

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	30 November 2025
Service:	Eucharist, Advent Sunday
Preacher:	The Revd Canon Vanessa Baron, Treasurer

Isaiah 2:1-5; Mt 24:36-44

As many of you know, for more than three years now, a Ukrainian couple, Iryna and Vlodymir, have lived with us. They came to England about three months after the war started; in their mid-seventies, never expecting to find themselves as refugees and exiles in the last decades of their life. A couple of weeks ago, trying to be organised, I asked Iryna what she would like for Christmas. She replied, simply and sadly, "I want to be able to go home and live in peace."

Last Wednesday morning I preached at Lancing College and found myself surrounded by 400 young faces. They face an uncertain future, and we know that levels of anxiety are very high among our young people; who or what are they meant to be in a world where so much is changing? Will there be any work for them or will they be replaced by AI? I know too that many people in this congregation have fears for our society, where many people seem so lonely, extreme views flourish and institutions we thought we would trust prove wanting.

The stability and prosperity most of us have known since the end of the Cold War is under threat. We long for peace and prosperity but have a sense that human institutions neither have the knowledge nor the power to be able to withstand the destructive forces around us.

But today is Advent Sunday and over the next few weeks we will read again the prophecies of Isaiah - we've just heard part of Isaiah 2. Like us, Isaiah lived through turbulent, threatening political times. He excelled at being able to express the hopes and fears of the people of his day - how God's People longed for an end to captivity, to be at home with God again. He used powerful metaphors to express the hope that God would not desert his people, but

would come to their aid - metaphors about the desert blossoming; rain falling after drought; the day dawning after a long night. He watched and waited.

But, through the prophecies of Isaiah, we will also hear the call of God to his people to spiritual renewal. So Isaiah 2, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

Isaiah invites us to go with him, to join with all the others who will flock to the temple in Jerusalem, wanting to go to the place where God could be found and where God 'will teach us what he wants us to do' – put an end to the uncertainty.

And not only put an end to the uncertainty, for Isaiah envisages a time when God's peace will come to earth, when 'He will settle disputes among great nations....they will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again.' He looks forward to a time when the drones and the missiles will be melted down; when people like Iryna and Vlodymir will be able to return home.

Increasingly Isaiah saw that this new way of life, God's kingdom, would come in the most unexpected fashion, with the birth of a child – a child who would change everything – a child who would be a light to the nations, the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah was prophesying in a specific historical context, but Christians have always seen in his prophecies a foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. The child who would challenge the narrative that power automatically lies with the strong; whose kingdom was based on love and truth. A child whose death and resurrection would break the last and most powerful enemy of all – death itself and give the hope of Life in all its fulness and Life for evermore.

As we stand at the beginning of Advent – we look at the darkness, the uncertainty around. With Isaiah we wait and watch. As we wait, we examine ourselves to see where the darkness lies in us and ask for God's help to 'walk in the paths he has chosen.'

For our Gospel reading introduces another dimension to Advent. As Jesus came into the world that first Christmas, so we wait for his coming again in glory; knowing that, as Matthew foretold, we 'must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him.'

Advent is a time to respond to the invitation to spend time with God, 'Come let us go to the house of the Lord.' And for a bit of self-examination: Have we allowed Jesus into our lives fully? Has his good news really made the full impact that it might, or are our lives still locked into old patterns, into darkness, into being not at home with ourselves or God or with other people? It's a time of repentance, for looking at ourselves honestly and saying sorry for the things that don't easily face the light.' There will be a time when we are called to give an account. (If you would like to talk things over with one of the clergy or make your confession – please make contact with us.)

Like Isaiah, we long for peace, for truth, for Life and so we watch and wait this Advent, 'let us walk in the light which the Lord gives us!' Amen