

ADVENT 2025



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Introduction

George Frideric Handel's "Messiah" has provided some of the soundtrack that many associate with the Christmas season for almost three centuries. We listen each year to its majestic arias and soul-stirring choruses with scant knowledge of the background behind its composition and initial public offerings. Such knowledge, however, is an important aid in the work's message in our current context.

For instance, while we associate "Messiah" solely with Handel, it was actually a joint composition. The Scriptural passages for "Messiah" were chosen by Charles Jennens, who often provided librettos to accompany Handel's compositions. Jennens offered "Messiah's" libretto as a testimony for what he believed about the times in which he lived and aspirations for the future. England at the time was in a state of supreme upheaval due to political confusion over whether the Hanoverians, who were Protestants, legitimately ruled the Kingdom or the exiled Stuarts, who were Catholic, belonged on the throne. There was a constant threat of rebellion to restore the Stuarts to the throne, and the religious aspects of the debate only added to the tension and turmoil. Society was also roiled by a new form of journalism, the newspaper, that was more concerned with sensationalism and sales than with facts and truth. Jennens wove together various Scriptures so that the overarching message one hears as "Messiah" unfolds is the supremacy of hope in the face of the tumultuous times in which Jennens and Handel lived. To be sure, this message is one that we need to hear once again as we, too, face such difficult days.

To that end, this year's Advent devotion brings together two congregations, Enfield and Grove Park, that, though they have never worshipped together, share similar journeys. Both congregations have been shaped by an emphasis on musical excellence, through valuing the contributions of all God's children

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regardless of background, and a consistent message of hope and redemption found through the Messiah. As we hear voices that may be foreign to us, let us listen more closely for the message of hope each presents and allow ourselves to be strengthened by them.

Each of these voices also pays tribute to the fact that the Messiah always offers second chances. The first person to ever sing the contralto part in “Messiah” was Susannah Cibber, who had her reputation sullied due to an adulterous relationship. Yet, when she sang the “He was despised” aria, she did so with such power that one clergyman called out, “Woman, for this, be all thy sins forgiven.” Her career was reborn in that moment, and she went on to a life of acclaim and peace. Furthermore, Handel’s music was associated with public performances for many years, which raised funds for the Foundling Hospital, an orphanage for children abandoned by their mothers. The money raised created the second chances that these children desperately needed. As you read the following reflections, take time to inquire where second chances are needed in your life, be they received or given to another, and allow the power and majesty of “Messiah” to enable you to write another chapter in this story of hope and second chances.

- The Reverend Dr. Marc Sanders

1. Sunday, November 30

Isaiah 40:1-3

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

Writing a devotion or commentary takes me back to my early days of ministry. I would proudly spread out the resources that new pastors had bought or been gifted to aid in ministry. Long before the internet the pastor's tools included a full set of The Interpreters' Bible - each volume of commentary seemed to weigh about four pounds. Isaiah is in volume 5. Others were Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary, The Mercer Two Volume Commentary, and my most treasured book of all, my leather bound Oxford Annotated Bible given to me by Enfield Baptist Church in 1985 on the occasion of my ordination.

Isaiah 40 is found at the opening of the second major section of the Book of Isaiah. This part of Isaiah is believed to have been written towards the end of the Babylonian exile. The impending end of the Babylonian captivity and the prospect of return to the land of Israel had been long awaited. This passage provides hope to an exiled nation that has suffered humiliation, defeat, and displacement. The exiled are experiencing divine forgiveness and God is now offering comfort and redemption. As Christians we should always give comfort to those in need - remember that offering comfort is also a divine commandment. This reminds us of the Advent message of hope, relief, and joy.

Isaiah serves to remind us that God's judgments are intended to correct rather than destroy. John Calvin, one of the most important figures in church history, theology, and central to the Reformation movement, believed this part of scripture gave the example of God's mercy and demonstrated that God will always be a refuge for his people. Calvin thought this Isaiah passage was a pivotal point that began a turning from the themes of judgment to the message of hope and restoration. This is the same message of Advent.

