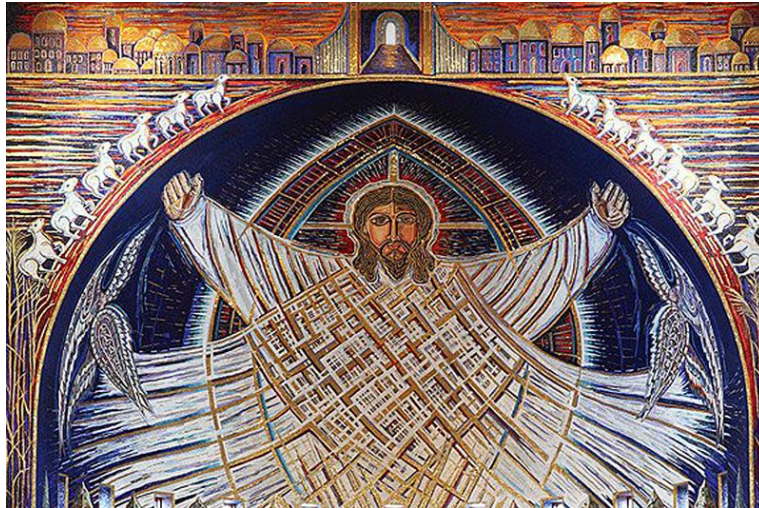


North Leith Parish Church

29 November 2020

The First Sunday in Advent



Christ in Glory

“Awake sleeper, rise from the dead and Christ will shine upon you”.

Ephesians 5:14

A very warm welcome to online worship with the congregation of North Leith Parish Church. On the first Sunday in Advent we worship with resources from Christian Aid and start by joining together with many other churches to sing and share the Christian Aid Christmas Carol. We reflect in unity that love builds hope, especially in difficult times.

Click the link below to listen

Hymn CH4 291

[When out of Poverty is Born](#)

When out of poverty is born a dream that will not die, and landless, weary folk find strength to stand with heads held high, it's then we learn from those who wait to greet the promised day: 'The Lord is coming; don't lose heart. Be blest: prepare the way!'

'When people wander far from God, forget to share their bread, they find their wealth an empty thing, their spirits are not fed. For only just and tender love the hungry soul will stay. And so God's prophets echo still: 'Be blest: prepare the way!'

‘When God took flesh and came to earth, the world turned upside down, and in the strength of women's faith the Word of Life was born. She knew that God would raise the low, it pleased her to obey. Rejoice with Mary in the call: ‘Be blest: prepare the way!’

Scripture

Luke 1:46-55

Mary's Song of Praise and Justice

Click the link below to listen

[Mary's Magnificat](#)

Click the link below to listen

[2020 Christmas Sermon with Dr Paula Gooder](#)

Love builds hope

It can feel as though hope is in short supply at the moment. We roll from one crisis to the next, barely catching our breath between each one. The simple task of keeping going is so exhausting that our chances of being able to discover any significant sources of hope feel slim and often beyond our grasp.

The season of Advent and the approach of Christmas, however, are powerful reminders that, contrary to appearances, hope does glimmer around us. It just doesn't look like we expect it to look. On one level this shouldn't surprise us. Jesus, hope for all the world, certainly didn't look like the people of his day expected him to look. The Jews of the first century had all their hopes pinned on a powerful, majestic king - what they got instead was a baby; they expected him to be in a palace - instead he was found where animals eat. The light that shone so vividly in the darkness was certainly nothing like anyone had thought he would be.

At this time of year, and especially this year as we trudge onwards through what feels like never-ending fear and grief, it is worth reminding ourselves again and again that hope has always appeared among us at an unexpected time and in an unexpected form. The Jesus whose birth we prepare to celebrate brings the kind of hope we can neither imagine nor anticipate.

One of my favourite strands of the Advent wait, as we approach Christmas, is that in this season awaiting coincides with that of Mary's, waiting for the birth of her baby. It is almost impossible for us to comprehend quite how much Gabriel's announcement of Jesus' birth turned Mary's life on its head. One moment she was a normal young woman waiting for the all the future would hold, the next she was staring at the likelihood of a life of shame and exclusion, shunned by everyone she knew, possibly even her future husband.

One of the striking features of Luke's account of Gabriel's annunciation to Mary is that we hear so little from Mary - a question ('How can this be?') and an acquiescence ('Let it be with me according to your word') is all we're told that she said. She seems subdued, barely uttering a word. The beautifully eloquent, heart-stirring poem of praise - which we call the Magnificat - came later, much later, when she went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth.

