

Advent Calendar

A vision from Isaiah for each day this week,
with a short reflection and ideas how to pray.
Put aside a little time for this.

First week 1-6 December

Following on from Sunday's reading from Isaiah, each day brings us a new vision, as the book announces in pictorial terms the gracious gifts that God has in store for his faithful people.

With these visions, Isaiah challenged Judah in troubled times. The early church recognised them as finding particular fulfilment in the work of Jesus Christ. They have continued to inspire God's people to look beyond our daily crises to what God has in store for us.

These visions were announced against a background of war, and of judgment on the failings of Judah and its leaders. Yet they have provided a foundation on which people of all times, however troubled, have been able to build and sustain hope.

Monday 2 December

Isaiah 4:2-6

On that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from rain.

its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Indeed over all the glory there will be a canopy. It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and

A people made beautiful living in God's presence.

When we put together the several pictures that make up this vision, they speak vividly of how things will be when God puts his people to rights. They set before our eyes a people purified, who with a world eager to learn from the God who meets with his people, turn from human corruption to the rich life that God offers. They will bear a rich harvest, as the God present among them teaches them, guides them, shelters and protects them. It is worth taking the time to ask how each of the detailed pictures used here is appropriate.

Tuesday 3 December

Isaiah 11:1-10

*A shoot shall come out from the
stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of
his roots.*

*The spirit of the Lord shall rest on
him,*

*the spirit of wisdom and
understanding,*

*the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the
fear of the Lord.*

*His delight shall be in the fear of
the Lord.*

*He shall not judge by what his
eyes see,*

*or decide by what his ears hear
but with righteousness he shall
judge the poor,*

*and decide with equity for the
meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the
rod of his mouth,*

*and with the breath of his lips
he shall kill the wicked.*

*Righteousness shall be the belt
around his waist,*

and faithfulness the belt

around his loins.

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with
the kid,*

*the calf and the lion and the
fatling together,*

*and a little child shall lead
them.*

*The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down
together;*

*and the lion shall eat straw like
the ox.*

*The nursing child shall play over
the hole of the asp,*

*and the weaned child shall put
its hand on the adder's den.*

*They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the
knowledge of the Lord*

as the waters cover the sea.

*On that day the root of Jesse shall
stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him,
and his dwelling shall be glorious.*

A shoot from the stump

The Divine forester has worked his way through the trees, pruning some, cutting others to the ground. But as gardeners know, a strong new shoot can spring from a seemingly dead stump. The line of David may no longer rule over Judah, but when one comes, endowed with all the gifts of God, one who is righteous in all his judgments, firm for good, strong against

evil, and when peace reigns throughout creation, then we will know that a true heir of David is again in control. The vision, which challenges our sense of what is possible, heightens our longing for a time when, under God's enlightened leader, the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

Wednesday 4 December
Isaiah 25:6-10a

*On this mountain the Lord of
hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of
well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow,
of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this
mountain
the shroud that is cast over all
peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all
nations;
he will swallow up death
forever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away*

*the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people
he will take away from all the
earth,
for the Lord has spoken.
It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have
waited for him, so that he might
save us.
This is the Lord for whom we
have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his
salvation.
For the hand of the Lord will rest
on this mountain.*

This vision is centred on Mount Zion, where the LORD of Hosts, the mighty God of battle, calls all people to his rich banquet. As host, he will present his guests with a gift: he will carry out a mighty act on their behalf. The people have come burdened with the guilt of broken covenant, conscious of the consequence that implies - death. But God's gift is to take away the disgrace of the people, to swallow up the death that is their due and to wipe away the tears of grief and shame from their faces. The LORD has spoken.

Thursday 5 December

Isaiah 26:1-6

*On that day this song will be sung
in the land of Judah:
We have a strong city;
he sets up victory
like walls and bulwarks.
Open the gates,
so that the righteous nation
that keeps faith
may enter in.
Those of steadfast mind you keep
in peace—
in peace because they trust in*

*you.
Trust in the Lord forever,
for in the Lord God
you have an everlasting rock.
For he has brought low
the inhabitants of the height;
the lofty city he lays low.
He lays it low to the ground,
casts it to the dust.
The foot tramples it,
the feet of the poor,
the steps of the needy*

This is a song to be sung by pilgrims. Those who have kept faith with God long to process to his city and there to worship him, to enter into his peace. The pilgrims know that God has reduced to ruins the city that stood for oppression, for exploitation of the poor and of the needy. But those who trust God can call in confidence for the city gates of God's strong city to be thrown open to admit them, in justly famous words, to the perfect peace of those whose mind is stayed on God.

Friday 6 December

Isaiah 29:17-24

*Shall not Lebanon in a very little
while
become a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field be
regarded as a forest?
On that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a scroll,
and out of their gloom and
darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.
The meek shall obtain fresh joy in
the Lord,
and the neediest people shall
exult in the Holy One of Israel.
For the tyrant shall be no more,
and the scoffer shall cease to
be;
all those alert to do evil shall be
cut off—
those who cause a person to lose
a lawsuit,
who set a trap for the arbiter in
the gate,*

*and without grounds deny
justice to the one in the right.
Therefore thus says the Lord, who
redeemed Abraham, concerning
the house of Jacob:
No longer shall Jacob be
ashamed,
no longer shall his face grow
pale.
For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his
midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of
Jacob,
and will stand in awe of the
God of Israel.
And those who err in spirit will
come to understanding,
and those who grumble will
accept instruction.*

The time of God's reversal is at hand. The rich forests of Lebanon will grow again, as desolation gives way to recovery. The deaf shall hear, the blind see and the meek will find joy in God. Then all the evils of political tyranny, of cunning, manoeuvring and corruption will fail. At this time Israel, the house of Jacob, that had so signally failed to fulfil its covenant obligations, will be given another chance. Jacob will see God's work in his children as, in contrast with their past faithlessness, they turn to him in worship. Do we hear Jesus echo some of these words (Matt 11:5), as evidence of God at work?

Saturday 7 December
Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26

Truly, O people in Zion, inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

He will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and grain, the produce of the ground,

which will be rich and plenteous. On that day your cattle will graze in broad pastures; and the oxen and donkeys that till the ground will eat silage, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. On every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water-- on a day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days, on the day when the LORD binds up the injuries of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.

This is a message of hope to the people in Zion. The time for tears will pass. The God who heard the cry of his people in Egypt will hear and answer you, the God who fed you in the wilderness, who revealed himself to his people and who guided them will be with you, too, directing your steps. No longer will he seem to be absent from you. Agriculture will prosper, sustained by regular rains and copiously flowing rivers. Darkness will be banished and the sun will shine as it shone on creation. All this is the promise of a gracious God. Yet the reference to a day of slaughter suggests instability and anxiety in the background, not very far off.

Each day...

One Thought

Think about the reading and its vision. What could I find there? Is this the way the world is, or the way it might be? Carry your thoughts through the day and try to remember them before you go to sleep.

One Prayer

Pick up one thought or picture from the reading for today and form a short prayer around it. Prayers do not need to be complicated. God understands what we try to say to him.

One Thank-you

Find something here that you can thank God for. Try to be explicit, however little it may seem. Thank God for it, just as you would thank anyone who gave you a gift.

Sum it up

*Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the
works of darkness, and to put on
the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ
came to visit us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his
glorious majesty to judge the
living and the dead, we may rise
to the life immortal;
through him who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit, now
and for ever. Amen.*

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name;
your kingdom come;
your will be done
on earth, as it is 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 yours is the kingdom and the
power and the glory forever.*