for you to make all things new.

As our anticipation of Christmas grows, and our hearts are filled by all the love expressed in cards and calls and as we wait eagerly for what we hope will still be a day of great joy with those we love, we are aware that we are not always loving. We have not loved your creation and we continue to damage our planet. We have not loved ourselves and we push too hard to achieve. We have not loved the people you place in our lives and we exploit them for our gain. We have not loved you as you have loved us. Father forgive us all that is passed and enable us to worship you with our whole lives.

Say the Lord's Prayer

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

Hear Jesus' words of Grace that he spoke so many times on the road,
"Your sin is forgiven, go in peace."

Song: StF 175 Light of the World <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdfrijGy-FIU>

<p>Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness, opened my eyes, let me see beauty that made this heart adore you, hope of a life spent with you.</p> <p><i>So here I am to worship, here I am to bow down, here I am to say that you're my God, and you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy, altogether wonderful to me.</i></p>	<p>King of all days oh so highly exalted, glorious in heaven above. Humbly you came to the earth you created, all for love's sake became poor. <i>So here I am to worship ...</i></p> <p>And I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross. And I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross. <i>So here I am to worship ...</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tim Hughes</p>
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Meditation:

I want you to sit as comfortably as possible, close your eyes and take a couple of deep slow breaths. Now, listen for one word in the passage: a Gift which God is giving to the world in Jesus. Something our world needs. Something you need! Focus your attention on God, and if your attention drifts say the word again in your mind.

First Reading: Luke 1:46b-53 (Common English Bible)

With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my saviour.

He has looked with favour on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favoured because the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is his name.

He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honours him as God.

He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

Junior Church Address:

What is better: getting a present and holding it for that moment before you open it and it has all the potential to be everything you want, or actually opening it up seeing what is inside?

Waiting for the present, the anticipation must be at least half of the fun, else children wouldn't try and wait up all night to see their gifts arrive, and they wouldn't try and guess what they are.

Here I have an envelope which doesn't have just a card in, but a whole present. What could it be? There is so much potential and possibly!

It could be £200; that would be an amazing present, we could get whatever we liked. It could be a lifetime supply of sweets. It could be a coupon for your favourite game. Or it could be horrible like a lifetime supply of Twiglets, or just be empty.

Or maybe, it could be a note which says "I love you more than you would ever know, and nothing you do could ever change that."

Mary's song gives us an idea of who she thinks the Gift of Jesus is going to be. Saviour, favour, humble servant, mercy, mighty, scattered, pulled down, lifted up, filled. That's what she thinks God's gift will be. If only she knew there was even more of a blessing for us in God's Gift of Jesus. Mary expected Jesus to be a king, if only she knew Jesus was a note from God saying "I love you more than you would ever know, and nothing you do could ever change that."

Prayer by Junior Church / Second Song (See Him Lying on a Bed of Straw)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUSEGmUywXw>

Today in Zoom, Junior Church we will be hearing about how an angel came to both Mary and Joseph, telling them about the child given by the Holy Spirit to Mary, and how baby Jesus would bring hope for all people.

Dear God, When things are difficult, please help us to bring messages of hope to others. We pray for our neighbours and our friends this season of Advent. *Amen*

<p>See him lying on a bed of straw; draughty stable with an open door, Mary cradling the babe she bore; the Prince of Glory is his name:</p> <p><i>O now carry me to Bethlehem to see the Lord of love again; just as poor as was the stable then, the Prince of Glory when he came.</i></p> <p>Star of silver, sweep across the skies, show where Jesus in the manger lies; shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise to see the Saviour of the world:</p>	<p>Angels, sing again the song you sang, sing the story of God's gracious plan; sing that Bethl'em's little baby can be the Saviour of us all:</p> <p>Mine are riches from your poverty, from your innocence, eternity; mine, forgiveness by your death for me; child of sorrow for my joy:</p> <p>Michael Perry (1942–1996)</p>
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Prayers for the Children

Reading: 1 Samuel 8: 1-20

¹When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. ²The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. ³But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

⁴So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

⁶But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.

⁷And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

¹⁰Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. ¹²Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plough his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. ¹⁵He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. ¹⁶Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. ¹⁷He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."

¹⁹But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. ²⁰Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”

Reading: Luke 1:26-33

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.”

²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Sermon:

There was a time, long, long ago, where everything was as close to Eden as life on earth can reasonably be when humanity is involved. Ancient Israel treated each other with dignity and fairness. You could not become so indebted that your life was destroyed. You were unlikely to go hungry for long, if at all. Justice and mercy rule the nation, and God was King. But the nations around Israel were greedy, they wanted Israel's land. Israel was afraid, they didn't entirely trust God to defend them, and they wanted a king to rule and defend them. They didn't care if it meant they would lose control of their lives, if people would go hungry, if people would be slaves, or even if they would die in the king's wars. They wanted a person in charge. They didn't care if they were rejecting Justice and Mercy. They did not care if they were rejecting God as their King. And Samuel warned them, and they did not listen.

