



Peace

Sunday
8th December, 2024

Becoming Flesh

Hope and Yet Peace Awaits
When You Return to Me



PAYNESVILLE

Anglican Diocese of Gippsland



Breaking Open the Word

Prepared by

Dennis Webster

St Peter's by the Lake
Paynesville, Victoria Australia
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland

INTRODUCTION

READINGS

Malachi 3.1-4

Canticle: Benedictus

Philippians 1.3-11

Luke 3.1-6

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

Blessed Lord,
who hast caused all holy Scriptures
to be written for our learning;
Grant that we may in such wise hear them,
read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,
that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word,
we may embrace and ever hold fast
the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which thou hast given us in our Saviour
Jesus Christ. Amen.

In today's sermon titled "Hope and Yet Peace Awaits When You Return to Me," we explore the profound themes of hope, peace, and reconciliation in the context of Advent. The sermon highlights the invitation presented in Malachi for believers to return to God, emphasising that this call is as relevant today as it was in ancient times.

Using the wilderness imagery, our struggles are paralleled by the transformative experiences God can provide. We are encouraged to view hardships as opportunities for personal refinement and faith growth, like how John the Baptist was prepared in the wilderness to share a message of hope and repentance.

The sermon further delves into the Canticle of Zechariah, illustrating how God's peace and healing are essential. God calls on every believer to become vessels of this peace and reminds them that genuine acts of kindness and reconciliation are crucial in

fostering community. The message of sharing the Gospel of hope takes centre stage as we challenge everyone to embody God's goodwill through their daily actions and interactions.

The congregation is urged to commit to returning to God with open hearts during this Advent season, trusting in his promises and preparing not only for Christ's arrival but also for his eventual return.

The sermon concludes with a poignant reminder of the communal nature of faith, the importance of uplifting one another, and the collective impact of living out God's peace and hope in the world.

Please note: this sermon was not delivered as a result of the author contracting COVID-19 in the days leading up to the weekend.

Blessed be the supermarket van arriving with paracetamol and fresh coffee!

Prayer

- You can ask God for the strength to follow the sermon's teachings this week and seek His guidance in everyday situations.
- Consider embodying the love and grace discussed in the sermon in your interactions with others, and pray for opportunities.
- You can reflect on any personal challenges related to the sermon and pray for wisdom and courage to overcome them.
- Think about someone in your life who might benefit from the message, and pray for guidance on sharing it with them.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

Introduction: A Call to Return

Each Advent, we are reminded of waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled, the peace that comes from reconciliation, and the ultimate hope in Christ. Malachi speaks of a messenger, one who prepares the way. In Luke, we see John the Baptist fulfilling this role, calling people to repentance and preparing them for the arrival of the Messiah.

But this is not just about ancient times. The call to "return to me," as God invites in Malachi, is still extended to us. We are all invited to prepare the way for ourselves and the world.

1. The Wilderness: Where Hope is Born

When we think about John stepping out of the wilderness, we might picture a place filled with struggles and desolation. Yet, God's loving care transforms the wilderness into a beautiful space where incredible change can happen.

Many of us have our own "wilderness" experiences—times of waiting, doubt, or struggle. Yet, hope is born precisely in these times. Malachi promises that God is coming, refining and purifying,

not a force of destruction but a mission to restore and recreate.

When we find ourselves amidst change, it's normal to feel overwhelmed by our challenges. Yet, it takes remarkable courage to lift that veil of uncertainty and glimpse the new possibilities that await us—filled with peace and lasting hope.

In biblical tradition, the wilderness is not only a place of testing but also a place of profound transformation. Remember how God met his people in their wanderings. He heard their pleas for food and water and gave them manna, guidance, and his presence. Similarly, the wilderness can become a space where we encounter God in new and powerful ways.

John the Baptist's words echo Isaiah's words to the now-lost tribes of Israel in exile. The wilderness was to be the preparation stage. It was where he was refined, equipped, and filled with the urgency of his mission to prepare the way for the Lord. Emerging from the wilderness, John didn't carry despair; he had a message of hope rooted in repentance and the promise of redemption.

