

## This week's Scripture - Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020 – Advent 1

**Isaiah 64.1-9; Psalm 80.1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1.3-9; Mark 13.24-37**

**Happy New Year! In the Revised Common Lectionary, we move to year B, and begin the liturgical year with Advent.**

**Isaiah 64.1-9:** Most scholars call the chapters of Isaiah from 56-66 as “Third Isaiah.” Like Second Isaiah, these passages take place after the exile, but these chapters occur at a later date after the people have returned to their ancestral land. The prophet recognized that the hope for the people to change their ways, that they would recognize God as the true king in their life, have faded. The people have turned back to their old patterns and have forgotten God. Isaiah cried out for God to respond like in days of old, to rip open the heavens and come down the mountains, like God was present with Moses when the people went astray. Isaiah longed for the people to remember God’s ways, to pay attention to God. However, Isaiah also asked God to forgive the people, and to not remain angry, for they were still God’s people.

**Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19** is a psalm that may have originated in the northern kingdom of Israel with references to Ephraim and Manasseh, the children of Joseph. The psalmist calls upon God to save the people from their enemies, to save them from suffering. The psalmist calls upon God to restore the people, to save them from their destruction. The psalmist seeks God’s presence through their “right hand” to be present with the one who will lead them—a hope of a new king. If the people are spared, if they are delivered from their enemies, they will not turn back from God. God is the only one who can restore and save them.

**1 Corinthians 1.3-9:** Paul’s introduction to his letter to the church in Corinth speaks of God’s faithfulness. Paul gives thanks for the church in Corinth for the grace of God that has been given to them. The people have been enriched by the spiritual gifts of God through Jesus Christ—and indeed, spiritual gifts are a main theme in this letter from Paul. Christ is the one who strengthens them, and by God they are called into the fellowship of Christ. Later on in this letter, Paul will refer to the body of Christ, with many gifts, drawing these images together.

**Mark 13:24-37:** Jesus speaks of the coming of the Son of Man, the Day of Judgment drawing upon an image from Daniel, the Son of Man would come to establish the reign of God on earth. The Son of Man would gather people from all parts of the earth together. Jesus insisted that no one can know when these things would pass but urged his disciples and other followers to stay alert, to be ready. Look at the things in the world that tell you what is coming next, Jesus said, using the fig tree as an example. When the fig tree sprouts leaves, you know summer is near. But one does not know when the Son of Man will come, so be alert, and not like the servants of a man who left the house, and the servants were asleep instead of keeping watch like they were supposed to be. The phrase “keep awake,” in Paul’s letters and in the Gospels, refers to living as Christ taught us to live, and not going back into our old selfish ways.

**Reflection:** Advent is the season of preparation for Christmas, but it is an active watching and waiting for the arrival of Christ in our world and in our lives in a new way. We read these passages pointing to the day of judgment and Christ’s return to remind us that we are still actively waiting, alert and awake. Because of the Nativity story, that Christ came to us in a completely unexpected way as a new-born child, so in these days we must be ready for Christ to enter our world, our lives, and our hearts in an unexpected way. How do we live faithfully in times when our faith might be tested? When the world isn’t as we hoped it would be? Where can we find signs of God’s faithfulness in our lives, in the world around us?

## Praying with others or alone...

### Call to Worship

O, that we would know You are present with us!

**O God, tear open the heavens and come down!**

O, that we would turn back to Your ways!

**O God, tear open the heavens and come down!**

O, that we would remember how You are the God of our ancestors!

**O God, tear open the heavens and come down!**

O, that You would forgive us of our sins,

**O God, come and be present with us.**

O, that we would wake up, and watch for You,

**O God, we know You are coming into our world, and into our lives in a new way.**

**Come, Lord Jesus, Come.**

### Prayer of Brokenness / Confession

Righteous God, we tremble in Your presence.

You are the one who spoke to Moses on the mountain

when the people turned away and worshiped a golden calf.

You spoke through the prophets when the leaders went astray, and the people were taken into exile.

Your anger and wrath are felt in the words of scripture.

Righteous God, we know that Your anger is at injustice, Your wrath is at oppression.

You are also the God of mercy and loving-kindness.

May we turn back from our evil, selfish ways, and turn to You.

May we be awake, alert, acting for justice in this world now.

May we pursue truth and right-living. May we show kindness, compassion, and mercy.

Forgive us when we have gone astray, and call us back, Righteous God of justice and peace.

In the name of Christ, whose arrival we wait, we pray. Amen.

### Assurance of Forgiveness / Blessing

The psalmist declares that "God's anger is but for a moment; God's favour is for a lifetime.

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning."

God's steadfast love endures forever.

Any anger that we might experience is anger against injustice, anger against oppression, anger against the ways sin, as fall into the temptations of this world for our own wealth and gain.

Listen to the call of God in your heart.

Turn to God's ways, and know God's favour, God's love, God's mercy and loving-kindness.

Know that you are forgiven, and your sins are remembered no more.

Go, and live into God's joy for your life. Amen.

### Prayer

God of Ancient Times, we find Your light in the simplicity of lighting candles.

We find Your love in the cosiness of familiar stories and songs.

We find Your joy in the pleasures of decorating and baking and passing on traditions that were taught to us.

We are reminded of our roots of long ago,

traditions from long before You came into our world as the Christ-child.

May our souls be filled as we harken back to days of old with our carols and rituals.

This Advent, speak to us from out of the old ways, and help us find new meaning here and now,

as we wait for You, who once was, who is, and who is to come, Almighty God our Saviour. Amen.