

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all
and also with you.

Let us confess our sins to God our Father.

Heavenly Father, we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault;
by what we have done and by what we have failed to do.
We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen

Absolution Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy on you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all
goodness, and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Isaiah 40:1-11 [God's People Are Comforted]

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her
penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the
uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of
the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of
the Lord has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All people are grass, their
constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon
it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of
our God will stand for ever.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,

lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'
See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

This is the word of the Lord;

Thanks be to God.

Mark 1:1-8 [The Proclamation of John the Baptist]

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” ’,

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Advent means one thing: “COMING”. For these next three weeks, if we keep this Advent season correctly, we prepare for the second most important feast of the Church – the birth – literally, the Coming – of our Lord Jesus to earth.

We try to mark that preparation liturgically, too, by wearing violet or purple stoles. We use that same colour in Lent, when we prepare ourselves for the primary Christian festival of Easter. When you see violet, think “preparation”.

If it’s put like that, it is actually quite an important time of year. But, speaking as a father, I know that’s easier said than done. Christmas presents don’t just appear magically, unless you are Father Christmas! So it’s a bit frenetic, to say the very least. In our civilization we also mark the turning of the year and the hope, the promise of longer, brighter days, at much the same time. We take time to celebrate our families, both near and far. We join with friends and work colleagues. We eat and drink, and by golly we make merry, in the darkest days of the year! I’m not one who thinks that that is inherently wrong!

But it is a very good thing to ponder what we believe in. What Christianity means to us. I still haven't got my small head around the fact that God, the Father of us all, sent his Son to us. And the equally difficult notion that he didn't come as a wrathful monster, or an avenging king. But as a defence-less baby. That's the problem with Christianity. It doesn't fit into the norms of our western civilization very well, does it? Perhaps we should, as a Church, provide for a few days for each parishioner to go on retreat during Advent. Just think of taking some time out, just to think about what we believe in. Mark has much to say to us on the same topic. Right from the start, Mark gives us a clue to what his message is. He quotes from his own Hebrew Bible, from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah:

"Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight".

And we read that too a few minutes ago. But Mark didn't pick it at random – it was very deliberate. Why? – because it introduced the point he wanted to make. That piece was written when the Israelites were in Exile in what is today's Iraq. They had been defeated, and carted off to Exile in Babylon in 583 BCE.

All the things that they felt were crucial to their religion and their God had disappeared – no Temple; no Ark of the Covenant; no Jerusalem; no land. No certainty that their God, their YWYH had any time for them any more. They had to radically re-think what they believed, and in whom they believed. They were imprisoned there for more than forty years – but it gave them enough time to re-construct their religion; their faith in God. And at the end of that bad time, Isaiah began to give them hope. Even today, it is beautiful lyrical poetry: "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem [that is, to the Israelites] and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid." And he maps out how God will ease their return to Jerusalem: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. How fabulous! A highway! This is Bob the Builder stuff, isn't it! And there's more! "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall be made level, and the rough places a plain." Our Isaiah piece is lyrical, and poetic. But what is it saying? It's saying to the Israelites that the road home will be made nice and flat - easy to travel on. Today's psalm 85 begins with a reassuring couple of verses. It tells us:

"Lord, you were gracious to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

You forgave the offence of your people and covered all their sins."

And then, we are told, "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed" And that's what Mark is doing with his Gospel. That's the whole point. He wants to reveal this Messiah, this Jesus, as the Son of God. Glorious. And the time has come to do that – to acknowledge that Jesus is God. That's why he doesn't start his gospel with stories of Jesus' birth, but with this transformative figure - John the Baptist. Just like Isaiah showed the Exiled Jews the way back home from Babylon, John the Baptist is showing us the way home: the way to the appearance of the Son of God – of Jesus. His part in this story is to alert everyone to the coming of Jesus.

These two “comings”; these promises of coming home to God, are the overall message of this season of Advent.

Travel with us through Advent to the Feast of Christmas and beyond, as we read through the Gospel of Mark, from beginning to end, this year. Live it. Enrich and deepen your faith in God in the process.

And now to the one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,

he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the Second Sunday of Advent

Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world, and will send him again to be our judge: Give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that when he comes again we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Lord, in your mercy ...

And we pray, too, for our own country, and for Michael D. Higgins our President. We pray for our leaders; for members of the Oireachtas and of our public services, that they may live and work honourably, ethically and fairly, as they seek to steer our country to an equitable, safe future. *... hear our prayer*

Be mindful, O Lord, of your people present before you, and of those who are absent through age, sickness or infirmity. We pray for our own community; for those we know. Let us pray for the people for whom the COVID pandemic is a constant fear and threat, for those who have been struck by the Virus. Lord, shine upon all who are in the darkness of suffering or grief; that in your light they may receive hope and courage, and in your presence may find their rest and peace. ... *hear our prayer*

Let us be quiet now, as we place into God's hands those for whom we want to pray. We know that he loves them with a greater love than we could ever imagine. In the stillness of your house, Lord, we are, for a few moments, here with you, for them, as we ask for your intercession. ... *hear our prayer*

When our span of life is over, we pray that we will join with all your saints in the joys of your eternal kingdom. O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublesome life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes; the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then Lord, in your mercy, grant us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last. ... *hear our prayer*

Merciful Father,

**Accept these our prayers for the sake of your Son,
Our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever, Amen.

Dismissal:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.**

Amen