

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Valentin Dedji. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as they pray for you.

Welcome & Invocation:

Dear friends, on this 2nd Sunday in Advent, it is my great joy to connect with you. We meet in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen!

For those who may not know me, I am Rev. Valentin Dedji, a minister in the Enfield Methodist Circuit, in North London.

Our first hymn invites us to long for Christ, the Light of the world, if we don't want to linger in the darkness of this world.

Hymn: StF 706: Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here:

<https://youtu.be/kt3Qc04ulOM?si=uslBa37ateCtcxvq>

Verse 1

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Chorus

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

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Verse 2

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.

Chorus

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Verse 3

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Chorus

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Verse 4

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Chorus

Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.

Verse 5

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Chorus

Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

Prayers of Adoration

Creator God, dweller in darkness, yet as light to you; from darkness you created earth, day and night, light and dark. Jesus, Light of the world, in darkness treasures are illuminated by your light, seen brightest in darkness. Holy Spirit, revealer of treasures, give us strength to persevere searching for the light in the darkest times of our light journey. Holy Trinity, challenge me to rise above the darkness of this world. In the fullness of time, may you reveal to me hidden treasures that can be found amid suffering, pain and grief; then I will see things differently. Help me dig deep, mining for these treasures produced by immense pressure. By your Grace, may you empower me to grow in your presence, with these treasures stored in my heart. In Christ's name I pray. **Amen!**

Chorus of Hymn (StF) 212

O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ, the Lord.

Confession of Sins

Lord Jesus Christ,

You take enormous risks to be with us,
but we are obsessed with our own comfort and joy.
We settle for complacent peace,
while many live with intolerance and oppression.

**Lord, forgive us and help us to use this Advent season
to re-think our place and calling in your world. Amen!**

Bible reading: Isaiah 40: 1-11 (NRSV)

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All flesh is grass;

their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers; the flower fades,

[[when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers; the flower fades,]

but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹ Get you up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good news;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;

lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,

"Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Lord GOD comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him

and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms

and carry them in his bosom

and gently lead the mother sheep.

Sermon:

Dear friends,

I assume that most of us know that, the Advent Season is a time of waiting and hoping, even when all signs of hope may seem lost. It is a time of daring to expect light in the middle of the darkest atmosphere. Crucially, Advent is all about reflecting on how we can prepare our hearts and homes for Christ's birth, as the '**Prince of Peace**' in our troubled world as it is today. It is a fact that 'longing for peace' is the main aspiration for most of us for Christmas. The key question is: How can we expect peace to appear magically if we are not ready to let peace permeate our own heart and mind? How can we expect peace to reign in our family, our local community, our church or within the circle of our friends if we are not ready to prepare the way for peace and offer ourselves as 'Peace-builders'?

That's why, I would like to share with you on the theme:

'CHOOSING TO BE PEACE-BUILDERS'

It would be indeed truly wonderful for all of us to have PEACE at Christmas. The complexity of the problem is that peace is not simply an absence of conflict or war. It is a state of mind. Living at PEACE with our self and with one another is a sacrificial choice. This

requires from us, not only to sacrifice our ego by humbly accepting offers of peace, but also willing to offer peace. Crucially, it is an invitation to actively engage in peace-building process.

In our Bible reading in Isaiah 40, it is truly comforting and reassuring to read how God is portrayed as the initiator of tender loving care and compassion for His people: '*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.*' (Verse 1).

By putting an emphasis on my people, God wanted to remind his audience that He is a Covenant-Keeping-God who declared: I will be your God and you will be my people'. We also read:

See, the Lord GOD comes with might...

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;

*he will gather the lambs in his arms
and carry them in his bosom*

and gently lead the mother sheep. (Isaiah 40: 10-11).

Not only God initiated the process of compassion and care for His people, He also promised a reign of PEACE-SHALOM through the Messiah to be born, Jesus The Prince of Peace, but God also invited and urged His people to actively commit themselves to the process of peace-building.

A PROPHETIC RESPONSE TO PAIN AND DESPAIR

In fact Isaiah 40:1-11 can be read as a prophetic response to outcries of pain and despair voiced by people who have been traumatized by many years of wars and the dehumanising atrocities that they experienced during their exile in Babylon. Into this void of despair, the prophet speaks promises, which become the basis for the nation's new future. That's why the prophet Isaiah works hard to convince his audience that God's words are actually trustworthy. It is the kind of preaching that is grounded in proclamation and promise, but shaped fundamentally by careful listening to those things that afflict the hearts of his audience. Great preaching one might say involves two ears and one mouth.

In Isaiah 40: 3-4 we read:

'A voice cries out!: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.'

Geographically, the wilderness, the valley and the hills mentioned in the passage here-above may refer to the dangerous waterless passage between Babylon and Jerusalem through the Syrian Desert. Spiritually, this passage may also refer to the necessity to deal with the inner grudges, resentment, bitterness, anger, the guilty conscience, the emptiness that were making people's life worthless

and unbearable. That was indeed (and still is) a crucial process towards spiritual healing and wholeness.

