

**Second Sunday of Advent,
Sunday, 6th December 2020**



Dear Friends,

'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!' (Mark 1: 3)

Last Sunday, as we celebrated the Church's New Year, we lit the First Candle in our Advent Wreath, the candle of Hope, and celebrated the Patriarchs. This First Candle reminded us of our hope in Christ. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and we believe that He will come again to fulfil all of God's promises to us.

Today we light the Second Candle of Advent, the Candle of Peace. We remember the Prophets who spoke of the coming of Christ. The prophet Isaiah called Christ 'The Prince of Peace.' When Jesus came, He taught people the importance of being peace-makers. He said that those who make peace shall be called the children of God.

The candles on the Advent wreath are symbolic of Christ being the one true light in the darkness of our world. As the number of candles lit increases each week during Advent, so the light grows brighter and brighter ... showing us how Jesus is coming closer to us. As the reality of His presence among us grows, so our fears are stilled, melting away as we lay down our earthly preoccupations and breathe in His peace. Peace is like a light shining in a dark place. As we celebrate the peace we find in Jesus, so the Advent carol '*O Come, O come, Emmanuel*' reminds us to rejoice in the presence of the Dayspring, who cheers our spirits by His advent here.

Prayer for the Second Sunday of Advent – The Candle of Peace

Lord Jesus, Light of the World,
the prophets said you would bring peace and save your people from trouble.
Give peace in our hearts at Christmastide.
We ask that as we wait for you to come again,
You would remain present with us.
Help us today, and every day to worship you,
to hear your word, and to do your will by sharing your peace with each other.
We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem.
Amen.



'The Light of the World' by William Holman Hunt

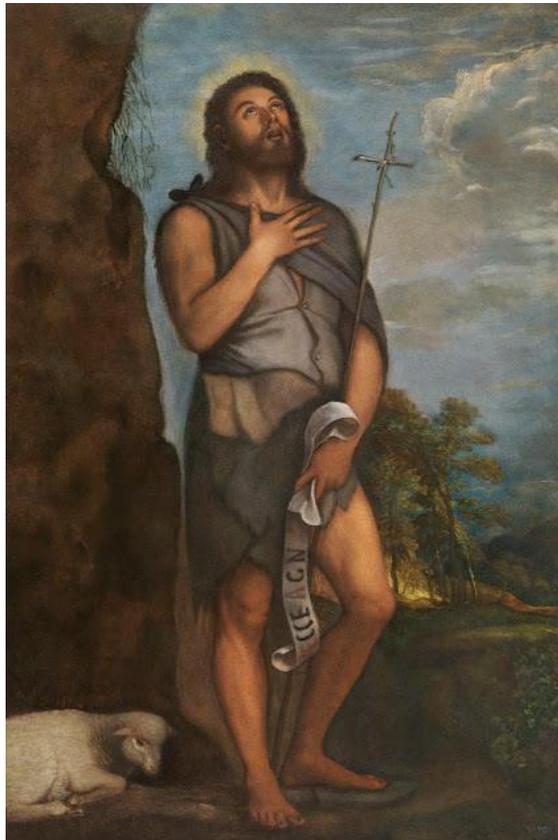
During the Advent of 1899, artist, William Holman Hunt, was putting the finishing touches to the final version of his allegorical painting *'The Light of the World'* which was inspired by his contemplation on the proclamation of Jesus in John's Gospel: *'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'* (John 8: 12). The image above is the last of three versions, which are said to have developed as Holman Hunt's own awareness of Jesus coming to us as our Guide and Saviour took on a deeper personal resonance. In fact, the version which hangs in St Paul's Cathedral was completed over *fifty years* after Holman Hunt had produced his first and second much smaller paintings on this theme, which are hung in Keeble College, Oxford, and the Manchester Art Gallery respectively.

It feels important that we appreciate something of the lifetime of spiritual reflection which compelled the artist to refine the prophetic image he had in his heart of Emmanuel coming to the world to draw us into His peace. The Cathedral booklet on the painting throws its own illumination on the depth of Holman Hunt's vision:

There are two lights shown in the picture. The lantern is the light of conscience and the light around the head of Christ is the light of salvation. The door

represents the human soul, which cannot be opened from the outside. There is no handle on the door, and the rusty nails and hinges overgrown with ivy denote that the door has never been opened and that the figure of Christ is asking permission to enter. The morning star appears near Christ, the dawn of a new day, and the autumn weeds and fallen fruit represent the autumn of life. The writing beneath the picture, is taken from Revelation 3 *'Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me.'*

Jesus was telling the world that He was the salvation we have been waiting for, the Morning Star which brings a new dawn to our days. He is the light which draws us back into relationship with God. Jesus' words come in the context of His miracle in restoring the sight of a profoundly blind man. In reality, Jesus is telling us that even those of us who have 20:20 physical vision can still be as blind as bats when it comes to our inability to find God. For when Jesus says that He is the Light of the World, He is pointing us to a light which is more important than any light we can see with our eyes. Emmanuel or *'God with us,'* comes to us as the Christ-child on Christmas Day to illumine our path away from the mire of our sinfulness so that we can see the right way to live. Holman Hunt's remarkable vision gives us an image, similar to the clear prophecies of Isaiah and John the Baptist and all the other Prophets: *'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'* When we open the rusted hinges of our hearts to Jesus, He lights the path ahead of us so that we can see our sinfulness for what it is and instead choose to live in the peace and encouragement of the Divine.



