

**Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,**  
**ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY**  
10 December Second Sunday in Advent

**HYMNS:**        7   13   490   84   292   9

**THE LIGHTING OF THE SECOND ADVENT CANDLE**

**R:** I will send My messenger to prepare the way for Me.

**C:** Then the Lord you are looking for will suddenly come to His temple.

**ALL:** Thank You, Lord Jesus, for coming to bring God's salvation. Help us to prepare the way for Your coming. Amen.

**INTROIT:**    Psalm 85

LORD, You have been favourable to Your land. You have brought Jacob back from captivity.

You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people. You have covered all their sin.

You have taken back all Your fury. You have turned away from Your fierce anger.

Restore us, O God, You who save us! Withhold Your indignation toward us!

Will You be angry with us for ever? Will You prolong Your anger through all generations?

Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?

Show us Your mercy, O LORD, and grant us Your salvation!

Let me hear what God, the LORD, will speak! For He will promise peace to His people, to His devout people. However, let them not become foolish again!

Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land.

Mercy and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth will sprout up from the earth, and righteousness will look down from heaven.

The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its produce.

Righteousness will go before Him, to prepare a way for His footsteps.

**COLLECT:** Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**READINGS:** Isaiah 40:1-11 Prepare the way of the LORD.  
2 Peter 3:8-14 The day of the Lord.  
Mark 1:1-8 John the Baptist prepares the way.

### **Isaiah 40:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> “Comfort, comfort My people!” says your God. <sup>2</sup> “Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce to it that its compulsory military service is over, that its iniquity has been paid for, and that it has received a double equivalent from the hand of the LORD for all its sins!”

<sup>3</sup> **A voice of someone calling out in the wilderness: “Prepare a road for the LORD! Make a smooth highway in the desert for our God!**

<sup>4</sup> **Every valley must be raised up and every mountain and hill must be levelled! The uneven land must become a plain and the rugged ground must become a plain!** <sup>5</sup> The glory of the LORD will be revealed, and **every human being will see it** together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

<sup>6</sup> A voice was saying: “Make an announcement!”

He kept asking, “What shall I announce?”

**“All human beings are like grass and all their beauty is like a flower in the field. <sup>7</sup> Grass dries up, and a flower withers.** For a breath from the LORD blows on it. **Certainly, the people are grass! <sup>8</sup> Grass dries up and a flower withers, but the Word of our God will endure for ever. <sup>9</sup> O Zion, you who bring good news, go up on a high mountain! O Jerusalem, you who bring good news, raise your voice loudly! Raise it!**

**Do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah: ‘Here is your God!’ <sup>10</sup> Look!**

The Lord GOD will **come** as a Mighty One, and His arm will rule for Him. Look! **His reward** will be **with Him**, and what He has accomplished will go before Him. <sup>11</sup> He will take care of His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arm. He will carry them in His lap. He will carefully guide those that are suckling young ones.”

## 2 Peter 3:8-14

<sup>8</sup> Do not forget this one thing, dearly loved people, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and **a thousand years are like one day!**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to keep what He has promised, as some people understand slowness. Rather, He is patient with you, because He does not want any to be lost, but wants all to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, burning will destroy the elements, and the earth and the works that are on it will become evident. <sup>11</sup> Since all these things will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people must you be in forms of holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup> as you look forward to, and hasten, the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed with fire, and the elements will melt by burning? <sup>13</sup> Rather, according to His promise, we look forward to **new heavens and a new earth**, in which righteousness dwells. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, dearly loved people, since you are looking forward to these things, make every effort to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace!

