

WELCOME AND NOTICES

LIGHTING OF ADVENT CANDLES: fourth Sunday in Advent

CALL TO WORSHIP

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all on whom his favour rests."

(Luke 2:13-14)

ANGELS FROM THE REALMS OF GLORY

<https://youtu.be/IBR4kkcT3is>

Angels, from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:

*Come and worship,
Worship Christ the King.
Come and worship,
Worship Christ the new-born King.*

Shepherds, in the fields abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant-light:

Come and worship...

Saints, before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord descending
In His temple shall appear:

Come and worship...

All creation, join in praising
God, the Father, Spirit, Son,
Evermore your praises raising
To the eternal Three in One.

Come and worship...

OPENING PRAYER & CONFESSION

Gracious Father God, you who created the heavens and the earth, who opened the gates of heaven and came in Christ to save all things:

We adore you, Lord

Gracious Father God, you who made a covenant with your people, who sent prophets to declare your will and came in Christ to save all people:
We adore you, Lord

Gracious Father God, you who prepared the way of salvation and chose obedient servants like Mary and Joseph and came in Christ to save each of us:

We adore you, Lord

Forgive us, Lord, when we demand signs and wonders before we will trust in you; when we are not obedient to your will, and find excuses for what we do and say; when we do not appreciate just who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Lord, forgive us. Amen.

There is hope because we have a Saviour, who came in love to set us free and give us life in all its fulness. His name is Jesus and he declares, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Thanks be to God. Amen.

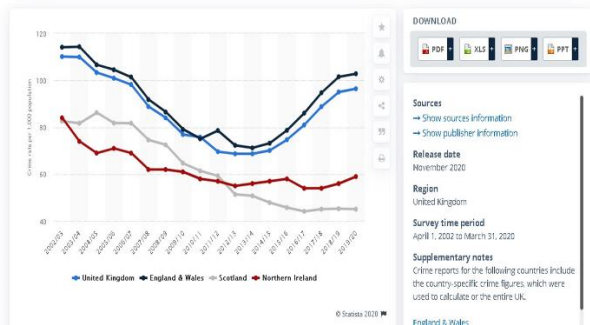
OFFERTORY PRAYER

Almighty God, as Mary rejoiced to be your humble servant, and Joseph was content to do your will, receive these gifts we offer, as symbols that we too desire to be your servants and seek to do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

INTRO TO THE THEME: Mike Acaster

Reading the tabloid newspaper headlines we are living in a broken Britain. That's a nice catchy headline and a good political phrase to hurl at one another but what's behind it? Some papers point to soaring divorce rates an increase in broken homes, family breakdown leading to increased criminality hence the soaring crime rates and especially violent crime. You decide this is crime per 1000 population over the last 18 years down here up here, flat there, over all what not better, not worse?

Society - Crime & Law Enforcement
Crime rate per 1,000 population in the United Kingdom from 2002/03 to 2019/20, by country



73% of us believe the UK is more divided now that it was ten years ago. Mind you over half said yes Britain is broken as a whole but not the area they lived in! We are united in saying the country is on the wrong track, problem is we can't agree what the right track is. Family breakdown – well the number has been steady since 2014 at 2.5 million households affecting 3.5 to 3.7 million children. Divorces are falling for heterosexual marriages but rising in same sex relationships but then marriages are in a long term decline. So, are we as a nation more or less broken than were 10 or 20 years ago is hard to say? Reading the newspaper headlines in the tabloids we do seem to accept that we are living in a broken land with broken homes, broken relationships leading to violence and crime. Not certain the statistics quite back that up but as an antidote to those bad news headlines what narrative does our faith offer for how we should live and tackle broken homes and broken lives.

WHO IS THIS KING OF GLORY?

<https://youtu.be/NCiUrwiWUns>

**Who is this King of glory,
maker of all the heavens**

Author of all creation, what is His name?

