



### Readings for this week:

Monday	Reading Rev 1:1–2:11 Pray for Norma Whyte & family
Tuesday	Reading Rev 2:12–3:6 Pray for Mick, Debbie & Mikey Kane
Wednesday	Reading Rev 3:7–4:11 Pray for Efrain, Nertilla & Samuel
Thursday	Reading Rev 5–6 Pray for Nikki & Mathew Armett, Antony, Jessica & family
Friday	Reading Rev 7:1–8:5 Pray for Maud Batchelor (our eldest member, in a nursing home)
Saturday	Reading: Catch up Pray for Arthur Basnett & family
Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> December	Reading Rev 8:6–9:21 Pray for Wendy Bailey (quite ill just now)

### Prayer requests:

- We pray for all who have been joining and supporting our online services from home; and those who have been contributing to the programmes
- We pray sincerely for *Debi M (who is now home from hospital and due to give birth at the end of January)*, *Bill E (still quite breathless)*, *Wendy B*, *Mike W (Sheila's father)*, *Terry S*, *John B*, & *Jon F*, amongst others...
- We pray for so many sorely needed charities over this Christmas period.
- We pray for Raising Futures (previously 'Vision Africa'), and thank you for recent provisions raised through The Big Give
- Remember those struggling with loneliness, especially during this pandemic

We give you a warm welcome to our morning service, on this **Third Sunday of Advent**. Just as a reminder, here is the programme coming up for the next couple of weeks.

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December** – 10.30 Morning Service

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> December** – from 6.00 pm our online Candlelight Carol Service

**Christmas Day** – 10.00 am is our Christmas morning Celebration!

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> December** – 10.30 am morning service taken by Lucy Frost

Christmas morning will feature a **Nativity** with the little ones taking part, the final **Advent Candle** with readings and prayer, and of course a few of our *favourite Carols*. We hope you are able to find twenty-minutes or so and join us in this online service to acknowledge the Reason for the Season!

Joining a government permitted 'Christmas bubble' is a personal choice with increased infection risks, but we do trust that some of us will be able to enjoy the company of family and friends we have not met for a significant time, especially those with recent bereavements who have been unable to even meet and greet loved ones. Our thoughts are for those from our fellowship who have lost a loved one and this is the first Christmas without them. Our hearts go out to you. There's lots of 'drama and emotion' involved in that first Christmas, isn't there? Mary was pregnant, and Jacob was trying to get his head around all that was happening. There was the stressful journey, demanding governmental legislation and a lack of affordable accommodation and all at a most inconvenient time. Not much different to today's challenges when I think of it. Yet, God is at the centre of it all... Now there is 'a valuable take-away' for us. When we think the government is being awkward, and hoteliers making a killing just because they can ask what they like, and young families - that cannot afford stuff - are struggling to meet the bills, we find that **God is at the centre of it all**.

*What a lesson for us to be reminded of;* that behind many difficulties and challenges God is in charge and doing amazing things. Advent teaches us what the Nativity scene also captures - that in this great timeless truth the Lord holds all the strings and is in control, despite appearances to the contrary. No need to worry and flap about in panic. Just enjoy the journey knowing that the final chapter is something that the world can celebrate by faith.

Blessings to all our readers... **Grace & Peace!**



## The Third Sunday of Advent

**Message:** The Voice

**Readings:** Luke 2: 1-15; Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The voice of God came to shepherds *'residing in fields nearby, who were looking after their flocks of sheep during the night'*.

It was essentially a church. This gathering of a few shepherds had all the hallmarks of a worship service. If you think about it, there was a small band of shepherds in fields nearby to Bethlehem. People were singing – okay, it was a choir of angels singing. There was also a message that was given.

The message was particularly good. First of all, **it was short!** But it was also riveting stuff. The people heard the voice of God speak to them! It was clear and easy to understand...

**"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."** (Luke 2: 10-12)

Not only is this sermon material put succinctly, but it is also – very importantly – **Christ-centred**. Friends, a valid gospel message must always uplift Christ and call the listeners to follow **Him**.