## Mark 1:1-8

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup> As it has been written in the prophet Isaiah: **“Look! I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way. <sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord! Make His paths straight!’”**

<sup>4</sup> John the Baptist came in the wilderness and preached that people should repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> All the land of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem kept coming out to him. They were baptised by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> John was dressed in camels’ hair, wore a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He preached: “He who is mightier than I am is coming after me, and I am not worthy to bend down and untie His sandal-straps. <sup>8</sup> I have baptised you with water; but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”

## A JOYFUL HOMECOMING

Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent 2023

Isaiah 40:1-11

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Today's text for our sermon is our First Reading from before, Isaiah 40:10-11: **“Comfort, comfort My people!” says your God. <sup>2</sup> “Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce to it that its compulsory military service is over, that its iniquity has been paid for and that it has received a double equivalent from the hand of the LORD for all its sins!”**

**<sup>3</sup> A voice of someone calling out in the wilderness: “Prepare a road for the LORD! Make a smooth highway in the desert for our God! <sup>4</sup> Every valley must be raised up and every mountain and hill must be levelled! The uneven land must become a plain and the rugged ground must become a plain! <sup>5</sup> The glory of the LORD will be revealed, and every human being will see it together.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**

**<sup>6</sup> A voice was saying: “Make an announcement!”**

**He kept asking, “What shall I announce?”**

**“All human beings are like grass and all their beauty is like a flower in the field. <sup>7</sup> Grass dries up and a flower withers. For a breath from the LORD blows on it. Certainly, the people are grass! <sup>8</sup> Grass dries up and a flower withers, but the Word of our God will endure for ever.”**

**<sup>9</sup> O Zion, you who bring good news, go up on a high mountain! O Jerusalem, you who bring good news, raise your voice loudly! Raise it! Do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah: “Here is your God!” <sup>10</sup> Look! The Lord GOD will come as a Mighty One and His arm will rule for Him. Look! His reward will be with Him and what He has accomplished will go before Him.**

**<sup>11</sup> He will take care of His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arm. He will carry them in His lap. He will carefully guide those that are suckling young ones.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When Isaiah wrote the words of our First Reading, he saw a day when his people would be far from home. He saw a day when the Babylonian army would come to Judah and carry his people into exile and captivity. He saw a day when Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed, and the fields and

vineyards would be laid bare. The people of God would be far from home. It would be a 2700-kilometre journey from captivity in Babylon to freedom in Jerusalem. There would be seemingly no hope of ever making it back.

The great tragedy was that God's people had brought this all on themselves. They were the ones who had rejected God and His Word. They had refused to listen to Him. Instead of trusting God, they sought security in alliances with surrounding nations - with Assyria and Egypt. Instead of hearing what God said, they closed their ears and disregarded Him. They lived like the nations and sought their own glory instead of God's. But all humans are like grass, and every achievement - all their glory - is nothing more than the blossom of a flower, which blooms beautifully but soon drops its petals and dies. **"All human beings are like grass and all their beauty is like a flower in the field,"** Isaiah had written, and **"Grass dries up and a flower withers."**

When the people wound up in captivity, they were not just far from home. They seemed to be far from God. It seemed as if God had abandoned them. It seemed as if His judgment was final and that He was never coming back to them. All hope was seemingly gone because they could never free themselves from their captors. All hope was seemingly gone because they could never atone for their sin of failing to listen to God and His Word. They saw a future apparently with no hope because it appeared as if, after they had rejected God, He had rejected them in judgment. **"Grass dries up and a flower withers. For a breath from the LORD blows on it. Certainly, the people are grass!"** The phrase **"a breath from the LORD"** perhaps recalled the hot, dry winds that frequently blew across Palestine from the desert. In a short time, such a hot, persistent wind could dry up everything and make life in Jerusalem miserable. The people of Judah were far from home, and it appeared they were far from God, unable to get back to Him.

That's what makes what Isaiah says so remarkable: **"O Zion, you who bring good news, go up on a high mountain! O Jerusalem, you who bring good news, raise your voice loudly! Raise it! Do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah: "Here is your God!"** <sup>10</sup> **Look! The Lord GOD will come as a Mighty One and His arm will rule for Him. Look! His reward will be with Him and what He has accomplished will go before Him.**" Isaiah says that God is coming to them. God isn't coming to heap judgment and condemnation on them; He's coming to forgive and pardon. God is coming to restore them. Isaiah says their sins of failing to listen to God and His Word are forgiven. Their iniquity is pardoned.

