

ADVENT 1
28/11/21
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

God's promise will be fulfilled!

God's promise will be fulfilled, as the faith community: of faith gather, for prayer and thanksgiving.

God's promise will be fulfilled!

God's promise will be fulfilled, as the suffering are comforted and the poor are empowered.

God's promise will be fulfilled!

God's promise will be fulfilled, when justice is a priority, and prophets are recognized.

God's promise will be fulfilled!

God's promise will be fulfilled as the coming of Jesus: coming of is embraced, and his Way followed.

Opening Prayer

Be alert! God's Promised One Jesus: promised one is on the way.

**Be ready with your praise;
be ready to give Jesus a rousing welcome.**

Be alert! God's Promised One is on the way.

**Be ready with your friendship;
be ready to make Jesus feel at home.**

Be alert! God's Promised One is on the way.

**Be ready to work with others;
be ready to discover Jesus in the faith community: of faith.**

Be alert! God's Promised One is on the way.

**Be ready to see Jesus in your neighbour,
and to promote God's justice for our troubled world.**

Be alert!

We are an Advent people! Amen.

HYMN 265 O come, O come Emmanuel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKu0or0t8Uw>

ADVENT WREATH

Today is the first Sunday of Advent - the time when we prepare once again for the coming of Jesus.

We light a candle each week to remind us that Jesus brings light into the dark places of the world.

Today, the prophet Isaiah describes a future shaped by peace for all nations as they walk in the light of the Lord. We wait in hope for this prophecy to be fulfilled..

We light the candle of hope to proclaim that God's light is coming into the world

A candle is lit.

PRAYER: God of all nations - you spoke to Isaiah and you empowered him to speak welcome words of peace and hope to the people of his time. We need to hear your word anew to us today as the darkness of despair is still experienced wherever peace and hope is absent. Strengthen us with the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may be your prophets in this day and age - teaching your ways and lifting people's darkness through words and work of love and peace and justice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

TIS 289 Verse 1 Christmas is coming

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God, the Apostle Paul says: 'How can we thank you enough?'
And, we know, of course, we can't.
There are not enough words, there is not enough breath.
Were our thanks to be continual, day and night for eternity,
they would not reach the end of all that you do in and through your creation.
While it is never enough,
we thank you in our spirit, in our mouths, in our hands, in our feet, in our minds.
We choose to live in gratitude day and night for our whole lives long.
God, we know, as we follow the life of Jesus in our scriptures,
how much he longed for his followers and his hearers
to experience the relationship of deep trust and intimacy that he had with you.
And we read how often he was disappointed in them and for them.
We know that we stand in their place today.
We read, preach, sing, and pray all the right words.
We know the language of your love and your call to us
but so often all it is, is language.
So often we do not let your truth of unconditional love and grace
live deep in our lives.
So much of the time we are sleepwalkers in a vibrant and awake world.
Today we confess our stupidity, our stubbornness, and our faithlessness.
Forgive us, we pray.
Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

People of God, hear these words:
'the kingdom of God is near.'
'the kingdom of God is among us!'
Around us, among us, within us is the world of God alive.
We are forgiven and we are loved.
Thanks be to God!

READINGS

· Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

· **Luke 21:25-36**

25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see

these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, 35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

HYMN 647 Comfort, comfort all my people.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1x7V9N583Q>

SERMON

Here we are at the start of another church year. With all that has happened in our world in the last few years we could be excused for being a bit apprehensive about what is going to happen next.

While we are settling into what the new normal might look like some churches around us have not even started to actually meet together yet. At the same time there seems to be a resurgence of COVID in Africa and Europe so it looks like it come back again.

The season of Advent is all about looking forward in hope and excitement despite what is happening in the world around us and instead look to what God has in store for us. We prayerfully want to be part of God's plans for the future. There are exciting things ahead and the passages are composed so that we are standing on our tip toes and stretching our necks peering into whatever the future has waiting for us. We are simply wanting to experience the dawning of God's reign of justice and peace which would mark to arrival of God's kingdom.

Given the situation in our world today churches are not being seen in the best light. There are persistent stories of sexual abuse by leaders in the church. There are heated debates about political and theological issues which seem to be constantly dividing the whole community. It has come to the point that throughout the western world the number of people attending a church is dropping radically. At the same time some fringe churches are preaching radical and divisive messages of hate and intolerance which are in direct conflict with the messages that Christ gave us in the Gospels.

How often do you come across people who look at you strangely if you happen to mention that you attend church regularly?

People wonder what we do during this thing that we call worship. At times wild rumours can circulate about strange rituals going back almost 2,000 years. These activities appear to some people to have little relevance in a modern world. Some people think that we are involved in some sort of escapist movement which has no relevance in today's post-Covid world. For them it is just some sort of costume fantasy.

This situation is however nothing new to people who worship God. About 600-700 years before Christ there was a prophet called Jeremiah who faced similar agonising challenges from among the people who were supposed to be God's chosen race. Even in those dark and troubled times the prophet was able to share the image of a fresh new shoot growing out of a supposedly dead tree stump. We also see this image in Isaiah 11:1 where we hear 'a shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.'

Jesse was the father of King David whose descendants had failed to live up to the promises that the king had made to God. Those descendants had long since been abandoned and the hope was that a

new branch from David's family tree would come to the fore to renew and refresh the dwindling group of the faithful.