**Who is the One who formed us,
made us into His image?**

**At who's voice will all of Heaven
one day bow in praise?**

His name is wonderful, His name is counsellor

His name is Prince of peace, the living word

His name is mighty God, eternal Father

His name is Jesus, His name is LORD

Who is this King of Glory,

born to the virgin Mary

**Who's simple words could raise the dead and
heal the lame?**

He gave His life for many,

was crucified and buried

But on the third day He rose up from the grave

His name is wonderful, His name is counsellor

His name is Prince of peace, the living word

His name is mighty God, eternal Father

His name is Jesus, His name is LORD

Ransomed for my release,

He came to set me free

Oh how amazing is

my Saviour's love for me [X2]

His name is wonderful, His name is counsellor

His name is Prince of peace, the living word

His name is mighty God, eternal Father

His name is Jesus, His name is LORD

His name is Jesus, His name is LORD

His name is Jesus, His name is LORD

READING: Isaiah 9:2,6-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

**REFLECTION: CAN WE LIVE WITH REALITY? (3)
Everlasting Father in a world of broken homes**

Let's have a look at our reading and then see if we can answer that question. Our theme continues names given by Isaiah for the messiah and today we are looking at everlasting father and applying that to broke homes and broken lives.

Here I am going to have to tip toe through a minefield, when this is applied to Christ it could be misconstrued that Jesus the messiah (God the son and the second person of the trinity) is being conflated with the first-person of the trinity, God the father. If we have a quick peak into John, we can see father and son are clearly distinct persons: Firstly, John 3: 16-17, "16 For God expressed His love for the world in this way: He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not face everlasting destruction but will have everlasting life. 17 Here's the point. God didn't send His Son into the world to judge it; instead, He is here to rescue a world headed toward certain destruction." Here we read that the son was sent into this world therefore they cannot be one and the same person. You don't send yourself someone else sends you.

Secondly, in John 16: 10 we see that the son returned to the father, the version from the Voice reads, "10 This new awareness of righteousness is important because I am going to the Father and will no longer be present with you." How can you return to yourself?

It is unlikely that Isaiah had the trinity in mind when he gave the messiah the title of everlasting father. If we are not to confuse the notion of the Godhead and the persons of the trinity how are we to understand Isaiah's use of the term father?

What is the intent here? Isaiah gives us four names each of which describe something of the character of the messiah. So, lets unpick it if we can Everlasting Father. From this we can take two things firstly that the messiah's concern for the people he has come to save will be like the concern that a father has for his children. I perhaps ought not to use such paternalistic language I think it represents the concern any parent has for their child. From Isaiah view point the messiah will be sent to save the nation by separating it from those who mislead the people and from the ungodly and wicked. This concern has much in common with any parent who wants to see his children grow,

develop and thrive. A parent who strives to make sure that his children are set on the right path to achieve their goals and ambitions and ideally guiding and encouraging them. We often use the term shepherding don't we for trying to get independently minded persons from A to B while avoiding dangers and pitfalls along the way. This is what a good father does out of concern and love for his children. Christ was sent by the father to be our shepherd and into his hand we were given, Christ is expressing that fatherly concern for his children, he has been made responsible for us. Another concept woven into the name is that the messiah would be a mighty king, ruler of the nation and separate from God the father. The American's often refer to George Washington as the father of the nation. The term father can be seen as the person who can to save the nation as its leader, the head of the nation, the father of the nation. We can go much deeper into this and many people struggle with the concept of the trinity, it is one of the mysteries of our faith that transcends human understanding. For now, let us take this as meaning Christ the messiah is expressing a fatherly concern for us, one he has been given by our heavenly father.

The second aspect is that this concern is without end and this is perhaps where the emphasis in this phrase really lies. That the concern is eternal, everlasting is further emphasised in v 7 where we see that "of the greatness of his government there will be no end." This fatherly concern is not just for while the messiah was on the earth but is for all time thereafter, without any end, truly eternal. Like a child who falls over and hurts themselves, bawling out for their mother, father, grandparent, etc. we too have someone we call out to when life hurts us don't we? We can call on God when life gets tough, we can go the Father or, Jesus in prayer. The use of eternal also confirms the divinity of Christ. Isaiah uses the term eternal in talking about God as he "who inhabits eternity" God is eternal, the messiah is eternal, their concern for us is eternal the messiah is therefore divine as God is divine.