And this is what we find – at the end of this impromptu 'open-air service', the shepherds immediately went off to find the Lord Jesus Christ and express their faith in him. There were even a few *'Amens!'* from the angels.

There are many ways to hear the voice of God. We can come to a church service; you can be walking in some breathtaking natural habitat; you can even be reading or sitting merely thinking about life. I think I can say this of everyone listening to this Advent message just now – you probably all know what it is like to hear the voice of God!

If I may, two observations...

### 1. God's Voice Silences all other Voices!

The Voice of God became the Jewish voice of an infant who in turn gave voice to a minority nation on the world stage. From this relatively small and

insignificant nation in the Middle East 2000 years ago (*where many other similar-sized nations have all but disappeared*) one Voice from Israel has emerged as the Voice of the Lord God Almighty amongst us today!

In those early days, the sound made by that infant's voice was very much like any other baby. It was sometimes crying; there were unintelligible sounds before the first distinct words would come.

This 'Voice' grew up with a Galilean accent. It was a 'Voice' that blended with many other young voices alongside him in Nazareth. But as we know, Jesus moved from being just a voice amongst many to be **the Voice of God** in human form. On one occasion, on a visit to the capital city, it was **the Voice of wisdom** beyond his years – as he spoke with elders in **'My Father's House'**.

As Jesus began his three-year itinerant ministry, it became the **Voice of authority**, (Other voices commented that *'no one ever spoke the way this man does'*). It became **the Voice of wisdom** (as thousands gathered on hillsides to listen to his stories and their meaning). It was **the Voice of Power** (as he healed those with diseases and commanded the storms to *'Be still!'*).

*Most surprisingly*, it became **the Voice of submission**... *not to evil or to selfishness*, but to the **will of the Father**. He submitted to the cross and its hidden secret – a transaction, as it were, the good for the bad. The Voice became **a cry of dereliction** (*'My God, My God, why...'*); the Voice of utter yet tender **surrender** (*'into your hands I commit my Spirit...'*) There is even **the cry of Victory!** (*'It is Finished!'*)

The Voice of Jesus is one that all must hear because...

### 2. God's Voice Gives Life!

As in the voice of Creation (**And God said, 'Let there be Light!'**) and there was light!

The Apostle Paul writes about this same 'voice' which he heard when travelling along a road - his personal experience on the day of his conversion:

*"As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground **and heard a voice** say to him, **"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"**"* (Acts 9:3-4)

What Paul ascribes to Jesus is a power **so awesome** that it can change a person into someone new.



Some months ago, I watched a programme on TV where a few *aerospace hopefuls* were set tests. Each one was asked to step up and down on a single step while listening to a series of numbers spoken. They then had to list the numbers in reverse while focusing on stepping up and down. It didn't appear to be a very difficult test for potential astronauts...

*Surprisingly, no one got past seven numbers.* It got me thinking about how God Almighty can do everything all at the same time and that over thousands of generations! It is mind-blowing. He can come to earth and appear in a fragile humanity yet hold control of all things.

*Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above; With wisdom, power, and love - Our God is an **awesome God!***

The Lord God Almighty speaks with a Voice that gives life. What is just as remarkable, is that the voice of God as a child was a wonderful display of his humble nature. It was ***in the form of a human being*** that God in Christ re-created humankind from the tomb!

*It was this Voice of life that spoke to Isaiah...* We read about this intriguing reference in John 12: 41, ***“Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.” (John 12:41)***

Was this not a reference to his Vision of the Lord in the Temple, *‘high and lifted up’?* Each Christmas we are reminded that **the Voice of the Almighty, became a voice with incredible vulnerability.**

From the ***Womb to the Tomb*** the Voice of Jesus speaks to the whole world. He calls everyone to Himself. He has earned the right ***to address*** our greatest fears, ***to grace*** us with his presence, and ***to bless*** us in our every effort.

The hymn writer drew our attention to this very aspect of God in the words,

**Closing Hymn:**

***I heard the voice of Jesus say,***

*‘Behold, I freely give, the living water, thirsty one;  
stoop down and drink and live.’*

*I came to Jesus, and I drank, of that life-giving stream;  
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
and now I live in him.*