The wilderness moments we

encounter—be they seasons of loss, uncertainty, or waiting—hold the potential to prepare us for more incredible things ahead. They lovingly invite us to trust God's faithfulness, even when the outcome remains unseen. If we embrace it, the wilderness can beautifully refine our faith, like how fire refines silver (Malachi 3:3). It gently strips away our self-reliance. Letting go of our ego creates space for a more profound dependence on God's grace.

When we emerge from these experiences, we are uniquely positioned to proclaim God's peace. Like John, our testimony can inspire others to navigate their wilderness moments. The hope in God's promises becomes a light for others, pointing them toward the peace that only Christ can bring.

2. The Benedictus: A Song of Peace

The Canticle of Zechariah said today instead of a Psalm, the Benedictus reminds us of God's enduring faithfulness. In it, Zechariah speaks of a Saviour who will "guide our feet into the way of peace."

This peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the presence of God's wholeness. It heals, reconciles, and unites. Yet, it begins with a return—a turning of our hearts toward God.

Every believer has a beautiful calling and an important

responsibility to spread God's peace to others. This journey starts with a willingness to embrace the peace we hope to share. We can let it overflow into our actions, relationships, and communities from there. We are encouraged to be forerunners of this peace. Peace, creating spaces where others can encounter God's transformative love.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). In our personal lives, this could mean choosing forgiveness over bitterness, seeking reconciliation over division, and being patient when tensions arise. If a relationship is marked by conflict, take the first step toward reconciliation. Offer an apology, extend forgiveness, or reach out in kindness.

God's incredible peace includes justice, mercy, and restoration for everyone. Just like John, who encouraged people to embrace change and live rightly, we can support efforts to heal broken systems and stand alongside those who are marginalised.

John prepared by proclaiming repentance and pointing to the One who would make peace. We, too, are called to share the hope of the Gospel, inviting others to experience God's peace. Whether through words, acts of kindness, or simply listening to someone's story, we are asked to let our lives point to Christ.

Peace blossoms within our communities! Just as the early church illustrated in Philippians, we have the fantastic opportunity to uplift and inspire one another, fostering a warm atmosphere of kindness and shared support. This Advent season, picture inviting someone special into your life. You could host a cozy meal, participate in a small group, or reach out to someone who may feel lonely or need friendly company.

Preparing the way for others to experience God's peace requires sacrifice, courage, and intentionality. It's not always comfortable—John's ministry certainly wasn't—but it's profoundly rewarding. When we commit to living as heralds of God's peace, we participate in transforming hearts and lives.

Let us momentarily turn to what Paul writes joyfully to the Philippians. He thanks them for their partnership in the gospel, reminding us that the work of hope and peace is not a solo journey but a communal or whole-village matter. As John prepared the way and the angels heralded the good news, we are also called to proclaim God's message of hope and peace. This involves humility, service, and a willingness to see others as God sees them.

Advent invites us to be vessels of God's goodwill and messengers of hope. It is a season of expectation, reflection, and preparation—not just for Christ's coming but also for how we live out his message in the here and now. We can effectively do this in everything we do and face in life. The

key is to be open to receiving hope and peace personally.

It's so essential for us to feel hope and peace before we can honestly share God's beautiful gift with others. This journey begins with grounding ourselves in God's promises, trusting in His unwavering faithfulness, and welcoming the peace God graciously offers. God's peace often shines through in simple acts of kindness and the warmth of our presence. Like Christ, we're invited to meet others right where they are, extending love and support with open hearts.

We are stronger as a faith community when we work collectively. Our impact can be transformative, reflecting God's goodwill on a larger scale.

4. Share the Gospel of Hope

At the heart of Advent is the beautiful message of Christ's coming—the ultimate source of hope and peace for all of us. Together, we're encouraged to share this excellent news with everyone as individuals and as a loving community. Advent invites us to prepare our hearts and the world around us for the Lord actively and joyfully. By embracing our roles as messengers of His peace and reflections of His hope, we can truly embody God's goodwill. The call is clear and inviting: we are encouraged to live out God's goodwill in our words and actions, sharing this journey called to reflect His hope, becoming a light in the darkness for those around us.