'John the Baptist' by Titian

And there is more! As we allow the light of Christ to dwell and develop in our own hearts, that light cannot help but want to spill out. Have you ever tried to pad out to the toilet in the middle of the night without disturbing the household slumbering around you? Traversing the landing in the dark has been the cause of many a stubbed toe! Inevitably, we switch on a light, and its immediacy is so bright as to reach into every corner of the house, flooding it with light. So it is with Christ. He knocks at the door of our hearts and offers to guide our lives out of the darkness we've been stumbling around in. And when we make the choice to stand in His radiance, the light which floods into our own hearts, has a habit of wanting to spill out beyond us, reaching into the dark souls of others' hearts. So, we become lights to others by the way we choose to live. The lamp Holman Hunt assigns to the light of our conscience, shines as brightly in the dark recesses of the lives of the people around us as any landing light in the middle of the night. We become lights to others and point them to God that they too might know His peace.



'The Kiss' by Gustav Klimt

Gustav Klimt's painting 'The Kiss' is an allegory on love as the central most important aspect of human existence. For Christians, pure love is exemplified by Christ's gift to the world by dying for our salvation. Holman Hunt's depiction of this love shows Jesus waiting, patient and forgiving, for us to receive the gift of His grace-filled love, freely given. The baby we are longing to celebrate on Christmas Day enters our world vulnerable and humble, lowly and meek yet all powerful. However, we make a mistake if we only see the sanitised story of the manger; allowing ourselves to limit our sight to the pre-school nativity delight of wayward angels, grumpy innkeepers and maternally-challenged Marys!

For the Christ who comes as 'God with us' and who, with His heavenly Father, has given us the free-will to choose to worship Him, is lifting the lamp of love to help us prepare the way for us to know eternal life. Receiving His love is only the start. *Living* His love involves our accepting His forgiveness and reciprocating by emulating His love through the choices we make in our lives and by putting others first and loving them too.

So, this Advent, in the midst of Tier 2 Coronavirus restrictions, and quite possibly from the confines of our own homes, we can make a decision to shine like the growing number of candles on our Advent wreath. Peace is like a light shining in a dark place. As we light the candle of peace, will we be peace-makers by choosing to join with the Prophets in accepting the love of Christ, freely given: encouraging our neighbours to prepare for the way of the Lord and bringing the solace and comfort of the Good News of Jesus to the doors of others' hearts? Or, will we allow the flame of Christ's love to falter and fizzle out by starving it of the oxygen of life in all its rich fullness? For how can we celebrate the peace we find in Jesus Christ without wishing to share that joy with all around us?

Yours, in the light of the coming Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice

Schedule of Services

(All services begin at **10am** unless indicated otherwise)

Date	Service	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
9 Dec – Wed		X	x	9.30am - Mid-week Holy Communion	X	x
13 Dec	<i>3rd Advent</i>	Holy Communion	Closed	Morning Prayer	6pm – Christmas Music & Readings by candlelight	Closed
20 Dec	<i>4th Advent</i>	Advent Readings & Prayers	4pm – Readings & Music by candlelight	Morning Prayer	4pm – Crib Service	4pm - Evening Prayer
24 Dec	<i>Christmas Eve</i>	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
25 Dec	<i>Christmas Day</i>	Family Christmas Service	Family Christmas Service	Family Christmas Communion	Family Christmas Service	Family Christmas Service
27 Dec	<i>St Stephen's</i>	Closed	Closed	Closed	Patronal Holy Communion	Closed

Now that the **Month of Prayer** in response to the Lockdown, has come to a close, please find below some beautiful prayers given by Christine Disher at last week's Zoom Morning Prayer gathering for you to use in your private prayer lives.

You can find further resources and information on our Benefice website at: <http://downsbenefice.org>



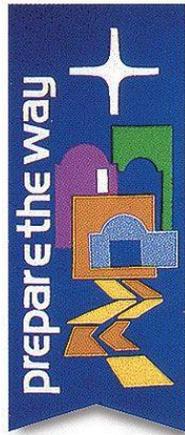
Prayers by Christine Disher

As we come into this time of Advent, we give thanks, Lord Jesus, for the intuitive ways that worshipping communities have been able to connect with each other for fellowship and prayer during these difficult months. But we pray especially for the many who have been searching for answers in an uncertain world, and have yet to discover for themselves the grace of God that offers salvation to all. Draw them to yourself in their need and uncertainty and bring them out of darkness and into a living faith.

Dear Lord, whose understanding is beyond measure, we thank you for the great strides that have been made by the scientists developing a vaccine for Coronavirus. Give wisdom and clarity to the various companies as they reach the final stages of launching their products onto the market, and a sense of fairness for those responsible for the distribution of the vaccine worldwide.

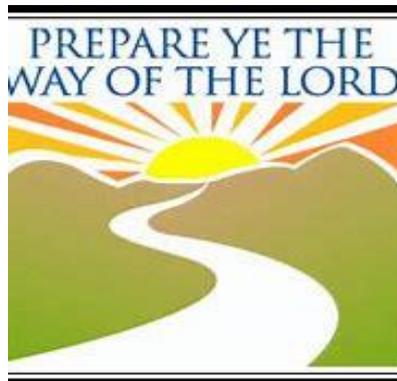
Lord God, thank you for the way the psalmists record their joy at the wonder of your creation. Help us not only to value the beauty and diversity of the natural world, but also to continue to learn and fulfil our responsibilities towards it. We pray too that politicians and local councils will make wise decisions in the months and years ahead, as they juggle with how to allocate land for more housing over the desire to keep our green spaces for pleasure and recreation.

We hold in your presence, Father God, all those who are being cared for in our parishes, whether at home, in hospital or a care home. Be their comfort and friend in this time of loneliness and separation from their families, especially now as plans for scaled down Christmas gatherings have yet to be finalized. Amen.



Collect Prayer for the Second Sunday of Advent

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us,
your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.



Mark 1: 1-8 - John the Baptist Prepares the Way

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;

As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.