One of the truths of this passage, for me at least, is that God does not need man (us) to prepare a highway for Him to appear. God did not need man's help to create the universe. John's Gospel teaches us "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and without him was not any thing made that was made." God did not need our assistance in preparing for the Advent of Christ the Lord. The road is made straight and paved with reflection, prayer, scripture, meditation, service, and offering comfort to our neighbor and stranger. We don't make the road so God can get through. We make straight the highway so we can journey to Him.

May this Advent journey be one of Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love.

- The Reverend Craig Gaither

Isaiah 40:4-5

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low: the crooked straight and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

Even after having total knee replacement in both of my knees, I still find it difficult to maneuver myself in some places. Steps still give me difficulty. Trails that are rocky, hilly and rough keep me from seeing some magnificent places such as waterfalls. Deep sand at the beach keeps me from enjoying putting my feet in the ocean. However, when there are ramps (or elevators), I can go to higher (or lower) places. When trails are smooth and flat, I can walk the trails and see where they lead. When the sand is packed down, I can walk to the ocean and enjoy being in the water. I am able to have the same experiences as those who don't have limitations.

I compare this to verse 4 in our passage in Isaiah that says “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.” The glory of the Lord is revealed so that all flesh will see.

What is the glory of the Lord? It is the visible manifestation of God's character, power and presence. God's glory is shown in His creation; from the ocean, the earth and the heavenly bodies. God's glory is shown through powerful deeds and mighty acts throughout time. God's glory is shown through the lives and actions of people. Most of all, God's glory is shown in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual obstacles have been leveled so that all of us may experience the glory of the Lord through Jesus Christ. This Advent, let us prepare our hearts by removing obstructions that keep us from experiencing the glory of the Lord.

- Mrs. Kim Cain

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us."

When the LORD God, King of the Universe takes the time to give us a sign, the smart thing to do is to pay attention.

According to the margin notes in the NIV Quest Study Bible, King Ahaz reigned over Judah during the Syro-Ephraimite War in 734-733 BC. Several nations in the region, including the northern kingdom of Israel, were controlled by Assyria. Israel and Aram formed an alliance in order to throw off Assyria's yoke, and then they tried to force the southern kingdom of Judah to join their conspiracy.

King Ahaz and his people heard about the two bullies headed their way, threatening to invade Judah, tear it apart, and divide it among themselves. Isaiah 7 says their hearts were "shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind." If they had lived in times of American cowboys, they would have been shaking in their boots.

"Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid," the Lord assured them through Isaiah. "It will not take place. It will not happen." He added, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."

The prophet Isaiah relayed another message to Ahaz: "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest height." Ahaz thought this was a bit much, refusing to "put the Lord to the test."

Then in verse 13 of chapter 7 Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? THEREFORE, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

He went on to explain that by the time the young woman's son in the prophecy back in Ahaz's time was grown, Judah's two enemies, Aram and Israel, would be destroyed. And so it came to pass.

Why was a sign offered to Ahaz? It was a last ditch offer from God to give Ahaz a way out, saving the nation from needless tragedy—as though the Lord was saying, "What will it take to prove this to you?" The offer of a sign revealed God's grace and ongoing concern for Judah's destiny.

Flash forward 730-some years to Matthew 1:23. A young virgin girl Mary, also of the house of David, was pledged to be married to a carpenter named Joseph. Matthew, the former tax collector and a disciple of Jesus reported, "Before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 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. 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.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet (that's Isaiah, over 700 years before): 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel,' which means 'God with us.'"

Like old King Ahaz, perhaps Joseph felt a bit shaken like a tree in the wind at the prospect of what the angel of the Lord asked him to do. But he, along with the very first followers of Christ in the years to come, remembered the sign from God. They paid attention and followed the Messiah straight into the arms of a merciful, loving Abba Father.

The same LORD of the Universe is still telling us, “Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid.” (T-shirts encouraging us to “keep calm” are still popular today, oddly enough.)

The Lord’s advice, “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all,” sounds strangely like the Aaron Tippin country hit, “You’ve got to stand for something (or you’ll fall for anything).” Who knew that God liked t-shirts with pithy slogans and country music? Or maybe he just continues to find new ways to share his message.

Can you imagine it? The Lord himself, full of grace and love, reached down from heaven with signs to calm and reassure us when we’re shaking in our boots. He cares for us “in the deepest depths” and “in the highest height,” as Isaiah proclaimed.