Through Isaiah, God says He is coming *not* in anger and *not* in judgment. He is coming as a compassionate, gracious God. **“Comfort, comfort My people!”** Isaiah reminds the Israelites that they are still His covenant people, and He is coming to comfort and restore them. He is coming to bring them back home. Even after their unfaithfulness, rebellion, and sins, they are still His people. God remains their God, faithful and gracious, as He promised to be: *“The LORD, the LORD, the merciful and compassionate God, slow to become angry, abounding in unfailing mercy and truth. He preserves mercy for thousands and forgives wrongdoing, rebellion and sin”* (Exodus 34:6-7). He will **“take care of His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arm. He will carry them in His lap. He will carefully guide those that are suckling young ones.”**

God’s people will be resettled. The temple will be rebuilt. The fields and vineyards will be replanted. They will be restored. There will be a joyful homecoming because **“the Word of our God will endure for ever.”** Unlike the frailty of created things, God’s Word remains forever. Everything human fades and disappears; all that comes from God in His Word endures for all time, and when the Lord returns, the earth and all that is within it will be destroyed.<sup>1</sup> The Word of the Lord will survive even that catastrophe. It is permanent and enduring.

David once wrote, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us”* (Psalm 103:12). Nothing could ever separate them from Him and His love for them. No sin could ever cause God to leave His people in exile forever. No amount of iniquity could ever overcome the comfort and pardon that God has for them. Their exile from God because of their sin will be ended.

Isaiah saw a day when God’s people would be far from home and far from God. But more importantly, he saw a day that would be a joyful homecoming. God would come to them in forgiving love. Isaiah saw a day when there would be a joyful homecoming with God as He gathered them up in His arms and brought them back home.

Dear friends, that same good news is for us too. It’s good news today because, like Judah, we are a long way from our heavenly home. That’s happened because of our sin. While we may listen to God’s Word today and throughout the week, when we fail to put God’s Word into action, we reject it

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 3:10

and our God. We close our ears and refuse to hear Him. When we disregard His promises to defend us from danger and to guard and protect us from evil by seeking safety and security in people and things, we are just like the people to whom Isaiah wrote. We distance ourselves from God and our heavenly home by a distance we cannot cover. Because of our sins, we can do nothing to make things right with God. Any attempts on our part to justify ourselves will only compound our guilt, drive us farther from God, and forfeit any hope of returning to life with God in a new heaven and a new earth. If God were to give us what we had earned and deserved because of our failure to listen to His Word, *we would experience eternal judgment and exile from Him.* There would be no comfort. There would be no pardon. We would wither under God's eternal and holy judgment.

But God had a message of grace about a joyful homecoming for the people of Isaiah's day, and He has that same message for us today. God has come to us in Jesus Christ. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, outcast shepherds, who were thought to be beyond God's love and forgiveness, received the comfort of hearing from the angel that the Saviour had been born in Bethlehem for them. Wherever Jesus went, He brought comfort. To a paralytic troubled by his sin, Jesus said, "*Your sins are forgiven*" (Matthew 9:2). To a Samaritan leper, "*Your faith has made you well*" (Luke 17:19). Zacchaeus was told by Jesus that salvation had come to him and that he was a son of Abraham, a member of God's eternal family.

Finally, the day came when Jesus gave you the greatest comfort we could ever hope for. By His suffering and death, He brought us back to God. He ended our exile of sin. When Jesus died with all our sins, our iniquity was pardoned, and we received from God's hand a "**double equivalent from the hand of the LORD for all (our) sins.**" At the cross, Jesus was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. We have peace with God. "*He Himself carried our sins in His body to the cross, that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wounds you were healed*" (1 Peter 2:24).

God's eternal Word to you is that He has come to you in Jesus Christ and brought you back home to Him. He says that we are forgiven and that nothing could ever separate us from Him and His love for us in Jesus Christ. All our failures to listen to Him are pardoned. Our sins of rejecting God's Word have been forgiven.

That makes all the difference for our future. Advent is a time of waiting. We are waiting for God to come again. Because God came in Jesus Christ,

forgiving our sins, we can look forward to Him coming on the Last Day. When Jesus comes again, everyone will see Him. When He comes again, He will gather us up in His arms and lead us home to the eternal place He's prepared for us in our heavenly Father's eternal mansion. In Jesus Christ, we have a joyful heavenly homecoming where we shall see Him with our own eyes and live face-to-face with Him in a new heaven and a new earth. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Lord God, we praise You that You reckon us as blameless in Your sight because of Jesus' obedience for us. We praise You for Your commandments, so that we may love with right knowledge, and for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask You to bless all who preach, teach, read, and study Your Word, that more and more people may know the Gospel message of joy and hope.

