

ADVENT COURSE

MAKING JESUS KNOWN

2023

INTRODUCTION

In this Advent resource for 2023, we explore themes associated with this season through the lens of our new diocesan vision and strategy – ‘Making Jesus Known’:

Our Vision: To make Jesus Christ known in every place so that all might flourish and grow, seeking His Kingdom, here and now.

Making Jesus Known begins in Advent for it is this season where we prepare to receive the gift of the Christ-child at Christmas. Bishop Stephen asks how we can use this season to prepare ourselves, our local communities, and the world to hear the first cry of the new-born Christ on Christmas morning, for this is when Jesus is ‘made known’ to the world.

Dean Nick explores the theme of prophecy, reminding us that our calling is that of the prophets. Working for a just world, championing climate justice, and beginning all of this where God has called us to be – where we live, work and worship. In doing this, in having the courage to do this – a courage that is rooted in our faith in the grace and promises of God – we reveal, we ‘Make Jesus Known.’

Bishop Karen explores the theme of peace, as we prepare in Advent to receive Jesus, the ‘Prince of Peace’ into our hearts and lives. As we reach the end of 2023, we see a world where the anxieties and fears of living in a time of global pandemic have fast given way to the horrors of war and conflict.

Increasingly we live with an absence of peace between nations, with many people struggling to find inner peace in their lives. Now more than ever before in living memory, we are called to live as people who believe, trust and act as those who place our faith and hope in God's promises of peace in Christ. In living this, we 'Make Jesus Known.'

Finally, Bishop Andrew explores the theme of proclaim. He reminds us that Advent is also a time for looking forwards, recognising that the resurrected Christ is calling us to live, in the 'here and now', as people, as communities that reveal the coming Kingdom of God. This Kingdom has broken into the world in the birth, death and resurrection of Christ and the promise that he will 'come again to judge the living and the dead.' In doing this, we proclaim Christ, we 'Make Jesus Known.'

We hope that you and your local church communities enjoy using these resources for Advent and are also nurtured by them. The local church is at the heart of our new vision, for it is the ministry of the local church that so often makes Jesus known in 'every place' and 'in the here and now.' As Bishop Stephen has said, "Making Jesus Known is not a strapline; it's a choice." Let us then choose, in this season of Advent, the beginning of the Church's year and in these difficult and challenging times, to turn once again to Christ who is coming into our world and to live as people who reveal the love, peace and the eternal hope and promises of God revealed to us in the gift of his Son – 'God with us.'

Revd Sarah Wood-Roe, Bishop's Chaplain

PREPARE



+ Stephen Lake

THE RT REVD
STEPHEN LAKE

BISHOP
OF
SALISBURY

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ (Luke 4: 16-21)

This reading from Luke’s gospel is not one normally associated with the season of Advent, but it is at the very foundation of our new Vision and Strategy as we seek – together – to Make Jesus Known.

During the season of Advent, we are called to prepare ourselves, our communities and our world, to listen carefully for the first cry of the Christ-child on Christmas morning.

PREPARE

This will emerge from a stable in Bethlehem into a noisy, complicated and dark world – how little has changed? Yet this cry reveals the same message of love and hope to us that it revealed to Mary as she held Jesus in her arms for the first time – finally, God is here, ‘God with us.’ It is this first tiny cry that makes Jesus known to the world.

As we wait and prepare to hear Jesus, to receive the Christ-child, the Son of God into our lives, we know that the tiny lungs that managed to form this first cry, will one day help form the words that he speaks in the synagogue in Nazareth. Words that spell out his ministry and mission, even to those whom the world – in every age – tend to overlook: the poor, the oppressed, the captives, those who themselves cry out but are not heard, those who live with disability, illness or brokenness of any kind. His life, his ministry and his mission will be made known to them for he is ‘sent,’ he goes to them and all of us, for God’s love, reaches out to all.

During Advent, we are preparing to Make Jesus Known. For we know that we are not mere spectators to Christ’s ministry and mission – we share in this, we live this. We believe that the Spirit that is upon him dwells with us and in us. The best way we can Make Jesus Known and prepare those around us to receive him in their hearts and lives, is to live his life; share in his ministry; allow his mission to be our mission – our job description as the baptised, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Advent is a busy season; we can easily become swept up in preparations for the joyful Christmas celebration and all that comes with it.

