

# twelvebaskets



## ADVENT 3C

A complete Sunday service ready to use  
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **theworshipcloud.com**

**Third Sunday of Advent - Year C**  
15th December 2024



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**165 STF – Advent candles tell their story OR**

**174 STF – Light a candle in a darkened place**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains OR**

**186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!**

Readings: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

**Hymn:**

**504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR**

**722 STF – When mountains that we thought secure lie crumbled where we stand**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart OR**

**255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**774 STF – The peace of the earth be with you OR**

**714 STF – The God who sings a new world into being shows the way**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

**Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## Call to worship

In the darkness, shine your light, O God.  
In the cold, bring your warmth, O Christ.  
In the chaos, breathe your peace, O Spirit.  
Come, O Come Emmanuel,

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

165 STF – Advent candles tell their story OR  
174 STF – Light a candle in a darkened place

## Opening Prayers

Isaiah 12 verse 2 says:

‘Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defence; he has become my salvation.’

Let us pray:

Lord God,

We thank you for giving us strength when we are weak,

Hope when we are afraid,

Bringing light in dark times,

And forgiveness when we go astray.

We bring before you now all that preoccupies our minds and consumes our time, and offer you, with open arms and hearts, all that we are.

We pray that you will gather us to you as we worship and fill us afresh with your spirit.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## We say together the Lord’s Prayer

### All Age Talk

*Materials needed: pre-cut hearts, pens, two shirts and some food.*

Have you ever been so miffed and annoyed with someone that you struggle to find your words? You desperately want to deliver a scathing putdown or to give the perfect response

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

that lets you take the high road without succumbing to your anger. It's a real skill to be able to contain anger enough to maintain control.

In this passage, John the Baptist delivers a line that has been repeated across the ages as a rebuke and condemnation. 'You brood of vipers!' It was a terrible insult but its purpose was to draw out a deeper meaning. John's anger here towards the crowds, and especially the Pharisees, seeking baptism provides a good lesson for each of one of us today.

As the crowds descended on John wanting to be baptised, he calls out the hypocrisy of wanting to be baptised when your actions do not reflect what the symbol of baptism represents. The cleansing and rebirthing of baptism, the being made new, is not a shortcut to salvation. The external action must match the internal.

We can join with the crowd in asking: "What should we do then?" when John is explaining that trees that don't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire. What fruit are you producing? What does your heart look like?

John's answer is a surprisingly practical one:

"Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

For tax collectors - "Don't collect any more than you are required to"

And for soldiers, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely - be content with your pay."

So, essentially John says to those who have enough that they should share with those who do not have as much, they should be honest and content with what they have. Which at the time was very counter cultural. Extortion and greed was rife. Those who had plenty wanted to have more and hoard their wealth or take advantage of their positions of power. Perhaps we can see some parallels?

If you have two shirts, share with the one who has none. If you have food, share with the one who has none. John is challenging the crowds, and us, to not let greed and self-serving actions defile our hearts. To acknowledge that we have enough to get by so can share with others.

Does your heart match your actions? John says that one will come to baptise with the spirit. A baptism through the holy spirit is a cleansing from the inside out. The banishing of darkness by the light. How will people know we are Jesus followers? By how we love one another. By our actions.

On the hearts you have been given, can you write down the feelings you have thanks to being part of God's family and the action that might stem from that. For example, I feel a sense of belonging because I am a child of God and a member of his church therefore my action is to welcome others with wide arms into our community. What feelings and actions can fill your heart?

[If suitable for your context, gather up the hearts to be displayed and reflect on some of the suggestions represented].

As we look ahead to the coming week, let us all encourage one another in asking for God's help in aligning our hearts and actions to match the incredible gift of love he has given us. Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains OR

186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

**Readings:** Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

**Hymn:**

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR

722 STF – When mountains that we thought secure lie crumbled where we stand

**Reflections on the readings**

'I am not religious ...but'. How many times have I heard this phrase, in the shops or hairdressers and most recently at a poetry recital. The poet in question was the remarkable Lemn Sissay, a wise and gentle wordsmith of considerable skill. He had held the audience at the Nottingham Playhouse entranced for a whole evening with his quips and insight, and yet at least three times during the evening he had said, 'I am not religious, but ...' and it made me feel sorry that someone who had captivated an audience with his spiritual and human warmth needed to repeat this phrase. It continues to trouble me that 'being religious' is so often seen in the negative, associated with a rhetoric of exclusion, slavery, racism, bigotry – or at the very best 'being boring'.

And what I thought was that I don't want to be religious either if what you mean by religion is a set of beliefs set in stone that will cause a fight with anyone that disagrees. Nor do I want to be religious if it means that I cannot listen to different voices or that I am so certain of my own opinions that there is no room for questions or dialogue. Nor do I want to be religious if by saying so I am by implication associated with imperialist, colonialism and sectarian violence. So I also want to say 'I am not religious but...' but maybe want to finish the sentence in a different way from the poet.

