

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 14 December 2025 - The Third Sunday of Advent

Lectionary Readings (*depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on*)

Isaiah 35.1-10; Psalm 146.4-10 or Canticle Magnificat; James 5.7-10; Matthew 11.2-11

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Claire Brockelsby, Assistant Curate in Training, Fen Drayton with Fenstanton Benefice

We are now halfway through Advent – a season filled with wait and wonder. Some of you may already have a Christmas tree up, have some cards written and perhaps even some presents wrapped. Others may hear the word 'Advent' and feel a knot of panic: so much to do, so little time! The television adverts have been at work for some time now, building anticipation for the 'big day' and stirring up our desires. For many, especially children and young people, the magic of such adverts can be powerful – shaping hopes, expectations, and of course, wish lists. I wonder if you have had moments when you have longed for a highly advertised gift that has not quite lived up to expectations on Christmas morning, making you realise that you have been 'caught' by the marketing hype and nonsense, and your expectations have not aligned with reality.

As we reflect on the tensions between expectation and reality, we find that today's gospel offers a poignant example. John the Baptist, the once 'wild' prophet of the desert who beckoned the crowds with his powerful words, is now imprisoned and uncertain, and he sends his disciples to Jesus with this plaintive question:

"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

It seems John may have been expecting something different, perhaps a Messiah who would come in power and judgement, or a king or warrior who would overthrow injustice once and for all. Whatever his expectations were, today's reading suggests they have been shaken and he sends a question to Jesus, via the disciples, seeking clarity, hoping his uncertainty might be resolved.

We too carry expectations – of faith, of God, and of how life should unfold, and let's be honest, sometimes they do not match reality either. Moreover, John appears to be having a moment of honest doubt, and perhaps even disappointment, which I am sure is equally relatable to us. It is a reminder to us that even the most faithful can wrestle with the gap between expectation and reality.

To the question, 'Are you the one?', Jesus offers a gentle reply. He encourages the disciples to, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them.' Jesus is inviting the disciples, and John, to look again for the signs of renewal. Not

for the Messiah that they have come to imagine in their minds, but for the one who is already at work, quietly healing and gently restoring, for the kingdom that Jesus heralds, is rooted in compassion and action - and sometimes we just need a reminder to seek it out.

The signs of the kingdom are not always wrapped in grandeur, and Advent is the time where we are invited, once again, to set aside our preconceived ideas of God and to watch for love and transformation in unexpected places. The prophet Isaiah promises that 'the desert shall rejoice and bloom (Isaiah 35:1), reminding us that God can bring beauty to the plain and the parched. Of course, that can be hard to grasp this in a season that is also often crowded with noise, excess and distraction. Perhaps then, Advent calls us to clear a little space so that we do not miss the quiet miracle that is already unfolding around us.

As Christians, we are called to watch and wait, and to notice where change is taking place. Jesus is challenging us to rethink our expectations of the Messiah, and invites us to recognise that the kingdom comes, not in power and spectacle, but in quiet acts of healing, restoration and love, and we are called to play a part in the ushering in of that kingdom. So, as we continue through Advent, let us be reminded once again not restrict God to our own expectations. And should we find ourselves in a place of doubt and asking, 'Are you the one?', may we turn to the signs of grace already present in our own lives - the places where love is humbly at work - so that we may be drawn back to the heart of Christ.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Let us pray for the Church, the world, and all in need, watching and waiting for signs of God's kingdom among us.

God of promise,
In this season of Advent, help your Church to wait well.
Where we are tempted to rush ahead, slow us down.
Where we cling to old expectations, open our eyes to new possibilities.
May we be faithful in watching for your presence in unexpected places.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of compassion,
We pray for those who feel overwhelmed by the season -
by noise, pressure, or the weight of unmet expectations.
Bring peace to anxious hearts, rest to weary bodies,
and joy that is not dependent on perfection.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of justice,
We remember those who, like John the Baptist, sit in places of uncertainty.
For the homeless, the displaced, and those caught up in the violence of war.
May your presence be known in places of fear and instability,
and may your kingdom come through acts of mercy,
and through voices that speak truth, and hands that bring healing.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of transformation,
Where deserts feel dry and lifeless, bring bloom.
Where lives feel stuck or broken, bring movement and hope.
We especially bring to mind those who are sick,
and those who find this season a lonely one.
We also bring to mind those who grieve and those who have painful memories at this time,
and we pray that your love and peace may surround them.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of mystery,
When we ask, "Are you the one?",
remind us to look again— not for grandeur, but for grace.
Not for spectacle, but for the steady unfolding of your kingdom.
Help us to trust, and to wait, and to join in your work.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Gathering all our prayers, spoken and silent, we say together:
Merciful God, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Suggested hymns/songs

On Jordan's bank, the Baptists cry
Come, thou long-expected Jesus
Longing for light, we wait in warkness (Christ be our light)
O come, O come Emmanuel
I heard the voice of Jesus say
Hark, the glad sound
Let all mortal flesh keep silence
Wait for the Lord (Taizé)

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)