PREPARE

Yet it is also a time of year when many who would normally walk past a church may step inside. They come, as we do, carrying a years' worth of joys and sorrows in their hearts. It is a time when many hear again – even if it is within the chaos of a nativity play – the story of God's love for this world; a world which Christ comes to save. It is a time when the Church with all its complications is called to re-focus as one on the Christ-child who we wait and prepare for – for he is our God-given source of unity.

During this time at Advent, the local church bringing communities together and welcoming everyone, preparing all to receive the gift, the love of God in Christ. The ministry we can offer during this dark time of year to the lonely, the bereaved, the struggling and the forgotten, prepares all to receive the one who is made known to us in flesh – 'God with us - and who calls us by name. The Church, all of us – the Body of Christ – in reminding ourselves that we, despite difference, are all preparing and waiting for the gift of God's Son, can call our noisy, increasingly angry and divided world to: 'hush the noise, ye men of strife' and to listen for His first cry on Christmas morning. The cry of God's love, hope and peace that makes Jesus known to the world.

PREPARE

Questions

1. Who in our local communities are 'crying out'? How do we, with so much noise and distraction in our lives, ensure that no one is missed or overlooked?
2. With so many in our world living in fear, anxiety and with the brutal consequences of war and conflict, how can the Church make known the 'Good News' of Jesus Christ coming into the world?
3. In a Church which can so often be found turned in on itself, how do we show the world during this season that that we are 'one in Christ through faith' and that we are – together - committed to Making Jesus Known?

PROPHECY



**THE VERY REVD
NICHOLAS
PAPADOPULOS**

DEAN OF SALISBURY

The Bible is not replete with comic moments, but the civil servant prophets of the Kings of Israel and Judah always make me smile. For example: Ahab and Jehoshaphat want some advice. Will God look favourably on their attack on Ramoth-gilead? All the prophets at court (and there are 400 of these tame yes-men) agree that he will. They urge the kings to advance. But Jehoshaphat is unpersuaded. Perhaps he is suspicious of their unanimity. He asks whether there is one more prophet whom they might consult. ‘There is...Micaiah son of Imlah’ replies Ahab, ‘but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favourable about me, but only disaster’.

You can read the blood-stained conclusion of the story in the fourteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings, but Ahab’s disarming honesty about what he wants in a prophet reveals much. Much about power, and much about the nature of prophetic ministry. Ahab wants a diet of unmitigated good news. He wants to be assured that whatever he does will have a divine seal of approval.

And he finds 400 nodding dogs who are ready to do his bidding – ready to scratch the royal back, ready to massage the royal ego, and ready to turn a deaf ear to what God might just be wanting to say through them. Only Micaiah is faithful to his calling. Only Micaiah does the risky thing. Only Micaiah tells the king exactly what he doesn’t want to hear.

PROPHECY

One of the candles on the Advent wreath is traditionally lit for the prophets, for those who throughout ancient Israel's history remain faithful to their calling, and who speak God's truth whatever the cost. Make no mistake, there is a cost. Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern. Amos is banished from the land. John the Baptist (the last in the Biblical lineage) is summarily executed in a tyrant's prison cell. Each of them proclaims a message that the powerful of their day do not want to hear. Each of them pays a price.

'Maintain justice, and do what is right' records the prophet Isaiah. Our Diocesan Vision is to make Jesus known in every place so that all might flourish and grow, seeking his Kingdom, here and now. Two of the strategic objectives that will contribute to that flourishing and growth are that we will work for justice, and champion climate justice. Our calling is the prophets' calling – in seeking a more just world we walk in their footsteps, and in seeking a more just world we must surely begin where God has placed us – in the homes, churches, parishes, and neighbourhoods where we live and serve.

Which might bring us back to King Ahab, to Micaiah, and to the necessity and cost of prophetic ministry. No individual and no group of individuals likes to receive bad news. Ourselves included. But the Jesus whom we are committed to making known is a Jesus who knew all about bad news, for he is Jesus crucified and Jesus risen. To flourish and to grow – to know resurrection life - perhaps we need hear the worst, see the worst, absorb the worst. Perhaps we need to hear the words of the prophets. Then, perhaps, we can decide together how we will face the challenge to which they alert us.

PROPHECY

Questions

1. What are the things that we really don't want to hear?
2. Who is saying them?
3. How do we ensure that we are hearing them?

