

## COMBINED ADVENT STUDY 2020

### UNITING CHURCHES IN MAROONDAH

**Study for Advent 3:  
“Witness to the Good News”  
Prepared by Rev. Brendan Byrne**

#### 1. Gathering

*Spend a moment to settle yourself into a prayerful attitude. If you have a candle, you can light it as a reminder of God’s eternal presence.*

*Listen to the song “Good News” by Ocean Park Standoff. Available at the following links:*

*Spotify:*

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1dXCXb006YbPSAajh6qhaF>

*YouTube:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCaK3D\\_IIbA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCaK3D_IIbA)

#### 2. The First Reading

##### **Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

<sup>1</sup>The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;

<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;

<sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

<sup>4</sup>They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.  
They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

<sup>8</sup>For I the Lord love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

<sup>9</sup>Their descendants shall be known among the

nations,  
and their offspring among the peoples;  
all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.  
<sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
<sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring  
up,  
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

### 3. The First Reflection

The reading from Isaiah comes from the prophet known as Later or Third Isaiah, who was active in the period following the return of the exiled Hebrews to Jerusalem. This prophet declared that the time of judgement against Israel was concluded and that the Chosen People had been re-constituted into a new covenant with God.

1. What do you understand to be the “vengeance of our God” in the light of the proclamation of “the year

of the Lord’s favour”? (v.2) Who – or what – is being avenged? Against whom is this vengeance directed? And what form does it take?

2. If the exile to Babylon arose as a consequence of Israel turning away from covenant, and if God is one who “loves justice” and will give the people “their recompense” (v.8), what is this recompense in the light of Israel’s sinfulness? Does it operate according to the strict rules of justice – or is there some other paradigm at work?

3. What is the hope for the future that is articulated in v.9-11? What does this hope say about the witness which the people are called to exercise?

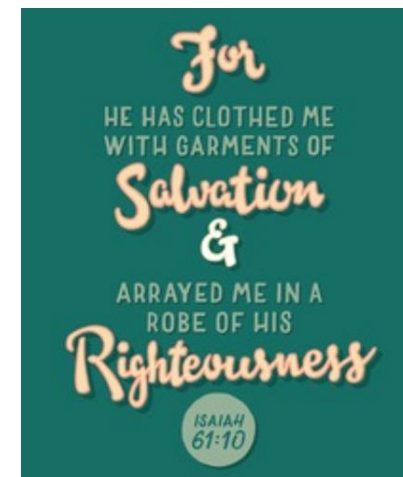


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## 4. The Second Reading

### John 1: 6-8, 19-28

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

<sup>19</sup> This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' <sup>20</sup> He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' <sup>22</sup> Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' <sup>23</sup> He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord" ', as the prophet Isaiah said.

<sup>24</sup> Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup> They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' <sup>26</sup> John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup> the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' <sup>28</sup> This took

place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

## 5. The Second Reflection

The reading from The Gospel According to John comes after the famous opening, in which John declares the co-eternity and co-divinity of the Word with God, and of the coming of the Word into the world as the source of all light and life, against which the darkness cannot stand.

1. John's witness and testimony takes a "negative" form – denying that he is the Messiah, but only a messenger who comes before (v.20-23). What does this say about the witness and testimony to which we are called? What does it say about the Scriptural witness, and how we are to approach and read that witness?

2. John declares that the Messiah stands among the people as an unknown figure (v.26). What does this suggest about the way in which God makes God's-self known to us in our own lives? How does this inform our understanding of Advent as a "season of expectation"?

3. John is described as one who was sent to “testify to the light, so that all might believe through him”. (v.7) He is then questioned by the religious authorities from Jerusalem, who demand answers of him (v.19-23). What does this description of John, and the answers he gives to his questioners, suggest about the answers we should give when the world demands an accounting of our faith and its meaning? What does it suggest about how we can offer real and not false or convenient “hope” to the world?



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## 6. Benediction

God the Creator, who in love for you made you in the image and likeness of the divine – blesses you.

God the Redeemer, who in love for you entered into your humanity that you might be liberated from sin and death – blesses you.

God the Counsellor, who in love for you abides with you today, giving hope of the Kingdom to come – blesses you.

Go therefore into the world to witness to God’s love, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.