

**ORDER OF SERVICE FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH AND SHEPPARTON RURAL  
CONGREGATIONS – ADVENT 2** (6<sup>th</sup> December 2020)

Welcome/Introduction:

May the PEACE of the Lord be always with you.

All: And also, with you.

Acknowledgement:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of the land in which I live, work and worship. To the elders and members of the Yorta Yorta nations, past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship:

Hymn: 276 (TiS) *'There's a light upon the mountains.'*

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

O God, we thank you for the unfolding drama of life, for its dreams and visions, its passion and its peace.

We thank you for surprises which wait around corners and can transform our expectations into yours, O God.

We thank you for the promise of even greater things to come, if we will but wait and watch in peace.

We confess that we do not always wait for you with open hearts and minds. It is often easier to stay with what we know, or with a life which has fewer challenges.

We sometimes cling to the familiar and the safe and hope that our comfort is a sign of your approval.

We sometimes create a world and a god in our own image, rather than in your image, O God. We make judgements about the way it ought to be and try to avoid or condemn difference, rather than holding our lives open to new truth.

Forgive us when we choose to live without your peace given freely through your son Jesus Christ. Forgive us when we choose to settle for what is there, rather than what might be, closing our eyes to your prophet beginnings for change.

Confront us with your peace and your vision for the world, even as you bring us your grace, Jesus Christ.

This we pray in faith in Christ.

**Amen.**

Declaration of Forgiveness:

God's love is always a surprise for us as it stretches across the breadth of the universe into all eternity. There is no place where God's love does not search for us.

We are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God.**

Doxology: 768 (TIS) *'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow'*.

Advent 2 Candles Liturgy:

Reader: We long for the peace of Christ in our world.

All: **Come, Prince of Peace.**

*(The first two candles are lit)*

Reader: Listen for the voice of the prophet crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'

All: **Come, Prince of Peace.**

Reader: The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him; all the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

All: **Christ, shine on the earth today.**

*Sing:*

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

*Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts.*

*Shine through the darkness.*

*Christ be our light!*

*Shine in your church gathered today.*

Readings: Isaiah 40: 1-11, Mark 1: 1-8.

Message:

This morning we are engaged by two prophetic voices. One is that of Isaiah from our Old Testament reading and the other is John the Baptist from the Gospel of Mark.

The context, of course are similar in that both are responses to sin and suffering.

In Isaiah 40: 1-11, the people of God are now back home from exile in Babylon, only to find their city and the temple in ruins and people may have been asking whether God's judgement went too far.

This morning we find Isaiah is speaking to a people who had experienced trauma and whose relationship to God had been deeply wounded. For these people, the hiddenness of God is far more real than God's presence.

The words from the Book of Lamentations can give us a feel for the pain that God's people experienced. In Lamentations 2: 20-22, "She (Israel), weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on

her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her; all her friends had dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies.”

The comfort that Isaiah offers is God’s seemingly long absence from Jerusalem has come to an end. God will return once again to God’s holy city and God will be accessible. In 40: 5 we read, “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed” (v. 5), because, a hidden God is a terrifying God. Therefore, the hiddenness of God had come to an end.

That God comes with might, and his arms rules for him. His reward is with him, and his recompense before him. (v. 10)

So, how should the people of God, who had been traumatised, dispossessed and led out to slavery, respond to this comforting word from Isaiah?

The people are to prepare a way “in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

This is where John the Baptist enters our story from the Gospel of Mark (1: 1-8). “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1)

For Mark, the good news begins with the witness of two prophetic texts from Malachi and Isaiah that announces the forerunner who will go before the coming of God’s Messiah. “A messenger of God will go “ahead of you” (Malachi 3: 1), one who will: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Isaiah 40: 3).

These words bring together for the people who have lived in Messianic hope, the anticipation and fulfilment of God’s salvation. Hopes and fears will be met, pain and suffering will be comforted, and the new Jerusalem is ruled with love by her Lord.

Many have experienced trauma and pain in our community and our world. There are those who believed that their suffering is due to sin, but God’s judgement is too harsh. There are those who suffer in silence, especially during Covid 19. Their pain and suffering are as real to them as that of the Israelites.

There are many who have felt abandoned by a hidden God and cannot fathom a future with a distant God. Many are still in their dark nights of being abused, victimised and their seemed to be no hope.

It is to them and us that the words of hope of a new beginning are offered. We wait in anticipation for the fulfilment of God’s salvation where God will be accessible and available. I do not have to suffer alone; the dark nights are only clouds on the horizon. Mourning will turn to hopefulness and the deserted places in our lives will turn into a place of life in peace and harmony.

Hymn: 270 (TiS) *‘On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry’.*

Notices:

Joys/Concerns:

Offering:

Prayers of the People:

O Holy Spirit pray with us, that we may see those whom we miss seeing in the picture of your peace. Hold them firmly in your warm embrace so that we may look into their faces to see their longing and despair.

Help us to see beyond race, ethnicity and behaviours in people which alienate us from them when they defy our religious cultures or move in different circles of life.

Give us courage in our praying that we may move past our old concerns into new areas of care.

Stir us O Holy Spirit into making and offering peace to all people and spread out your love alongside our efforts in bringing renewed hope for your world.

Give us generous hearts and a humble gratitude for your love for us so that we never begrudge your love for others.

Comfort those who are grieving, heal those who are sick. Liberate those are enslaved and bring your reign closer to us.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ your Son our friend and Saviour.

**Amen.**

Hymn: 264 (TiS) *'Hark! A herald voice is calling'*.

Sending forth of the People of God:

Blessing: 778 (TiS) *'Shalom to you now'*.