Advent is a season of tension: hope and peace, already and not yet. It is a

time to reflect on God's promises while actively working to prepare the way for their fulfilment.

As we await the celebration of Christ's birth, let us remember that we are also preparing for his return. Like John in the wilderness and the angels heralding peace, we are called to proclaim the good news with our words and actions.

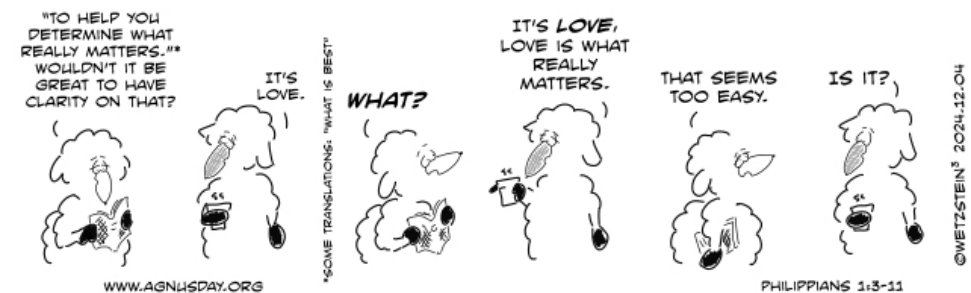
This Advent, the invitation is clear: return to God. Return with all your heart, trusting in His promises and allowing His hope to refine and renew you. Let the peace of Christ guide your steps, transforming how you live, love, and serve.

But this journey is not yours alone. Just as the angels proclaimed peace and goodwill at Christ's birth, you are also called to share in that proclamation. You are called to join their heavenly chorus, spreading God's peace to a world longing for hope. By adopting more of our WOMBAT mission, we embody divine goodwill through our actions, becoming a beacon of God's blessings to those around us.

As we await the celebration of Christ's birth, let us commit to these truths:

- To return to God with repentant and open hearts.
- To let his hope shape our lives and His peace guide our steps.
- To proclaim His blessings boldly, bringing peace and goodwill wherever we go.

The call is yours. Will you answer it this Advent season?



Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to 'return to God' each day, and how can we actively practice this during Advent?

- The sermon highlights God's invitation to 'return to me', underscoring its relevance in our lives today.
- Can you identify a specific area where God is urging you to reconnect? What steps can you take to progress forward?

2. How can our personal 'wilderness' experiences contribute to our spiritual growth, as mentioned in the sermon?

- The sermon describes these experiences as times filled with waiting, doubt, and struggle, but also as opportunities for profound transformation and hope.
- Reflect on a time in your life when finding peace was challenging.
- How can you apply the lesson about peace from the sermon in future conflicts?

3. As discussed in the sermon, how does peace encompass more than just the absence of conflict?

- It states that true peace reflects God's complete presence, which brings healing and reconciliation, beginning with a return to him.
- Think of a moment in your life when seeking peace was tough.
- How can you incorporate the sermon's insights on peace in upcoming disagreements?

4. What significance does forgiveness hold in becoming a peacemaker, according to the sermon?

- It encourages believers to prioritise forgiveness over bitterness and to seek reconciliation following Jesus' teachings.
- Is there a relationship in your life where forgiveness may be needed?
- How could you start that journey?
-

5. How can we embody hope and peace in our community during Advent?

- The sermon emphasises that we are called to share the good news, acting as messengers of God's peace by allowing hope to inspire our actions.
- What is one practical step you can take this week to spread hope or peace in your community?

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore themes of hope, unity, and God's eternal love as we remember those who have gone before us and look forward to the promise of resurrection in Christ.



Day 1 Malachi 3:1

The wilderness often serves as a transformative place in our lives, much like it did for John the Baptist. In times of profound struggle, we may feel lonely and overwhelmed. However, it is precisely in these wilderness experiences that hope begins to emerge. God invites us to enter these seasons with faith, trusting that He is working to refine and purify our hearts, preparing us for new opportunities and beginnings filled with peace and hope.