The promise and reality of “Immanuel, God is with us!” is every bit as miraculous and amazing as a virgin birth. Let’s read his signs and follow his Son.

- Mrs. Nancy Cardwell Webster

4. Wednesday, December 03

Isaiah 40:9

“O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain. O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!”

Isaiah 40:9 encourages believers to have courage and boldness in proclaiming the good news of God by shouting "Behold your God" from a high place without fear. We should focus on the confidence that comes from knowing God's presence and power. It is important to share this hope with others, and remember that God is a powerful and caring shepherd who is both strong and gentle.

- Mrs. Linda Bozard

Isaiah 60:1-3

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

Isaiah uses the imagery of opposites to illustrate God’s redemption of his people, and beyond that, the redemption of all creation. Good and evil. Cloud and fire. Light and dark. The contrast between what has been and what will be—both in Isaiah’s time and in the far future—gives us hope for the restoration of all things. Following a chapter of lament and judgment, Isaiah turns to its opposite: rejoicing and glory, beginning with the rising of God’s light. We can rightly view this as taking place at the Second Coming of Christ, but it began at his First Coming.

The glory of the Lord rises first on his holy city, Jerusalem, and is then reflected by his people in a way that draws the nations to himself. How incredible it is that Jesus did all this in his birth, ministry, and sacrificial death! Devout Simeon, who was promised a glimpse of the Savior before he died, recognized Jesus as the light of God’s glory: “My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:30–32).

With his prophetic insight Isaiah could see that, despite the restoration of Israel following Babylonian captivity, there would once again be “thick darkness” upon the peoples of the earth. The idolatry that led Judah into exile may have been dealt with, but the sin issue remained. There was no perfect, ultimate sacrifice to finally dispel the darkness. That is, until the “sun of righteousness” arose and offered his own spotless life on our behalf.

God chose to send this sacrifice in the person of his son, dwelling among sinful humanity and all its evil desires and actions. The light that would draw peasants and kings came into this world in the lowliest of circumstances, yet with the greatest of purposes. As we celebrate this Advent season, may we live in the light that shines in the darkness and is not overcome by it—the light of the incarnate Christ!

- Dr. Matthew Byrd

Isaiah 9:2

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”

Christians often interpret this verse as a different prophecy about the coming of Jesus Christ, who is identified as the great light that shines on the dark world. The passage uses the contrast between darkness and light to represent a transition from the state of hopelessness and despair to one of salvation and new life. This verse also lets us know that spiritual sight is given from the changing of the heart that has been in the darkness. The prophecy is set against the historical backdrop of conflict, where the land particularly the northern region of Israel was in a state of devastation. It is a prophecy about a turning point from the darkness to the light, symbolizing Hope, redemption, and the coming of a savior. “People who walked in the darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned,” speaks to a future of immense Hope breaking through a time of despair. This prophecy is historically rooted in Israel’s troubled past and is widely interpreted as being fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, seen as the “light of the world,” who brings salvation and Hope to those living in spiritual darkness. The verse offers a timeless message of Hope, assuring that even in the darkest times, light and deliverance are possible through God’s promise. As I constantly evaluate this verse, it indicates a possible uplifting movement from darkness to light, as God promised. God lights our darkest hour. Psalm 37, verse 34, says, “Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land and the wicked will be cut off...” (darkness), so when we wait on the Lord, not only does the darkness come into the light as God promised, we will also see the wicked of this darkness be cut off and out of the lights.

- Mr. Warren Parks

Isaiah 9:6

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

When I hear these words, the first thing that comes to my mind is our choir singing the anthem “For Unto Us a Child Is Born” from Handel’s Messiah. (In my memories I can still sing the alto!) It’s a scripture that’s always read in church services at some point in December. We see the foretelling of Jesus in Isaiah’s prophesy here, not only as a baby but as “God.”

I love seeing Jesus in the Old Testament, such as here, some 700 years before His birth. God’s plan always included sending His Son to save a fallen world.

Isaiah’s words describe Jesus as:

“Wonderful, Counsellor” ... He would lead His people with Godly wisdom and guidance.

“The Mighty God” ... He is the divine Messiah.

“The everlasting Father” ... He is not only the creator of eternity, but He also gives “eternal care, protection, and love.”

“The Prince of Peace” ... He gives us never-ending peace because we have eternal life due to His sacrifice, and we have love and joy giving over to peace with others, including our enemies.

How wonderful to see Jesus in the Old and New Testaments.

It all fits together, God’s loving plan from the beginning, to save us. As we prepare our hearts to welcome/celebrate the Savior through scripture reading and beautiful anthems and carols, let us focus on all Jesus has done for us, just as Isaiah described through these names. Jesus’s ultimate love for us shines through as our “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

- Mrs. Sallie Griffin

8. Sunday, December 07

Luke 2:8-9

“There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.”

About 70 years ago, when Hwy 301 was the main route from Florida to New York, Enfield was a busy little town. On the corner of Hwy 301 and Burnette Avenue, there were two businesses owned by Enfield Baptist members. On this corner there was a display of a live nativity scene. I cannot remember if this happened more than one year, but I do know it had a lasting impression on me.

The scene was of different animals, shepherds, angels and the Holy family. I can only assume it was an outreach of the Enfield Baptist Church because of the location. It was such an illuminated bright sight on this corner as cars passed by.

In reflection, I can only imagine what a glorious, and unexpected surprise this must have been to Christmas travelers at the midpoint of their journey. We can only hope that it left a lasting impression on them, as it did on me, and that lives were transformed by this reminder of the birth of our Savior.

- Mr. Roger Judge

Luke 2:10-11

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

When studying to complete this devotion, the theme that kept popping up was the joy the angels bring to the shepherds. It comes from a place of privilege to be able to skip over the “fear” part of this scripture. The shepherds were among the marginalized during their times, as their profession was one many considered lowly. In biblical context, humans were accustomed to fearing the presence of angels because it usually signified they had sinned. Fear thrives on the marginalized. We can relate this today to our neighbors we find within our community.

I work with people every day who live in fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of the known. Fear of injustice. Fear of failure. Fear of success. And too often, because of their histories, fear of authority. I must remember and acknowledge these fears before I can speak of joy.

We may not relate to this fear, or we may skip right to the joy part, because we know what this Good News meant to the world. We must remember when navigating life, not all of our neighbors and friends do.

Lord, we thank you for the privilege of knowing joy. We thank you for the joy that comes from the gift of Your Son. In your name we pray. Amen.

- Mrs. Emily Flack

Luke 2:13-14

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men.”

This scripture is about the proclamation of peace on earth with the birth of Jesus, symbolizing the fulfillment of God’s promise to bring reconciliation and harmony between humanity and God through the Messiah.

The message of peace and goodwill in this Luke passage is a timeless one. The birth of Jesus reminds us that this divine peace is available to us all...just for the asking. The world is full of chaos and challenges and wars and sometimes we wonder if we will ever experience peace in our time. These verses are certainly relevant to our lives and we are called to embrace and share the Advent peace with others. The transformative power of love needs to be evident in our daily lives.

When I think of a community divided by conflict I think of my many years of mission and relief work in Bosnia. I worked and lived among people divided by ethnicity and religion where neighbors fought neighbors, friends rose up against life long friends, and children were segregated in school based on their ethnicity. After three decades of working with children from multiple ethnicities and religions I learned the most effective way to teach peace and reconciliation was to show by example what they look like. To talk to these same children today as adults many will tell you how their lives were changed.

Wounds of war, loss, destruction, and mistrust run very deep and usually for a life time. But I have seen hostilities crumble away while celebrating the birth of Jesus. The message of peace and goodwill can become a reality and promote healing and forgiveness when that harmony is seen in us.

May we all be vessels of the transformative love and reconciliation of the Christ child.

- The Reverend Craig Gaither

John 1:29

"Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world."

You can't mistake John the Baptist as he is on the shore of the Jordan River baptizing people. His wild hair and camel hair clothes give him a commanding presence, not to mention his fired up preaching. I picture some fired up with him while others look on out of curiosity and maybe others milling around. But he preaches with zeal as he baptizes people who are seeking a renewal and redemption of sins. His message is offering something they wanted and needed.