Lemn Sissay finished his fluent and rich sharing by saying, 'I am not religious but .... I do believe in a higher power'. At which point the people alongside in row P might have heard me mutter 'but that is what religion should be, that's the point!' but I think they were too engrossed with their Magnum chocolate cones to be attentive to such muttering.

I am not unaware that the reference to 'higher power' is an important part of recovery programmes and in no way do I want to undervalue this transformative journey, on the contrary I want to say a huge 'yes' to the language of 'higher power' and to those who witness to it their stories of recovery. But I also want to say, 'I am not religious but, there's more to this than my own personal recovery even though this is important, there is something bigger, something more.

There are four readings suggested for today and in two of them the story-tellers are facing imprisonment. In Luke 3:2-18 John the Baptist was not enhancing his life chances by

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Sheila Matthews

declaring people 'a brood of vipers' but what he was saying was that pretending to be religious without backing this up with a way of life that showed true repentance and transformation was not sufficient. The way ahead was not pious religiosity but a costly choice, which was about to be embodied in Jesus. This choice involved setting different priorities and living in a new way. In other words, not simply trying to be good or follow the rules but taking the risk of being baptised by the Holy Spirit and fire!

Later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus we read in the words of the Letter to the Philippians what the requirements of such a baptism will be, to live gently and peaceably with all people, not just the few that agree with us, to put into practice alongside the others of the community a way of life that is just and pure and truthful. This is not simply adherence to 'religion', but rather a call to live a transformed life, to make choices to love our enemy and to relinquish our own self-interest for the poorest and most vulnerable around us. It is a sacrificial life, by which I mean a way that chooses less for self-interest and more for the good of others, even if it means relinquishing status, power or wealth. A recognition that the 'higher power' is not something for my internal world alone but a creative force across the whole of life, a paradigm shift, a seismic reconfiguring of everything within and without us.

And here we skirmish with the language of 'sacrifice'. Living this transformed life, the one described in Philippians, is not to abandon our own lives in some grand gesture but rather to live with such commitment, passion and determination that there will be consequences, positive consequences for those around us but also the huge risk of being seen as a dangerous threat to the status quo.

Whilst the language of 'higher power' is an important first step it might also be as fraught with the patriarchal assumptions that are dangerous seams within any religion. Assumptions of power equating with dominance, certainty, even magic, rather than the power of the small, unseen subversive power of the leaven in the lump are potentially destructive. Gospel power is never 'power over' but always 'power for or with' and God's power is not magic or domination it lies within creation and is not alien from it.

Am I religious? Probably not, even though others might think so. Do I believe in a higher power, well yes, but that power is incarnate within all creation and is not a private possession. Do I think that God can change the world? Most certainly, but not by magic or force, or wishful thinking but only by us each caring for those around us in ways that make love a priority even if it costs us everything.

Questions for private reflection, or discussion in groups:

- Are you religious, should you be?
- How often do you hear the word 'religion' in negative ways?
- How might we make changes in our individual and community lives to live out the vision of Philippians 4: 4-7?

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart OR

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Barbara Glasson

## **Prayers of intercession**

Loving, gentle and merciful one,  
In all things, may we dwell in your most excellent way.

Help us to relinquish anxiety, but not be complacent,  
Seek pure lives, without being judgmental of others or ourselves.

In this most troubling and perplexing world  
Unsettle our souls and spirits  
Baptise us with the Holy Spirit and with the fire of questioning minds,  
So that we will be determined and unabashed declaring the gospel  
Of truth, love and justice for all people.

Open our eyes, open our hearts, open our purses, open our minds,  
Provoke and prompt us on this most excellent way,  
each day, may the world be changed  
by yeast of your transforming love.

And walk with gentleness, not anxiety,  
But with true noble right, pure, lovely, excellent.  
In Jesus' name we pray,  
Amen.<sup>5</sup>

## **We will now take up the offering.**

Advent God,  
God of the waiting time,  
God of each moment,  
We are grateful for all that you have blessed us with. And in this time of giving and receiving of gifts, help us to use these gifts – the donations made today, and the gifts and skills each of us have, to build your kingdom here on earth.  
In Jesus' name we pray,  
Amen.<sup>6</sup>

## **Hymn:**

774 STF – The peace of the earth be with you OR

714 STF – The God who sings a new world into being shows the way

## **Blessing**

Let us go out with peace,  
Into this time of busy-ness and consumerism,  
Help us to be people of sanctuary and calm,  
Offering a different way to do Christmas,  
To experience it as a time of love divine, all loves excelling.  
Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Barbara Glasson

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker