

day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

"Everything will be destroyed" — Peter's attempted description is not for our information, but to give urgency to our holding the priorities and values of "holy and godly lives" when Jesus returns.

**13 But in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.**

"A new heaven and a new earth" — Christians hold the hope that God is going to vindicate Himself and re-create an eternal dwelling place for His people. This hope does not depend on our works but His promise.

• *For further study, read Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; Revelation 21:1–22:5.*

**14 So then, dear friends, since you are**

**SUMMARY** Our worldview is about today, tomorrow, next week – and God's is eternal. A time is coming when everything of man will receive a fiery purification. The language used is 'destruction'. God, in His love, desires our salvation so much He waits and waits. But He cannot countenance rebellious or independent attitudes. When Jesus comes again, He wants to find us "spotless, blameless and at peace with Him".

**APPLICATION** So, how do we keep right with God? Just over 500 years ago, Martin Luther, a Saxon monk and university teacher who knew all about being correctly religious, was studying the book of Romans and found there, that he had been heading down the wrong road. Righteousness with God did not come by our effort but by faith in Jesus. "It is a righteousness that is by faith, from first to last", Romans 1:16-17. So to be found right with God, when the Day of the Lord comes, is by having close faith relationship with Him, and the Holy Spirit helps us to live like this.

**QUESTION** *Can it be that simple? Why is it that we feel more comfortable engaged in practices and actions that amount to earning favour with God?*

**PRAYER** Thank You, Father, for giving us this insight and reminder of the Good News that is for us.

Thank You for giving us Jesus, for salvation through faith in Him and new life that comes from that salvation.

Help me to live empowered for holiness by Your Holy Spirit, ready for Your return, and playing my part in Your mission of reaching others, that they might turn and come to You in repentance. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.

looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him.

"Spotless, blameless and at peace with Him" — we cannot earn salvation by our works but living in assurance of salvation through faith, Romans 5:1, will result in spotless character and blameless reputation, like Christ, 1 Peter 1:19, 1 Peter 2:10b-22.

**15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him.**

"Just as our dear brother Paul wrote" — a picture of the unity of purpose and teaching that defined their relationship, also seen in Paul's letters and in Acts.

# The Living Word

Bible readings for Sunday, December 6, 2020, with explanatory notes

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

Bible study on the RCL passages for **Sunday, December 6** (Advent 2)

*Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching*

Theme: **Announcing the Good News that is ours in Jesus**

Isaiah 40:1-11 – Good news of just rule for God's people

Mark 1:1-8 John calls people to repent and have a new start

2 Peter 3:8-15 – God holds back on judgment that we might turn to Him

Also read: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

## Isaiah 40:1-11 – Good news of just rule for God's people

*A prophecy of restoration and the coming of the Messiah*

**1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.**

"Comfort, comfort" — double imperative for emphasis: this is good news.

**2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.**

"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem" — like many prophecies, extending beyond one time and event. "Jerusalem" looks a century ahead to the exile made inevitable by the unrepentant sin of the people and their "hard service" in Babylon. But God's ultimate purpose is the good news of a route of grace back to Him.

**3 A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."**

"A voice" — the first of three voices of hope explaining the "comfort" of v.1 and identified with John the Baptist in all four of the gospels

• *For further study read Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:1-13; Luke 3:4; John 1:23*

**4 "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain."**

"Rough ground... level" — goes with "prepare the way... a highway for our God", v.3.

**5 "And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it"**

**together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."**

"The glory of the Lord will be revealed" — Yahweh, the LORD, could not be seen but His presence could, like the luminous cloud in the tabernacle that Moses was unable to enter, and at the transfiguration of Jesus, Exodus 40:35, Matt. 17:1-3.

**6-8 A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?"**

"All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field."

**"The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass."**

**"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures for ever."**

"All people are like grass" — the second voice of hope is that all human powers and institutions apart from God are unsustainable. The power of Assyria and Babylon will only 'flower' for a time before withering. Quoted in part in 1 Peter 1:24-25.

"Breath of the Lord" — equally, Spirit of the Lord.

"The word of our God endures" — the divine plan is not seasonal, Isaiah 55:11. Jesus the Son of God fulfils the word, Matt. 5:17, 18, is the Word, John 1:1-18, and lives forever.

• *For further study, see Isaiah 8:10; Psalm 119:89.*

**9 You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"**

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*See also other Living Word Publications*

[www.glowweobley.com](http://www.glowweobley.com) – join others in the latest suggested prayers for our community  
[www.believethegoodnews.com](http://www.believethegoodnews.com) – fresh encouragement from God's word today

"Lift up your voice" — this reliable, enduring good news calls for the most public announcement. The exiles are to return to their towns in Judah, where the Messiah will appear.