As with so much else in this story we know little about the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary. We know that they were related and that one of them was very old while the other was, probably, quite young, beyond that we are given no further details. What is crystal clear, however, is the affection between the two women. Luke tells us that, when Mary greeted Elizabeth, the child - later named John - leapt in Elizabeth's womb. There is so much we might want to know. What did Mary say? How well did they know each other? Had they both been lonely and afraid until now? We are left with the scantiest of details and the need to fill in the gaps as best we can, but what we can tell is that the greeting formed a connection, a deep abiding bond between the two of them, a bond founded in love and that it was the love between these two women that changed everything so that Mary was able - possibly for the first time - to sing out her praise and joy and confidence in God. As far as we can tell, from what Luke tells us, love was what turned Mary's fear to hope. Love changed how she felt, love washed away her fears; love built hope.

At first glance this recognition seems odd. Surely hope is to be found in external things, in a change of circumstances maybe or in assurance that all is not as it seems? Perhaps hope is found in a hint of something new, that something better's round the corner? But on reflection it makes perfect sense that love builds hope. It is in relationship that our feelings change, circumstances may be no different but how we feel about them shifts. When we reach out in love, our ability to make sense of the world improves and our sense of hope ignites. It is when we are grounded in love and compassion that our horizon shifts and our view of the world changes.

It is so easy to imagine that we need to go looking for hope, that we need to generate it, somehow; that if we try hard enough we'll be able to conjure hope by our own efforts. The story of Mary and Elizabeth reminds us that we don't find hope - hope finds us. Hope creeps up on us when we least expect it; hope can spring up in even the darkest and most despairing of times and one of the factors that causes it to happen is love. When we can forget ourselves sufficiently to care deeply for those around us, when we reach with compassion beyond our own needs, anxieties and concerns, then hope can stir. This hope, however, is not a thin, inward looking hope for ourselves but a hope for the whole world, the world that God created and loved so much that he sent his only Son - the unexpected, unimagined embodiment of hope.

Christian Aid's theme this Advent and Christmas is precisely this - that love builds hope, when we reach out beyond ourselves to care for God's world, then hope grows and grows. Love and hope are profoundly intertwined. Jesus, hope of the world, in whom we have faith, impels us to love, and as we love, hope is built. Or as the apostle Paul put it in 1Corinthians 13 - 'faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love'.

Prayer of Intercession

(from Christian Aid staff written for the Church of Scotland, a little revised)

Hope for what is not seen

Listening God,
We thank You that You are God with us,
That we can glimpse Your Kingdom around us
That we can see signs of You in our world
That we can be part of Your story.
God, we wait and we listen;

We hope for what is not seen

Shine the light of your kingdom into the darkness of our world

Listening God,
Will You come into the darkness of our community?
To the people living with fear and worry
To the people whose Advent is not full of joy
To the people needing support
Open our eyes to the situations all around us that we do not see
And open our minds to the ways we can respond.
God, we wait and we listen;

We hope for what is not seen

Shine the light of Your kingdom into the darkness of our world

Listening God,
Will You come into the darkness of our lives?
To our human doubts and failings
The times we do not live out our faith
The situations we have not used our power to change.
Help us to be as open to you as You were to us
When You were as vulnerable as a baby
Trusting in the world for Your safety.
Show us glimpses of Your Kingdom
Help us to hear Your story
Reveal to us our part in Your Advent Hope.
God, we wait and we listen.

We hope for what is not seen

Shine the light of Your kingdom into the darkness of our world

Amen

[Picture Christ in Glory](#), McLean, Helen, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

INTIMATIONS

Sunday Services

Services in the church continue at 11am each Sunday. All are very welcome. If you are going to attend, it would be helpful if you could contact the church office by the Friday before to give us an idea of numbers.

Next Sunday, 6 December, our Christmas Appeal, which will go to Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal, will be launched.

Church Open for Prayer

The church building continues to be open for us all on Tuesday and Friday mornings from 10am until 12 noon.

Christmas Church Magazine

Contributions for the December magazine should be sent to the church office nipc-office@btconnect.com by Tuesday 1 December.

Fresh Start Christmas Appeal

As they do every year, Fresh Start have their Cooker Appeal. Anyone wishing to donate can do so online or by contacting Ellen Lowe who will provide an envelope (which allows Gift Aid to be added) and pass on the donation.

Session Meeting

There will be a meeting of the Kirk Session, via Zoom, on Wednesday 2 December 2020 at 19:30

Christmas Gift Service

We shall be collecting Christmas Gifts for the Citadel Youth Centre on Sunday 13 December. Presents (toys etc) should be for children of age 3 and over, and toiletries for teenagers aged 13 and upwards; leaving the present unwrapped helps to ensure the gift is best targeted to the individual young person.