Families play an important role in God working out his will in the life of man. At the start of this month, we looked at the Holy family and the role they

played in the coming of the messiah. Going further back we could add Abraham and Noah, God has a way of working out his plans through families. What pattern did God have in mind for families, right at the start of creation we see man and women, Adam and Eve, are created to be companions for one another, to be fruitful and multiply. And confirmed in this relationship by Jesus in Matthew 19: 5, “5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’” That was God’s plan from the outset, but Satan wheedled his way between Adam and Eve and their relationship with God. Satan has been getting in the way of right and proper relationships ever since, such as when Cain rose up against Abel and slew his brother. Right at the heart of the matter was selfishness and we can so easily fall into that trap. Being led to focus on ourselves rather than others can be one way Satan can attack families and the relationship between husband and wives, parents and children. The main thrust of his attack being we can have it all, relationship, homes and families everything but without God. Anecdotal evidence suggests that we have either direct or family experience of divorce and family breakdown. This is something that not even strong Christian families are immune to. Even in the strongest of relationships that selfishness can still creep in and come between a man and his wife. The bible has much to say about families and the relationship between a man and women. We should not lose sight of the fact that what the bible contains are the principles that good relationship should be based on. They are not promises, it is not as simple as if you do this or that thing then your relationship will flourish and you will be rewarded with a good job, good wife, good children, good relationships. The bible provides good sound advice but doesn’t provide a copper-bottomed guarantee that if you live that way then all will be well. Rather it provides a steer on how God wants us to treat one another because it is the right thing to do to honour all his creation and not just because there is some sort of reward carrot being dangled in front of us. In our selfishness we so often forget to follow the one who holds our own or our own family’s future in his hands. We

receive the gift of life eternal not because of what we have done but rather because the father sent the son to be the sacrifice due for our sin that we might be reconciled with the father. Christ came into this world to reach out to those who live in darkness, or are lonely, or are afraid and those who are broken. He came to bring them hope, peace, light, wholeness and life eternal. Christ came to reach those who are broken for it is often when we are most helpless that we are also the most likely to call out to God and really mean it. Perhaps we shouldn’t be overly concerned about being broken and the brokenness that surrounds us. Right from the beginning Jesus has used some broken people to spread his word, from Peter who denied knowing Christ, from Paul who persecuted Christ’s followers right down to you and me.

It is perhaps no surprise that families and homes are broken when we as individuals are broken. Certainly, when we think about fathers and how they are described in the tabloid papers I referred to in the introduction then we see words like absentee, unreliable, selfish, uncaring, cruel, aggressive and violent are used to describe these “feral” children’s fathers. Fathers whose self-centred neglect has contributed to if not outright produced emotional problems for their children. Christ’s concern for us is the direct opposite of such descriptions of fathers, the characteristics of Christ are the epitome of what a good father should be. A person who shepherds us, affirms and encourages us, one never leaves us but who stays close by us no matter what. Think of the father running alongside their son or daughter as they learn to ride a bike. At some point they let go of the saddle yet continue to run alongside so that their child still feels their presence and support. That’s what a father does. The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck noted that Jesus takes away our guilt and opens up the way to God’s fatherly heart. Jesus our everlasting father was sent down at Christmas into a broken and sinful world to restore our relationship with God and to fill our hearts with heaven’s love to show us how to love and care for one another. This is the father’s gift to us this Christmas. If you haven’t accepted this most precious of gifts, then please do so this Christmas by recognising Jesus as your Lord and saviour and

inviting him into your heart. For those of us who have already made that step and who are a child of Christ may we draw hope and comfort from knowing that Jesus is our everlasting father. As Charles Spurgeon said, "there is no unfathering Christ and there is no unchilding us, he is everlastingly father to those who trust in him." We can see the model we have been given for the relationship between man and women, for what fatherhood means, and for what families were meant to be. We can see the means to counteract modern divergent trends through focussing on God and being less self-absorbed. We see in Christ's concern many of the characteristics of a good father or parent. And when times are hard, we know he is there for us, he loves us as a father loves his children now and for evermore throughout eternity. Amen