- What wilderness experience is currently shaping your life?
- How can you invite God to refine you during this time?
- In what ways might your testimony inspire others facing similar wilderness moments?
- Pray for the courage to step into your wilderness with faith.
- Ask God to reveal how He is preparing you for the next season of your life.

Day 2 Luke 1:76-79

The Benedictus encapsulates God's enduring faithfulness as expressed by Zechariah. In a world often marked by conflict and discord, we are reminded that true peace is a gift from God that heals and reconciles. This peace signifies not merely the absence of strife, but the rich presence of wholeness that invites us to turn our hearts toward Him.

As followers of Christ, we play an essential role in spreading His peace. Embracing this calling begins with allowing God's peace to reside within us, transforming our hearts and actions. By embodying the peace we wish to share, we create spaces where others can feel God's loving presence. Each act of kindness and forgiveness contributes to the network of peace that God desires for our communities.

- How are you currently demonstrating God's peace in your relationships?
- What steps can you take toward reconciliation in your life?
- In what ways can you advocate for justice and mercy within your community?
- Reflect on a situation where you can extend forgiveness.
- Pray for divine creativity in finding ways to promote peace in your community.

Day 3 Philippians 1:3-5

Paul's letter to the Philippians emphasises the importance of community in our faith journey. Our hope and peace are not solitary experiences; instead, they thrive in the context of mutual support and love. Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ, we, too, are called to be messengers of hope in our families, workplaces, and communities.

This Advent season, we are encouraged to engage in relationships that reflect God's goodwill and kindness. Sharing meals, participating in small groups, and reaching out to others fosters a sense of belonging and community. No matter how small each action may be, it can illuminate the path for others to experience God's peace and joy, demonstrating that we are stronger together as a faith community.

- In what ways do you contribute to your faith community?
- How can you encourage someone who feels isolated or lonely?
- What opportunities do you have to share the message of God's hope with others?
- Pray for opportunities to connect with others this season.
- Reflect on how you can be a source of encouragement to those around you.

Day 4 Matthew 5:9

As Jesus taught, being a peacemaker is a divine calling that extends beyond mere words. It's an invitation to live out the heart of the Gospel through our actions, reflecting God's love in a world filled with tension. This Advent season provides a beautiful opportunity to step into this calling and create spaces where others can experience reconciliation and healing.

True peace requires sacrifice and intentionality. We are called to take the

first step towards healing as we confront disagreements or conflicts. Each kindness extended and each moment of patience practised builds bridges that connect hearts to the peace Christ offers. Through our choices, we can actively create a community defined by God's transformative love.

- Where is God calling you to be a peacemaker?
- How can you respond to conflict in a way that reflects Christ's love?
- What specific actions can you take to cultivate peace in your surroundings?
- Pray for the strength to be a voice of peace amidst conflict.
- Reflect on your relationships and ask God to reveal where reconciliation is needed.

Day 5 Isaiah 40:3

The heart of Advent is embodied in our call to prepare the way for Christ within ourselves and our communities. This preparation involves returning to God with open and repentant hearts, trusting His promises to refine and renew us. Our willingness to embrace this journey impacts not only our lives but also the lives of others, inviting them into the light of hope.

As we anticipate celebrating Christ's birth, let us remember our role as heralds of peace and goodwill. By sharing the essence of the Gospel through our words and deeds, we can illuminate hope in the lives of those around us.

- This Advent season is a time of expectancy and an active invitation to reflect on the hope and peace we have received.
- What is one way you can prepare your heart for Christ this season?
- In what areas of your life do you need to invite God's renewal and transformation?
- How can you embody the message of hope as you interact with others?
- Pray for a receptive heart to ever-present hope.
- Ask God to reveal opportunities to share His love and peace during this season.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press)

The Worship Cloud: articles by N.T. Wright and Jane Williams

Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>



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This is produced on
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Nations people everywhere.

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