After the better part of half a millennium, Israel was a poor facsimile of its former self. It had been conquered and reconquered so many times they had lost all real hope of self-determination. Their religious practices had been trodden on and abused and distorted to serve the few and make the rest afraid of the God who once ruled them all with Justice and Mercy and Grace. But still, Israel had one hope. The coming Anointed One of God, the Messiah, a prophet like Moses and a king like David. And they waited with awe-struck anticipation.

The problem is they were waiting for what they wanted and not what God was actually doing. The way their world was run was greedy, exploitative, and unjust. They were just hoping for a version of that where Israel was in charge. How much is that our story today? Do we want a world that is probably still broken, but if the UK is ok, then that is ok?

Skip forward a few hundred years from the first humiliations of the nation, and a young girl from a nowhere town prepares to be married. The old men in the family are discussing terms and the women are anticipating all the preparations for the feast. She is going to marry a good man, with a solid trade and some means to have a decent life for the time. At least they would not go hungry. And then she has a dream, or a hallucination, or whatever it was. She doesn't know; she is just scared. She was visited by a Messenger of the Lord and she is told she is pregnant, and she isn't sure how. But she knows it is true that she is pregnant, and she anticipates trouble. What will Joseph say? What will her father say? Will she be thrown out on the streets? So she does what scared teenagers do. She packs her things, and she runs away to her cousin whom she trusts and loves.

That is where we pick up the story of waiting today: Israel anticipating a prophet king and Mary anticipating rejection and shame. If only Mary had known that rejection and shame were Israel's story, not hers. And God was sick of all the rejection and shame.

So, she comes to her cousin and the baby in her womb skips a beat and Elizabeth starts to tell Mary what the Messenger told her. And she believes all the more, and she forgets about rejection and shame, or prophet kings, and she begins to anticipate the Gift.

The Gift, of course, was a baby boy, born in a barn, surrounded by hay and smelly animals. But that was not the Gift. The Gift was, of course, a man who would mature and teach people the path back to the upside-down kingdom where God is King, and all is well. But that was not the Gift. The Gift, of course, was a man willing to die because we are sinful, unable to see a world restored to God. But that was not the Gift.

The Gift was simpler. It was lived out in the life of Jesus, the baby, the teacher, the convict. But the gift was really a note from God saying, "I love you more than you would ever know, and nothing you do could ever change that."

There is a saying I love. When we are or are not able to do something for someone, we may say that something is, or is not, 'within our gift.' we simply mean we do or do not have the power to do it.

Much of our life is lived in anticipation of the things we need to do. Some of them are easy to do, some are hard, some are not. Some things that need to be done are within our gift, and some are not. But I want to focus on the 'some' that is.

What is within your gift? What skills and talents do you have? What time can you spare or are you willing to make?

Here is why I ask: as much as Jesus is the Gift of God to the world, you too are a gift to the world. God has given you in anticipation that your life will also read like the note from God saying, "I love you more than you would ever know, and nothing you do could ever change that."

We like to think of our gifts as Jesus' followers some amazing spiritual power. After all the first followers did miracles. But what if that isn't what our gift we give to the world is. Our gift is to be awe-struck by God's Gift of love and to anticipate that as we lovingly share our gifts with others, they may read, "God loves you more than you would ever know, and nothing you do could ever change that." And maybe God would leave then awe-struck at the Gift too.

Hymn: What Child is this? (Tune Greensleeves) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBSdHv0_s-Y

What Child is this, who, laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, While shepherds watch are keeping? <i>This, this is Christ, the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing: Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary!</i>	Why lies He in such mean estate, Where ox and ass are feeding? Good Christian, fear: for sinners here The silent Word is pleading. So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh, Come, peasant, king to own Him. The King of kings salvation brings; Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
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Intercessions:

Bring to mind anything you would like to give thanks to God for or ask our community's prayers for.

Hymn: StF 180 O Come, O Come, Immanuel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3-7EWH-85w>

- 1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear :
*Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*
- 2 O come, O come, O Lord of might
who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe :
- 3 O come, O Rod of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny ;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave :
- 4 O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home ;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery :
- 5 O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer
our spirits by your advent here ;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight :

Latin, 18th century, based on the ancient *Advent Antiphons*
translated by John Mason Neale (1811-1866)

Blessing:

The wait is almost over, Christmas is nearly here!

Emmanuel is about to be born. So go out, into this Christmas season, aware that God is with you.

The wait is almost over, Christmas is nearly here! The King who has come, and who will come again, sends you out to demonstrate his Kingdom on earth. The long-expected King, born to the sound of angels singing, sends you out to worship him with your lives. The King who was born poor and humble, sends you to serve those who are weak and needy in the world.

The wait is almost over, Christmas is nearly here! *Amen.*