

# Advent Season

## Colour: purple

### Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A

**First Reading Isaiah 7.10-16**

**10** Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz,

**11** Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.

**12** But Ahaz said, I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.

**13** Then Isaiah said, Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?

**14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

**15** He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.

**16** But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

#### What's going on?

The background to this passage is threat to Ahaz, King of Judah. He is worried about invasion by the allied forces of Israel and Aram (Syria). Isaiah offers Ahaz a sign from God in which he should trust. Though Isaiah's prophecy is made in this particular context, it also has a larger bearing on what God will give humanity if we trust in him. The sign is that a virgin (a young woman) will become pregnant and have a son. His name (as with all names in the Hebrew scriptures) is significant: Immanuel means 'God with us'. With the coming of this child the threat of disaster will go away. These words therefore match the account of Jesus' conception and birth and open up for us the idea of Jesus coming to bring salvation to all humanity. The name of the child reminds us that Jesus is 'God with us'. He is the Son of God and has come to us as a human being, truly one of us.

**Psalm 80 (C of E) 1-8; 18-20; Psalm 23 (24) 1-6**

### **Psalm 80**

**Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth**

**2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us.**

**3 Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.**

**4 O LORD God Almighty, how long will your anger smoulder against the prayers of your people?**

**5 You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.**

**6 You have made us a source of contention to our neighbours, and our enemies mock us.**

**7 Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.**

**8 You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.**

**18 Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.**

**19 Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved**

### **Psalm 23(24)**

**1 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;**

**2 for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.**

**3 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?**

**4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.**

**5 He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Saviour.**

**6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.**

## **What's going on?**

**Psalm 80 (in the Church of England liturgy)**

This fits with the passage from Isaiah. The psalmist asks God to save his people. God is a shepherd who should look after his flock and the psalmist tells of his trust that the Lord will bless the people. The request to God to 'make your face shine upon us' is a request for blessing and favour. We are waiting to receive this favour from God which will come to us, supremely, in the person of Jesus. With the psalmist we wait to be saved.

**Psalm 23 (24) (Roman Catholic)**

This beautiful psalm affirms that everything in creation belongs to God. God is wonderful and has done extraordinary things in creation that we can never emulate. People who live good lives and do not turn away from God and who are searching for God can expect to find God's blessing and to recognize his salvation.

**Romans 1.1-7**

**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—**

**2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures**

**3 regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,**

**4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**5 Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.**

**6 And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.**

**7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:**

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

## **What's going on?**

In this letter to the Romans, St Paul knits the previous readings together, reminding his friends that the prophets have prepared the way for people to know and recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Now Jesus, a descendant of

**King David and those that lived in the time of the prophets, has come into the world and been raised from the dead and this has brought those who believe in him the grace and blessing the prophets and the psalmist were waiting for. This promise is not just for the people of Israel but for everyone, and so everyone is called to respond to this good news and be part of it.**

#### **Gospel Matthew 1. 18-25**

##### **The Birth of Jesus Christ**

**18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.**

**19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.**

**20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.**

**21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**

**22 All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:**

**23 The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel— which means, God with us.**

**24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.**

**25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.**

#### **What's going on?**

**This is Matthew's story of the background to Jesus' birth. There are two important strands in Matthew's version. First, the story is told through Joseph's point of view. Mary is to be married to him but he discovers that she is pregnant and not by him. He decides that he will divorce her but is told in a dream that he should stay with her because she is carrying the Son of God. The angel tells Joseph the name he is to give him and Jesus' purpose in coming into the world. Joseph is therefore given this astounding knowledge and his own role, - to take care of Mary and see to Jesus' upbringing and care. We see him accepting this commission, marrying Mary**

**and respecting her pregnancy. When the baby is born, he does as he was asked and calls the child Jesus.**

**The second important strand is that Matthew likes to show how events in Jesus' life fit with the words of the ancient prophets of God, so he refers back to the passage we have already heard in Isaiah, showing how it fits with Jesus. What Joseph does and what Isaiah says fit together, so the prophecy is set inside the story of Joseph's actions and confirmed by the event. Isaiah says that the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and so she does.**

### **Why these passages?**

**Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of Jesus and these readings put together a prophetic expectation of a sign from God and the promise of grace and blessing which comes with it. But there is another element to this, we have to prepare ourselves to be ready for God's grace and blessing. King Ahaz is clearly not in the right place, the people around the psalmist are full of tears, Joseph thinks he is facing a scandal of immorality. It takes trust in the Lord and a commitment to right living to get ready for God's salvation, as Paul reminds his friends. God does give us the information we need to do his will. Like Joseph we have to be willing and open to hear it and act on it.**