

Third Sunday in Advent

On the third Sunday in Advent, the focus in most traditions turns to John the Baptist. Some remember the story of Mary, using the fourth Sunday to focus on the child Jesus himself. The candle we light is also known as the candle of Joy, recognising the third of the elements hope, love, joy and peace, which are key expressions of God's gift of salvation. In different ways each of these represents "making real" the words and truths that have already echoed through our Advent reflections. Ours is not a faith of words alone, but one which seeks to embody and apply God's truth to the reality of our world. As those who celebrate God's eternal provision, we make this truth real when we challenge any behaviour or narrative that goes against God's principles of generosity and grace. We declare it when we stand against those who would seek to silence the heart-cry of the oppressed.

ISAIAH 40:3-5

A voice of one calling:

**'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

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

**And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**

Today we light another flame
Christ is our hope; God's love is revealed
So that even in the midst of this world's darkness
Our hearts can know joy that no earthly circumstance can extinguish.

And this flame reminds us that where kings and rulers jostled for position,
While politicians and generals amassed their plans and strategies,
It was not in their corridors of power that God's voice was heard
But through the words of a desert dweller in a forgotten corner of our world.

A voice that cried out in the wilderness.
God's message made known through the life and circumstances
Of one that many would consider as having no worth,
Yet whose poverty was no barrier to being the vehicle of God's unstoppable truth.

His was a call for the mountains of oppression to be laid low,
The pathways to justice to be made straight and even.
His was a confident declaration that God's salvation would be seen by all
Unashamedly condemning any who would not turn from the ways of oppression and harm.

This is a moment to pause and consider
Where are the unexpected places, the uncomfortable circumstances, the awkward people,
In which and through whom God might be speaking today?
What are the messages that cry out from wastelands and wildernesses that our society has created?



Just advent

The desert is a place where it is a struggle to find enough.
Where the locusts and rags of disadvantage and deprivation are all that some can muster.
But this is not a place of silence; and if we leave its voice unheeded
What divine message might we fail to hear?

When lonely voices cry from the darkness of the wilderness places
Fashioned by neglect and greed, selfishness and abused power
These are the voices to which we can add our own
That a chorus of righteousness and truth might truly resound in our world.

Loving God
You have come that we might have life;
That those made in your image,
Might be renewed and fulfilled;
That the messages of hope, love and justice
Might begin to become reality
Through our acts of goodness
And our commitment to your cause.

As those who wait for your salvation
To be complete through your final coming
May we also be those
Who declare its message and embody its cause,
In the here and now.

Like candles in the darkness
May our words and actions
Shine the hope of your Gospel in the midst of shadow
Declaring 'enough' where oppression prevails;
'Enough' where the voices of the wilderness are still silenced;
'Enough' when your truth remains hidden
And never enough
While places remain
Where the light of our message has yet to fully shine.

This is the third in a series of four Advent Candle reflections and prayers originally written for the Joint Public Issues Team, exploring God's call to justice through the key themes of this season.