Refine our hearts, so that we may prepare a smooth way for the Lord in them. Give us stronger faith, joy and confidence, and grant that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Enable us to trust You firmly, to worship You with pure hearts, to serve You with clean hands, to obey You with willing minds, and to love You with our whole beings.

Guard us, that Satan, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, or lead us into error, unbelief, and sin. Do not let us lose the inheritance that You have graciously promised to those who know You in faith. Teach us to watch and pray at all times. We praise You that You have enabled us to stand with joy and confidence before the Son of Man when He comes in glory to judge the living and the dead. Therefore send us Your Spirit so that we strive to be blameless in our love for each other, to grow in it, and to practise it with sensitivity and insight.

Rid Your church of that all that is divisive, evil, and wrong, that all who profess Your name may serve You in truth, purity, and loyal devotion.

Give peace and stability to the nations on earth. Put down all evil rulers, and raise up leaders who will rule and serve us according to Your good pleasure.

May Jesus rule in the hearts of all parents and children. Supply the spiritual needs of all families, so that truth, love, and high morals may bless our homes.



Be with all people everywhere, in all situations and circumstances of life. Give healing to the sick, comfort to the sorrowing, guidance to the young, hope to the aged, comfort to the bereaved, and wisdom to the perplexed.

Lead us to continue to look to Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. Help us to wait in joyful hope for His Second Coming, when He will receive us, and all others who believe in Him, into Your eternal presence. This we pray in His holy name. Amen.

### **Article: The Angels**

As we draw closer to Christmas, angels are among the characters we see in the story of Jesus' birth. We read how the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and give birth to the Messiah, the "*Son of God*" (Luke 1:35), whom God had promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. We also remember the angels who visited the shepherds out in the fields that night (Luke 28-15). Often, we see angels as messengers of God throughout Scripture. Following Jesus' crucifixion and burial, the angel's message to the women at the tomb was that Jesus had risen as He said and that they should announce this fact to His disciples (Matthew 28:6-7).

Isaiah 6:1-8 offers a beautiful portrait of Confession and Absolution. Seeing God in His temple, the prophet Isaiah is moved to confess his guilt in God's awesome and holy presence. Through the actions of the angel, God broke the barrier between Himself and Isaiah and forgave Isaiah's sin. The seraph, a type of winged angel, took a burning coal from the altar of sacrifice, pointing to the atonement secured by the shedding of blood. The angel's message of reconciliation ("*Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for*" [Isaiah 6:7]) brought God's forgiveness personally to Isaiah. This Absolution moved the prophet and enabled him to powerfully preach to God's people concerning the coming Christ (Isaiah 7:14).

Although the Bible mentions angels in almost three hundred passages, no one passage tells us about their creation. While Genesis 1 is silent about their creation, John 1:1-5 informs us that before God created the universe, nothing existed besides Him. Also, Genesis 2:2-3 shows that God rested from all His creative work on the seventh day. From these two passages, we learn that God created angelic beings sometime during the six days when He created "all things visible and invisible," as we confess in the Nicene Creed. If those who doubt that God created angels at all find no mention of them in Genesis 1, they should look at passages where Jesus, God in human flesh, confirms their existence (see Matthew 22:30; 25:31; Luke 16:22).

Psalm 148 begins with the Hebrew word Hallelujah, meaning “Praise the Lord.” This psalm depicts all of God’s creation singing a great hymn of praise to its Creator, God. Note how “angels” and “hosts” (v.2) are included with “heavens” and “heights” (v.1), “sun,” “moon,” and “stars” (v.3 ) - indeed, with everything else that God created. The implication is clear: God created angels.