Lord, in our lives help us to keep you front and centre in all that we do. Help us to be less self-centred and focus more on how you would have us be with one another. Father we thank you that you sent Jesus to show us what a father's love should be like. We thank you that Jesus' fatherly concern for us is without end. When things are hard going may we also cling on to that promise. **Amen.**

SONG FOR REFLECTION: IS HE WORTHY?

<https://youtu.be/2QgcgDDt9F4>

**Do you feel the world is broken? We do
Do you feel the shadows deepen? We do
But do you know that all the dark won't
stop the light from getting through? We
do
Do you wish that you could see it all made
new? We do**

**Is all creation groaning? It is
Is a new creation coming? It is
Is the glory of the Lord to be the
light within our midst? It is
Is it good that we remind ourselves of
this? It is**

**Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open
the scroll?**

**The Lion of Judah, who conquered the
grave
He is David's root and the Lamb who died
to ransom the slave.
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honour and glory?
Is He worthy of this? He is**

**Does the Father truly love us? He does
Does the Spirit move among us? He does
And does Jesus our Messiah hold forever
those He loves? He does
Does our God intend to dwell again with
us? He does**

**Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open
the scroll?
The Lion of Judah, who conquered the
grave
He is David's root and the Lamb who died
to ransom the slave.
From ev'ry people and tribe, ev'ry nation
and tongue
He has made us a kingdom and priests to
God to reign with the Son
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honour and glory?
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Is He worthy of this? He is! He is!**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Lord Jesus, Everlasting Father, Son of David, we pray for all the nations of the world, especially those where there is conflict, where people cannot live in freedom and where their voices are silenced and not heard.

Our Lord Immanuel, **be with them we pray**

Lord Jesus, Everlasting Father, Son of God, we pray for those who approach this Christmas without faith or without hope, especially those who are dreading this Christmas because they will be alone.

Our Lord Immanuel, **be with them we pray**

Lord Jesus, Everlasting Father, Son of Man, we pray for all the people we know, especially those who are filled with sadness in this time of joy,



especially those who are grieving and feel the loss of a loved one more deeply than ever.

Our Lord Immanuel, **be with them we pray**

Lord Jesus, Everlasting Father, Son of Mary, we pray for all families at this time with the uncertainty of a covid Christmas, especially those families who are having to cope with changes in their lives.

Our Lord Immanuel, **be with them we pray**

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

SONG: FULLNESS OF GRACE

<https://youtu.be/iH00vNlaz3w>

**Fullness of grace in man's human frailty,
This is the wonder of Jesus.
Laying aside His power and glory,
Humbly He entered our world.
Chose the path of meanest worth:
Scandal of a virgin birth.
Born in a stable, cold and rejected:
Here lies the hope of the world.**

**Fullness of grace, the love of the Father
Shown in the face of Jesus.
Stooping to bear the weight of humanity,
Walking the Calvary road.
Christ the holy Innocent
Took our sin and punishment.
Fullness of God, despised and rejected:
Crushed for the sins of the world.**

Fullness of hope in Christ we had longed for,

Promise of God in Jesus.

**Through His obedience we are forgiven,
Opening the floodgates of heaven.**

**All our hopes and dreams we bring
Gladly as an offering.**

**Fullness of life and joy unspeakable:
God's gift in love to the world.**

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

Lord of eternity, when darkness had obscured the light and indifference had displaced love, you saw that the time was right and came into the world full of grace and truth. Set us free from fear that we may be ready to welcome you when you return as Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.