In the early days of the Christian church when Paul was writing to the faithful in Rome he says: "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope." (15:12) These images of hope in the midst of desolation bring me back to me images that were so common after the disastrous bush fires of 2019-2020. There was a desire for a new start with a messiah to lead us out of the darkness.

Both of the prophets that I have spoken about refer to a new branch coming out of the dead old tree stump to bring "justice and righteousness in the land." The prophets were looking for the fresh start needed to bring the nation back together. "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made and cause a righteous branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

I think that it is time to reflect a bit more deeply on this passage and prophesy in general. There are various names mentioned, like; 'righteous branch,' 'The Lord is our righteousness,' and so on. They seem to be leaning towards a person from the line of David but the emphasis also seems to be moving towards the whole Jewish nation. The question hanging here seems to be whether the messiah would be an individual or the nation as a whole. The prophets seem to be mixing up the two. This confusion also carries over into the New Testament.

While we might initially look to Jesus as the Messiah we can also reflect on all these different images which keep coming up, like the idea that the church is 'His body.' This body is charged with bringing light into the world. The image of the Messiah, as we call Jesus, equally reflects in the church and the task for both is to shine light into the world.

One of the things which goes with our prayers is that we need to be aware that God might call on us to be part of answering those prayers. This means that when we pray for the Messiah to come again to bring blessings and salvation into our world, we as the messianic people could be equally called on to help fulfil this prayer.

One issue for us to think on, in the year ahead, is that we too can be the part of the 'righteous branch' springing out of the supposedly dead stump. While some might see a deserted landscape we are in fact part of the new branch that is ready to burst into life.

If we are to consider ourselves to be part of God's chosen people we equally need to be aware of the pitfalls. Just think of the ongoing bitter conflict between the Palestinians and Israel as the both nations claim to be the chosen people of God.

They seem to forget that God does not choose people to be 'favourites' who are spoilt. Rather God chooses people to be a blessing to those around them and who can bear witness to the all-embracing love and grace which God says is freely available.

Our call to be the new shoots on the tree stump of Jesse is not one for most favoured status with some special privileges but rather it is a drawing of us into faithfulness, to a self-sacrificial outpouring of God's justice and righteousness.

As we look forward to the season of Advent we are not looking to some escapist fantasy or even some yearning for past power and prestige wanting to conquer the whole world. At the same time we are also not looking to deny the tough realities of life in our world today.

Both of the passages we heard today give their messages against the backdrop of a disrupted and earth-shattering world, much like we are experiencing today. The image of the new branch springing out of the tree stump is one of fragile hope where small and insignificant beginnings come in the midst of disasters.

This for me captures the image of how God operates. Throughout time God has constantly been revealed to us as hope in the middle of chaos. Jesus Christ was the much hoped for branch coming out to the remains of the stump that was Jessie's family tree. We know that the prophets and Jesus have constantly told us that in the midst of disaster and chaos there is always hope. There is nothing that God cannot bring back to life.

This hope burst forth in a manger in Bethlehem.

This hope sprang out of the empty tomb on the third day.

This is the hope that we pray for.

This is the hope that we seek in our life of faith and service.

It is a life of irrepressible love and grace so needed in our world today.

HYMN TiS.547 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT_Hjg

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of infinite grace and love,
we bring ourselves and our resources
seeking not to be afraid but to live as people
of your good, abundant and generous kingdom.
May what we bring be used for joy and love.
In the name of Christ.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

As we, your people humble ourselves before you we realize that there are so many needs in our world and even in our community, let alone our fellowship here in Caves Beach that we sometimes feel overwhelmed.

But you have called us to pray, sometimes without ceasing and so we humbly bow before you now asking that you hear our prayers and answer them according to your will and purpose.

The first need we see for our world is peace. Peace in the hearts of people, peace in the relationship between nations and peace amongst like-minded people. Help us as your people to show the way of peace guided by your Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we pray for Australia and our relationship with nearby countries. May we always be ready to help, provide goods, services and people to assist other countries who are having internal and economic difficulties. We especially pray for the Solomon Islands at this moment. May the peace keepers from Australia do their part in helping keep the people safe and secure from rebellion. We pray for the British government and their Prime minister as they try to make sense of why so many refugees are fleeing to their country, risking their lives in hazardous conditions across the English Channel. Keep these people safe Dear Lord.

We pray also for peace in the Middle East, as tensions flare between the Israelies and other opposing groups and nations.

On the home scene, we pray for the people living in flood prone areas, like Forbes, Cowra, Gunnedah, Narrabri, Boggabri, Wee Waa and also Singleton even Newcastle. May there be no fatalities as a result of this large rain event. We also pray for farmers who have lost crops because of the floods, just as it was almost time to harvest. Continue to give resilience to these people, strengthen them and may the Australian spirit of mateship grow even stronger.

Back to our fellowship here in Caves Beach, we would bring you the needs of our people. There are folk in our fellowship who have need for healing, some are still facing procedures in hospital, some of us are getting slower because of our age and weakness of body. Continue to strengthen us and may we never fail to trust you with our lives and our future, knowing that through your Son, our Saviour Jesus, you have made all things possible. May we never let you down in our faith journey because you have never let us down. And we offer this prayer in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray....

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.

HYMN 276 There's a light upon the mountains
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuvbW7gVwaI>

BENEDICTION

Lord of life, you send us into life
to live in trust in your presence.
So we go.
Let us go in peace.
Let us go in courage.
Let us go in hope.
Let us live for a better tomorrow,
and for a new world.
Let us live as people of love
and friends of God.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiH_HdkWs74