**10 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and He rules with a mighty arm. See, His reward is with Him, and His recompense accompanies Him.**

"His reward...and... recompense" — His delivered

**SUMMARY** Isaiah prophesies a new era for Israel under a powerful but caring Messiah. God's compassion and purpose will be seen in the exiles returning to Judah where they will encounter "the Lord [who] comes with power, and... tends His flock like a shepherd." This announces both the one who will "in the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord" — John the Baptist — and also the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Son of God.

**APPLICATION** This is a message of hope and encouragement for God's people, as much now as the first hearers centuries before Christ. God is speaking words of grace: the "hard service" (v.2) has been done and His love and mercy will override the judgment. Unlike the nation of Israel, we have a 'fast track' to be made right with God through Jesus. This passage sets out very important principle. With God, there is always a way back, through a repentant turning to meet Him in a new attitude. The Good News is that Jesus has made an uncomplicated way for us to do that.

**QUESTIONS** *What obstacles on our road need to be cleared, for God to come and show His glory?*

### Mark 1:1-8 – John calls people to repent and have a new start

*His message was about the One to follow, who would baptise with the Holy Spirit*

**1-3 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way – a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.' "**

"The good news about Jesus the Messiah" — headline for Mark's story of the good news about Jesus, or gospel.

"The Messiah" — Messiah, or Greek *christos*, means anointed and is often translated Christ.

"Written in Isaiah the prophet" — gives the main and earliest source, but this is a combined quotation, Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1.

**4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**

people, His flock (v.11) are His reward, Isaiah 62:11-12.

**11 He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young.**

"He tends His flock" — qualifies "rules with a mighty arm", v.10. This is a just, caring kind of rule, see Ezekiel 34: 11, 15-16 (OT, Nov. 22).

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**QUESTIONS** *What obstacles on our road need to be cleared, for God to come and show His glory?*

"John... appeared in the wilderness" — John means "the Lord is gracious" and the wilderness was the infertile region west of the Dead Sea. In Scripture, wilderness symbolises spiritual retreat and testing.

"Repentance" — turning, meaning an intentional shift from sin to righteousness. It was shocking to Jews to be called to repent and once again become the true people of God, as in Exodus 19. But John was in tune with historic prophets e.g. Hosea 3:4-5.

**5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan.**

"They were baptised by him" — John was so identified with the message of repentance baptism that he was called John the Baptist, v.4.

**6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.**

"Camel's hair... leather belt" — it was a widespread Jewish tradition that Elijah would

return and prepare God's people for the Lord's return, from Malachi 3:1, 4:5, and John dressed like him. He was not pretending to be Elijah but showing that he stood in Elijah's ministry tradition.

**7-8 And this was his message: "After me comes the One more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."**

**SUMMARY** John was the last of the line of OT prophets and Jesus said that there was no one greater of his time. He was unique in a couple of ways: he was himself foretold by Isaiah and Malachi; and he was chosen to be the prepare the way of the Lord and point people to Him. He adopted the style and dress of a 'wilderness prophet' like Elijah. He also had a distinctive style of ministry, exhorting hearers to repent and be baptised. They were to turn from their sin and independence and to show their new commitment to God by entering the water in baptism.

**APPLICATION** Before the gospel writer John tells us about the Good News, he tells us how it works. It is all about Jesus, the 'Anointed One' or Messiah, who will baptise [drench us] not just with water but with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God and He is holy; He empowers us to live differently, showing others the character of God. We are to hold the values of heaven, while engaging with a world which is selfish and independent. And this is how we do it — by turning to Jesus and asking to be empowered by the Spirit of Jesus.

**QUESTION** *As a regular church/chapel attendee for much of my life, how is this call to repent and re-commit to God for me?*

### 2 Peter 3:8-15 – God holds back judgment that we might turn to Him

*He is patient, not wanting any to perish, but come to repentance*

**8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.**

"A day is like a thousand years" — God stands apart from the human concept of chronological time.

**9 The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

"The Lord is not slow" — what seems to us like delay is evidence of God's exceptional kindness and patience. Some may be waiting for God, while God is delaying judgment and waiting for them.

"Not wanting anyone to perish" — this does not teach that all will be saved (universalism). *It does*

"Baptise you with the Holy Spirit" — "with" can also be "in". This promise, foretold by several of the OT prophets, is recorded in each of the gospels and repeated at the beginning of Acts. The NT letters present the different perspective of the post-resurrection life of the Spirit in the Early Church following Pentecost.

• **For further study**, read Isaiah 32:15, 44:3; Ezek 11:18-19, 37:14, 39:29; Joel 2:28,29; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5.

teach God's desire for all to repent, turn to Him in faith and be saved. We are partners with Him, helping people to do this.

**10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.**

"Everything... will be laid bare" — apocalyptic language attempts to describe something beyond words. Christ's resurrection body is part of the evidence that God desires to renew, v.13, not destroy, what is marred by sin. There will be total exposure, with nowhere to hide.

**11-12 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That**