

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church, Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Sunday 7th December 2025 (Advent 2)

Bible passage: Isaiah 9:1-7

Advent - shedding light on a forgotten season

Slide Over the nearly forty years I been a clergyman I have watched the season of Advent get smaller and smaller

These four weeks and Sundays have got squeezed by Christmas getting moved earlier and earlier

And even when the word Advent is used, usually about calendars, they have become like “pre-loading” for the indulgence of Christmas with everything from luxury chocolates and coffee pods, to gin countdowns and craft beers behind the calendar doors

I grieve that because I think Advent is a real gift for our times, and this service is all about shedding some light on what that means

As we heard last week, the word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus* and means “coming” - but what or who is coming, and what difference does it make to the way I see life and the world ?

I want to use words in the Bible from the OT prophet Isaiah to help us see who or what is coming and shed light on this forgotten season of Advent

Isaiah was speaking into a dark situation in seventh century BC not so different from how things seem so dark today

A big superpower, Assyria was threatening invasion of the north of the OT land of Israel. The King of Israel was a clever but misdirected man called Ahaz.

Rather than act as the religious leader he was meant to be, he was focused on being a politician, and was starting to be tempted to form alliances for protection with other countries rather than lead his country to trust God to keep His promises to protect and provide

Listen how Isaiah describes the threat from Assyria: *When the people look up or down, they see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness (8:22)*

Isaiah was a prophet whose job was to speak for God to His people - in this reading this is to help God's people make sense of their present situation - why was this happening and how should they respond?

And having made sense, to trust God to keep His promises

Slide Isaiah says it like this: the Lord is hiding his face from the house of Jacob (8:17)

Now why would God do that, hide His face?

It's a word picture Isaiah uses a number of times for how God seems distant from those who persist in doing evil

So the darkness isn't just how we feel when we face frightening, depressing news, like from Ukraine or Gaza or about Assyria for Isaiah's original hearers all those years ago

Darkness is also how it feels when it seems God has forgotten us, seems absent, hiding His face from us

Advent - the invitation (3) slide And that feeling is meant to move us to ask the question: Why?

Pause

There could be all sorts of reasons: but the invitation is to ask: Why?

Slide But note what Isaiah says before and after that: “I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, but I will hope in Him ...” (8:17)

Hope that we will understand why, in love, God does that and hope that in love He will turn to us again

The darkness is real, but it's not the whole story

Let's hear the passage now - the place names are all towns that have been invaded already by the Assyrians but he also mentions other towns not yet invaded and where God wants it to be different if only the people themselves could be different

The reading will also contain some echoes of God's faithfulness in past dark times - bringing His people from the darkness of slavery in Egypt out through Passover and the parting of the sea to the light of freedom

And its that memory of faithfulness in the past, that is the foundation for hope in the present

Reading slides READ 9:1-5

Please shed slide

Advent - the invitation (2) slide The prophecy is an invitation to be real about what is - to see the pain, the destruction, the fear, the darkness

But not to stop there

The prophecy is to be even more real about God and His big picture, His lighter future

Why? Not because of improved circumstances. But because He is faithful, can be trusted whatever the circumstances and whatever the timescale

It doesn't come over so clearly in our translation but in the original Hebrew the descriptions of what will be in the future are in the past tense

Isaiah is so sure of God's faithfulness, that it is as if the future events have already happened

And so he goes on

Reading slides READ 9:2, 6-7

Please shed slide ... and there it is: God Himself acted for His people at a moment in history, in 7C BC, to eventually restore and reverse the dark dangers for Isaiah's first hearers, although only the other side of defeat and a time in Exile

The bigger picture is for all of history, that God will come Himself to bring his justice and peace for all - for this is a looking ahead to Jesus, the light of the world who will come

And even then, the victorious pushing back of darkness by light in the cross and resurrection, will be slow, but it is sure

So we still need to walk by faith, often in the darkness, trusting that, as Isaiah puts it: “the zeal of the Lord will do this”

Advent - the invitation (3) slide This is what Advent is all about

The invitation to see the darkness differently

Not to deny it, or minimise it

But to trust that what we see on the news is not the full picture - that even as we walk in the darkness, light is coming, God is at work because our God is faithful to fulfil His good purposes

Corrie ten Boom slide Corrie ten Boom and her family were Dutch Christians who believed this way of seeing darkness and light

During WW2 in Holland this way of seeing prompted and empowered them to do the dangerous work of hiding Jews - her story is called *The Hiding Place*

They were eventually betrayed, arrested and sent to the terrible darkness of Ravensbruck concentration camp - her father and sister both died there, but she survived

Pause and think of the darkness she would have seen ...

Corrie Ten Boom was an expert on the darkness of human hatred and human suffering, and she was an even greater expert on this sort of Advent hope

Tunnel slide She once said: "When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark; you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the driver."