In the midst of this exciting revival John spots Jesus coming up the shore. His demeanor is quite different from his second cousin and people notice. John recognizes Him immediately and exclaims "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." What a spectacle of wonder and awe that must have been! This declaration is full of symbolic significance. It comes from the Old Testament imagery and points us toward the redemptive work of Christ. This scripture truly helps us understand the essence of Jesus' mission and its implications for us all.

Today's world desperately needs hope and reconciliation as we live with so much division and strife. One of the gifts of this season of waiting and hope is God's grace - the grace that will lead us to gifting that grace to others.

Juggling life, work, and preparations that never seem to end, imagine someone stepping up and lifting all our burdens. The Lamb of God does just this in our spiritual lives. May that immense love lead us to honor the greatest gift and sacrifice that can only come from the Lamb as we strive to live everyday in the light of the new born Christ!

- The Reverend Craig Gaither

Isaiah 53:5

*5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

“Van said it would be like this.” That’s a common saying at our house. Whenever the weather is just what the meteorologist said it would be, one of us will say, “[insert the name of whatever meteorologist we saw] said it would be like this.”

Take a moment to read Isaiah 52:13-53:12, commonly known as the Suffering Servant passage. Scholars still debate about exactly who Isaiah’s original audience thought he was referring to; in fact, I had to write college paper on exactly that topic. (Not that I’m a scholar!) Of course, we know who Isaiah was inspired to write this about, even if they (and even he) didn’t.

Compare Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection with what Isaiah said here. Hundreds of years before Christ, Isaiah said it would be like this, and it was.

In Psalm 22, which is not included in *The Messiah*, David uses phrases like “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. ‘He trusts in the Lord,’ they say, ‘let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him’” (v. 7-8); “They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment” (v. 18); and most poignantly, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 1). A thousand years before Christ, David said it would be like this, and it was.

Finally, consider Revelation 13:8, which refers to Jesus as “the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.” From the very beginning of the world, God knew it would be like this, and it was.

It’s so amazing. God knew that if He created the world, it would cost the life of His Son — and He did it anyway! He inspired His prophets to tell us over and over that it would be this way. And, beginning with Advent and going through Easter, it was.

And so it will be, when God finishes doing what He’s already told us He will do.

- The Reverend Dale S. Cain

Isaiah 53:6

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

All we like sheep have gone astray. This passage like many others in the Bible helps us to understand ourselves through comparison with sheep. The first question we must ask is why do sheep go astray? Sheep wander off for many reasons. Sometimes they wander for lack of fencing, or in search of better food. Other times they get distracted or curious and sometimes they follow another rebellious member of the flock.

As we wander from God it's often for these same reasons. We don't follow the law that God has given us, ignoring the fences that He provided. We are often in search of something better or more exciting. We think little of others, considering our needs and wants to be of the utmost importance. Much like sheep, we are prone to follow others, even allowing them to lead us from God.

The comparison with sheep does not end here. Sheep have a terrible sense of direction and cannot find their way back to the flock after wandering off. They need a shepherd to search them out, to find them and to bring them back into the flock where there is safety and security.

We, like sheep, could not find our way. God knew that man could not save himself and he provided for our greatest need by sending his own Son to earth. Jesus came, knowing no sin, and took on our sin that we may be made right with God. We are a sheep of His flock, a sinner of God's own redeeming. May we praise God this Advent season for sending a Savior to find us, redeem us and bring us back into the flock.

- Mrs. Eliza Sanders

Isaiah 53:8

"He was cut off out the land of the living: for the transgressions of thy people was he stricken."

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be unjustly arrested, judged and executed for our transgressions, leaving no succeeding generations to defend him. In Advent we celebrate a humble Christ, remembering his suffering and death as well as his birth. The Messiah's sacrifice provides the atonement for our sins and is the main theme of the Gospel message throughout Advent. This sacrifice is the most perfect gift!

During Advent we should focus on the Messiah's love for us, as well as the hope and peace he left with us as we await his triumphant return. This verse invites contemplation of sacrifice, humility and love expressed through suffering. Since Advent is a season of hope and waiting, may we reflect on the profound mystery of Christ's life with us.

May we prepare our hearts to receive the Savior who was born for our redemption.

- Mrs. Alma Hux

Psalm 24:7-10

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.”