PEACE



**THE RT REVD
KAREN GORHAM**

**BISHOP
OF
SHERBORNE**

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Great will be his authority, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9: 6 – 7)

We look back. In this wonderful passage the Prophet Isaiah announces God's faithful gift of newness through a new ruler, in response to a needy community. A new heir has been chosen who will faithfully inaugurate a new creation. In the announcement, like that of a birth or coronation, this heir is given names that provoke the people's best memories and deepest hopes.

The new king will be committed to dispensing justice (wonderful counsellor), will have the power of God, will be as reassuring and protective as a great tribal leader (Everlasting Father) and will be a bringer of peace and prosperity. Finally, this coming rule will be marked by justice and righteousness by care for people and mercy towards those who are weak.

PEACE

This is the work of Yahweh, brought about by the faithfulness of God, the covenant maker, world transforming God.

We see this prophecy fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. However, to understand the radical nature of God's transformation we need to ponder the 'upside down' kingdom which Christ demonstrated so powerfully. Here was someone who ruled with a basin and towel ministry, who rode on a donkey and not a stallion, who welcomed the outcast and the stranger and called them friends. Here was someone who stilled the storm, and called for peace in our hearts, but who also spoke of the conflict created by his powerful message. This rule on earth ending with Christ's death on the cross, the resurrection and ascension where loss becomes gain, hopefulness become joy, and death is overcome by the offer of eternal life.

There is much to get our heads around here. Our prayers for peace in our own lives and the lives of others are heartfelt, however they need to involve our participation as well as our words. Our personal experience of Christ is to be openly shared with a world who neither knows God nor know their need of God. Transformation is costly, and as God's agents today, trusting in Christ's promises of peace, living out that fact with faith and hope can demand our all.

PEACE

Questions to Consider

1. What does it mean to be a peace maker? What situations in your life and community need peace today? Is God calling you to pray and act in any way?
2. What does it mean to have peace in your heart, when much of life is a struggle? How can we maintain a healthy trust in God, offering hope to others, amidst the realities of life?
3. How would you translate Isaiah's words for today in a way that provokes our community's best memories and deepest hopes, so they can be a message for our time, as well as a yearning as we wait expectantly for Christ's return?

PROCLAIM



**THE RT REVD
ANDREW RUMSEY**

**BISHOP
OF
RAMSBURY**

Making Jesus Known is, among other things, a proclamation about the future. At most basic, it is the proclamation that we have a future – that the world has a destination wedded neither to the ability (or inability) of human beings to redeem themselves in time, nor even to the natural cycle of birth, growth, decline and death. Instead, the Gospel announces, preposterously, that our destination is one and the same as our route to it – namely, the person of Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Revelation, St John's uncanny but ultimately consoling vision of the future, the risen Christ appears to announce his Lordship over time and space: 'I am the first and the last and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.' After twenty chapters of (to us) bizarre apocalyptic imagery describing the conflicts and conflagrations that must mark the end of time, Scripture returns in closing to the figure of Christ in glory, announcing (in the words commonly read out at funerals to this day): 'Behold, I am making all things new'.

Advent insists we look not only back to the past but forward to what lies ahead – to the Christ who calls us from his own resurrected future, that we may become the people and communities we are intended to be.

PROCLAIM

To be ready, in other words. And because our vision of eternity finds no temple in heaven, we are called to recognise what might be called the penultimate place of the church as a rehearsal space for the coming kingdom – the community which is to be a small colony of God's future ways of life.

As soon as one speaks like this, of course, others may begin to wonder whether one is entirely hinged or may be missing a screw or two. Does anyone seriously believe in the last judgement – in building Jerusalem in England's green and sometimes far from pleasant land? Surely that particular future is a thing of the past? Yet when we look at the signs of our times: our increasingly warm autumns, the fearful rumble of global conflict and the ample evidence of what happens to society when people live without true hope, the old news of a messiah coming again to upend the fatal follies of our age, to bring light in every dark and deadly place, one realises again that this is unquestionably the news we need and long to hear. This Christmas, let us look again at the world around us and imagine the difference Christ can make.

PROCLAIM

Questions

1. Does a sense of heaven or judgement influence your faith at all?
2. What are we asking for when we pray “thy Kingdom come”?
3. What are the social consequences of a loss of hope in the future?
4. How can the church best demonstrate its belief that Christ makes ‘all things new’?

PRAYER

Coming Lord Jesus,

You teach us to imagine our world in
the light of heaven.

This Advent, give us the will to seek
your Kingdom,

that the world may know your
salvation.

Amen.