Colossians 1:15-17 affirms what we learned from John 1:1-5, namely, that the pre-incarnate Son of God, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, was active in creating all that was made. This includes angels. Nehemiah 9:6 teaches that God created the host of heaven, which worships Him. Angels are called “*the host of heaven*” (1 Kings 22:19) or the “*heavenly host*” (Luke 2:13). Therefore, part of angelic activity is to worship the triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In one of his table talks, Martin Luther said that he thought God did not describe the creation of invisible angels because God did not want people to speculate about it. In Acts 23:8 Paul says that the Jewish sect called the Sadducees denied both the bodily resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels. Some people today also doubt their existence. But denying angels’ existence breaks the First Commandment, because such denial exalts human reason above God; the Second Commandment, because it besmirches the holiness of God’s Word and calls Christ a liar; the Third Commandment, because it contravenes God’s Word, the exact opposite of holding it sacred and gladly hearing and learning it; and the Eighth Commandment, because it doubts God’s Word and accuses God of being untruthful.

As Christians, we confess our belief in God’s creation of the angels in the First Article of the Nicene Creed when we say God is the “maker of ... all things visible and invisible,” including angelic beings. The Creed reflects not only the scriptural truth concerning God’s creation of the angels, but also the source of our forgiveness of sins, including the sin of disbelief in angels, which is found in the Second Article: “And in one Lord Jesus Christ ... who for us men and for our salvation.”



## Children's Message:

During the season of Advent, we make use of the Advent wreath. Last week, one candle was lit. Today, we light the second one, Next Sunday, three candles will be lit. Two Sundays from now, four candles will be lit. We'll be getting closer to Christmas and our celebration of



Jesus' coming to be born. When one candle is lit, we're getting close to Jesus coming at Christmas. When two candles are lit today, we're getting closer. When three are lit, we're really close to Jesus coming. And when all four candles are lit, we're really, really, really close to Jesus coming. On Christmas, all the candles will be lit, including the white candle in the middle. Jesus' coming will be here!

An Advent wreath helps us remember that Isaiah wrote about something important. We heard it in our First Reading today. Isaiah said that God was coming: *"Look! The Lord GOD will come as a Mighty One... Look! His reward will be with Him"* (Is 40:10). Isaiah said that God would come and rescue His people from their sin. God would come and take His people home. God would come in forgiving love. He would come to forgive and make things right.

God did come. God came to us at Christmas in Jesus. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to die on a cross to rescue us from our sins and bring us back to God. One day in the future, Jesus will come again. We shall all see Him on the Last Day, when He visibly comes. On that day, Jesus will take us to the heavenly home He's prepared for us.

When you see the Advent wreath and its candles being lit every week, remember Isaiah. Remember how Isaiah said that God was coming. Remember how God came in Jesus at Christmas to forgive our sin. And remember that Jesus is coming again someday to take us to the heavenly home He's prepared for us. As one candle is lit, we're close to Jesus coming again. It could be any day. When two candles are lit, like today, Jesus' coming back is even closer. Next week, when three candles are lit... well, maybe we're so close that He'll come before next Sunday. Or maybe before the next. Or maybe years. Whenever it is, it'll be the greatest!

*Dear Jesus, help me prepare for Your Second Coming! Amen.*

## WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

<b>17 December 3 Advent</b>	<b>24 December 4 Advent</b>	<b>25 December Christmas</b>
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC  7.30pm Carols Evening at Oakey	9.30am OAK HC (Children's Christmas Program)  9.00am LOWOOD LR	7.30am LOWOOD HC 8.30am OAK LR <u>8.30am</u> TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 10.30am AUB HC
<b>Sunday, 17 December</b>		
READINGS: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11;      1 Thessalonians 5:16-24;      John 1:6-8, 19-28		
HYMNS: 733 1 17 (29 292) 631		
<b>Sunday, 24 December</b>		
READINGS: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16;      Romans 16:25-27;      Luke 1:26-38		
HYMNS: (Lowood) 622 2 142 24		

December 17, 7.30pm. Carols Evening at Oakey. If anyone has a particular request for a carol, let pastor know so it can go in the program!

Saturday, December 23, 10.00am at Oakey. Downs Sunday school teachers and children: Would this date and time suit to have a quick practice run-through of the children's Christmas program?