

## **Advent 1 God's faithful people**

### **Welcome and Introduction** Revd Wendy Gourlay

Welcome - from the Mid Loes Deanery, and to the first of four online reflective services for the Christmas season.

Our liturgy, for worship, comes from two Ordained clergy - David Adam and John Cox. David was the vicar of Lindisfarne, off the Northumbrian coast, until retirement in 2003, and has inspired many to worship in the Celtic tradition.

John Cox, was Archdeacon of Sudbury, here in Suffolk, before his post of Diocesan Director of Education – retiring in 2010. He writes “it is through Jesus’ relationships and stories that we see the outworking of his teaching – and we are invited not simply to listen, but to enter into the accounts as participants.’

So, in each of these four services we will hear an imaginative Story of a biblical character, for us to reflect upon.

Today, we begin with Advent.

Advent is a time when we rejoice in the coming of Christ into our lives, that he came at Christmas, and that he comes again to be our Lord and King. Advent celebrates that our God comes to us again and again.

### **Opening scripture**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; they who lived in a land of deep darkness, in them the light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

### **Opening prayer**

Lord of grace, **fill our hearts with hope.**

Lord of promise, **fill our hearts with laughter.**

Lord of love, **fill our hearts with wonder.**

### **Candle-lighting** Read by Jackie Clark

On the first Sunday in Advent we light one candle to say with all faithful people: The Lord comes to us.

**He abides with us.**

When our lives are darkened it is necessary to celebrate God's presence that comes to us and the light that God gives us.

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World:

**Eternal Light, shine in our hearts.**

Blessed are you, Lord our God, for you have called us out of darkness to be children of Light. The bright light of your presence scatters the darkness within us and is a lantern to our paths. Bless this light, that it may remind us of your presence among us and your love towards us; through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### **Confession**

**For times of despair, forgive us, Lord.**

**For doubting your promises, forgive us, Lord.**

**For lacking trust in the love of others, forgive us, Lord.**

**For doubting your goodness, forgive us, Lord.**

**For hurting our loved ones, forgive us, Lord.**

**For ignoring the needy, forgive us, Lord.**

**Hymn – Christ be our Light**

**Scripture Reading – Hebrews 11:8-12 read by Chris Clarke.**

By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a long time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.'

For the Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God.**

**Reflective Story – Sarah.** You must be joking!

(See Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-3)

You wouldn't think it to look at me now, but when I was younger I was considered something of a beauty. Abraham always said I was the best-looking woman in the whole family. He was really quite proud of me, the men all turning to look at me, the way they do. Mind you, that has its disadvantages and on a couple of occasions my looks made things difficult for us. Abraham was afraid the local rulers would kill him just so that they could get me, so we pretended we were brother and sister. They took me just the same. Not that anything happened, if you know what I mean. But it made things awkward.

But looks aren't everything, are they? I'd have been much happier even if I'd been plain and could have had children. Barren, they called me. It's such an empty, soul-destroying word. I can't begin to tell you what it made me feel. There was the shame of it – not just for me but for Abraham as well. He never said anything but I could see it in his eyes. It was as though I had let him down, let my family down. I had failed them all. I tried everything I could think of. The other women were always giving me advice, offering me potions and things. Made no difference. Every month I'd hope, and every month the same.

I don't blame Abraham but he didn't help. Well, it wasn't so much him I suppose as those visions of his. He'd tell me about them. Just made matters worse. I mean to say, what would you think if your husband kept telling you he'd been promised by God that he would be the father of a great nation, descendants too many to count, and you not able to bear him any children. It was awful. I got really low about it. I got so desperate that I did something I really regretted later. But I didn't know what else to do at the time.

We'd been in Canaan for ten years or so and I had this servant, a nice little thing she was in her way. An Egyptian girl called Hagar. I just came out with it one day. 'What about Hagar,' I said to Abraham. 'What about her?' he asked. So I said he could have her, sleep with her, have a child by her. At least that would mean he would have an heir. If that was the only way he was going to be a father then so be it. It wasn't so strange really, not where we come from.

So he did and that's when the trouble started. Once she got pregnant she just changed. All haughty she was, giving herself airs and graces, looking down her nose at me. Started telling me what to do even. How I regretted it all. It was even worse than before and I just couldn't stand it. I told Abraham so. But he just said I had to sort it. So I did, God forgive me. I made her life hell. She ran

off into the wild places. I don't know what happened but she came back eventually – all submissive she was then and when she had a son Abraham called him Ishmael. So there he was, a dad at 86!

Well, to cut a long story short, things went on much the same for the next ten years or so. We moved around a bit and ended up at a place called the Oaks of Mamre, near Hebron. One day three strangers turned up. I heard my husband talking to them outside the tent and eventually he came in and told me to get them a meal.

I wasn't really paying much attention but I could hear them outside as they ate the meal. Then one of them said something that really took the biscuit. 'I'll come back this way in due course,' he said, 'and visit you again. And when I do your wife Sarah shall have a son.' Ha! I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. What a joke, at my age. They must have heard me laughing but I denied it of course. Frightened I was. They weren't like ordinary folk and they scared me a bit.

But it wasn't a joke. I got pregnant just as they had said. Couldn't believe it. Got me in a right state. One moment I was over the moon, the next I'd be worrying and all anxious. But how good it felt – my belly all rounded and as it should be. No more that empty void. I started smiling again, like I hadn't done for years. And the pain and the joy of his birth, it was marvellous. Here was the son I never thought I'd have. I cried and laughed and laughed and cried. And so did Abraham. This was no joke, this was a laughter that went right through me, filled my heart.

We called him 'laughter', our son Isaac.

He'd brought joy to my old age. No more a failure, no more shame. It was the Lord's doing. You don't know how good it felt.

*I invite you to a short period of reflection. A visual slideshow will be accompanied by "A touching place" © 1898 The Iona Community.*

**Intercessions.** Led by Mary Baker

Heavenly Father, for all whose lives feel empty and unfulfilled; **we pray today.**

For all whose work is tedious and uncreative; **we pray today.**

For all whom illness and infirmity have robbed of activity; **we pray today.**

For all who long for children and are unable to have them; **we pray today.**

For all who feel ashamed through failure; **we pray today.**

Lord, grant us sensitivity and understanding towards those less fortunate than ourselves. May we never belittle them nor despise them but through encouragement and support, build their self-esteem and sense of worth, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

*As our Saviour taught us so we pray*

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen**

### **Hymn – the God of Abraham praise**

**Special intention – in the light of God** read by Jackie Clark.

When this world is as dark as night, you are the one we call the Light.  
**Come Lord Jesus.**

When we are tempted to go astray, you are the one we call the Way.  
**Come, Lord Jesus.**

When the storms of life increase, you are the one we call our peace.  
**Come, Lord Jesus.**

When troubles to our lives bring harm, you are the one who brings us calm.  
**Come, Lord Jesus**

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 us in great humility; so 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 is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

## **Closing Prayers**

Heavenly Father,  
grant us faith in your unending love  
and in the power of your promises;  
when the future appears bleak  
give us hope and thankful hearts  
for all you do for us.  
In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

**Lord of Life, of Light, of Love,  
come that I may fully live;  
come that I may walk in the light;  
come that I may burn with your love.  
Come Lord, this day, I welcome you.**

## **Blessing**

God give you joy and gratitude for all the good things of your lives:  
God give you peace in your homes and where you work;  
God give you health and happiness, enough to live on and the extras to enjoy;  
God give you the blessing of his love in the name of Christ and in the power of  
his Spirit, today and always. **Amen**

Credits:

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