This is so crucial that, hundreds of year after Prophet Isaiah, John Baptist used the same words as his urgent calling to his fellow citizens to get spiritually ready if they really wanted to have their minds open when encountering Jesus in person, as the promised Messiah.

CHOOSING THE WAY OF PEACE

Recently I read a moving story that took place in the little village of Schengen on the border between France and Germany during WWII. It was Christmas-Eve in December 1944. The valleys and hills were covered with deep white snow. There was an uneasy calm on the war front, after many months of heavy battle. There were two small camps of French and German soldiers deeply dug in their respective fortified trenches, not too far apart. Those men were completely exhausted. On that Christmas-Eve while they were far away from their families and friends, they had a very difficult choice to make: Either continue to fight or build for themselves, a unique opportunity to 'celebrate' Christmas in 'Peace' on that surreal war front. Surprisingly, one group of soldiers took the initiative to start communicating with the other group, inviting them to 'snow-fight' instead of 'gun-fight', just for few hours. After some moments of

careful and suspicious hesitation, the soldiers from each camp started emerging one by one from their trenches, throwing snow balls at each other like little children. The few remaining inhabitants of that little village could not believe the fable-like spectacle that they were witnessing. Eventually, some of the most courageous among them joined in that extraordinary 'celebration' on that war-front! What a lesson that was! You would certainly agree with me that, that unique moment of peace would have never happened if the soldiers did not take the initiative and did not engage in building that atmosphere of peace, as fragile as it was!

Here, I think of all those regions in our world today where wars are still raging: The invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Syria, Soudan, Afghanistan, Iraq and recently the war between Israel and Hamas rebels in Ghaza. It is truly heart-breaking to see the unbearable suffering and the tragic death of so many innocent civilians, children, vulnerable women...

Indeed, we need to keep praying for peace in our world, especially in those war-torn regions. However, peace will only be achieved if the leaders are willing to swallow their ego in order to actively engage in peace negotiations for the sake of their people.

I'm always moved by the words of the hymn StF 706. The 2nd verse goes like this:

'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.

This is where as Christians, we need to take very seriously our calling to show compassion to the categories of people the hymn is talking about: those who are longing for hope, for food, water, bread, shelter, warmth...

As we journey through Advent, marching towards the celebration of Christmas, I personally and strongly believe that, as prophet Isaiah has put:

***For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders,
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*** (Isaiah 9:6)

It falls on me and on you to play our part, in order to make real, the Peace that Christ is the guarantor.

Here are a few ideas:

- Being willing to make peace with a brother, sister, friend, colleague you have been in arguments.

- Call a friend you haven't spoken with for a while.
- Visit a neighbour who lives alone.
- Bring something special to your local homeless shelter
- Say a prayer for a different person each day

Here, I remember another hymn by John Cohen with the following thought-provoking words:

*Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred let me bring your love
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord
And where there is doubt true faith in You*

*Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope
Where there is darkness only light
And where there's sadness ever joy*

No matter how you are planning to celebrate Christmas this year, please make sure that Jesus Christ is at the centre. May He grant you His everlasting Peace. Merry Christmas from the bottom of my heart.

Prayers of Intercession

Compassionate God, who sent Jesus Christ to deliver us from all manner of injustices and inequalities, create in us new hearts and enlarged visions, to see the image of God in every person.

May we be generous in our love of others as we work towards ending misunderstanding, racism and injustice; creating communities of human flourishing, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, we bring our broken towns, our neighbours hurt and bruised; you show us how old pains and wounds for new life can be used.

We bring our broken loves, friends parted, families torn; then in your life and death we see that love must be reborn.

Lord Jesus Christ,

We bring our broken selves,
confused and closed and tired;
then through your gift of healing grace
new purpose is inspired for our life.

**Come Spirit, on us breathe,
with life and strength anew;
find in us love, and hope and trust,
and lift us up to you.**

Silent personal prayers

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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. **Amen**

Our final hymn is an invitation to each of us to proclaim and to reflect The Light that we receive from Jesus Christ as 'The Light of the world'...

Final Hymn: StF 59 Lord, the Light of your Love is shining

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here:

<https://youtu.be/op17raOTXbk?si=TLujoGFsRl1iufvB>

1. Lord, the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness, shining:
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us;
set us free by the truth You now bring us -
shine on me, shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, shine,

fill this land with the Father's glory;

blaze, Spirit, blaze,

set our hearts on fire.

Flow, river, flow,

flood the nations with grace and mercy;

send forth your word

Lord and let there be light!

2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance;
by your blood I may enter your brightness:
search me, try me, consume all my darkness -
shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus, shine,
fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit, blaze,
set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,*

*flood the nations with grace and mercy;
send forth your word
Lord and let there be light!*

3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory:
mirrored here,
may our lives tell your story
shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus, shine,
fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit, blaze,
set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
flood the nations with grace and mercy;
send forth your word
Lord and let there be light!*

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Blessing

As we continue our spiritual journey through this Lenten season, may we keep focused on the precious gift of life that gives hope even in times of despair, doubt and darkness; May we be renewed and strengthened to face the future, through Jesus Christ, our Immanuel God-With-us. **Amen!**

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