In Psalm 24, we read of the sovereignty and glory of God. He has authority over the earth and all its inhabitants. We are told that if we want to come near Him, we must have clean hands, pure hearts, truthful lips, and undivided loyalty. We must prepare ourselves and open wide the doors, so that the mighty, victorious King can enter.

This passage holds such an interesting contrast with the birth of Jesus. The Psalmist reminds us of God’s sovereignty and power, but the Christmas story tells us of a helpless baby. The sovereign God has all power, but the Babe needs to be held and fed, comforted and changed.

Another contrast is between the preparation required for entrance. The Psalmist teaches that we must be clean, pure, truthful, and loyal in order to come near God. To enter the manger, however, you just had to have a willing heart to receive the message of the angels and a strong desire to enter His story.

While the picture we see in Psalm 24 is different from the one we see in the story of Jesus’ birth, this does not mean that one is correct and the other is not. Nor does it mean that one story has replaced the other. Instead, both pictures are needed in order for us to understand more of the nature of our God.

God is high and holy, majestic and powerful. He demands holiness and loyalty from His followers. He is also loving and kind, who took on flesh and lived among us. Because we are unholy and disloyal, He made it possible for us to be forgiven and He helps us grow to follow Him more closely.

What a glorious day it will be when we truly see the sovereign God, the “God with us,” and the indwelling Spirit in all of God’s glory. On that day we will join the mighty chorus, saying “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13)

- The Reverend Dale S. Cain

Hebrews 1:6

“And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.”

The birth of a baby is so exciting. The parents have long waited for the child to arrive. Everyone in the child's family is thrilled and wants to hold and cuddle the new baby. But, as special as this new child is, it cannot be as special as Jesus.

God's angels understood the birth of Jesus fulfilled a promise God made to “cause a righteous branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land,” (Jeremiah 33:15) and they worshiped Him.

We join with the angels to worship the Christ child that has come to us. He is Immanuel.....God with us. This is how God showed His love for us; He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.

We can only imagine the joy of the multitude of angels as they sang of the fulfilment of God's promise of a Messiah. We can experience a glimpse of that joy, and know there is more to come in Heaven someday.

- Ms. Debby Armstrong

Romans 10:15,18

“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! ... Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.”

In Handel's Messiah, one of the most joyful and soaring choruses sets Paul's words from Romans 10: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." The music dances with lightness, almost as if the feet themselves are leaping across mountains to deliver good news.

Paul quotes Isaiah to describe the ministry of Christ's messengers—but ultimately, these words point first to Jesus Himself, the original Bearer of Good News. Before apostles were sent, before preachers were commissioned, He was sent by the Father. He is the One whose feet walked dusty roads, entered forgotten villages, and carried Him toward the cross for our salvation. His whole life was the embodiment of "glad tidings of good things."

Romans 10:15 reminds us that the gospel does not drift into the world on its own. It is carried. It is borne by feet—feet that move because God has sent them. Advent tells us that the Father sent Jesus into the world not as an idea or a message, but as a person who walked among us. Jesus' ministry was never distant or abstract; it had weight, rhythm, dust, and steps. His life shows us a God who comes close.

In verse 18, Paul says that the message has gone "to all the earth." What an echo of Messiah! From the opening cry, "Comfort ye, my people," to the triumphant "Hallelujah," the music declares that the saving work of Christ is not hidden or silent. The Word made flesh has spoken—and His voice still resounds. His life and ministry continue to extend into "the ends of the world" through every believer who carries His message.

This is the heart of Advent:

Jesus was sent so that the world could hear. We are sent so that the world might still hear.

The Child born in Bethlehem grew to be the Messiah who preached good news, proclaimed liberty, healed the brokenhearted, and announced the kingdom of God. His feet were beautiful because they moved toward us in love. And now, He invites us into that same movement.

- Mrs. Cynthia Willets

Psalm 2:1-4

"Why do the nations so furiously rage together: and why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed. ... 'Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us.' He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn: the Lord shall have them in derision."

When I was first approached to contribute to an Advent Devotional booklet with themes from "The Messiah," my thought was "that's easy." I know most of the choruses in that great work from memory and some of the solos. Though some of that work could be called dark, most of it is joyous and celebratory. It is both thrilling and satisfying to give all you have in practicing and singing this music. Then I read the passage in Psalm 2 which was assigned to me and I thought who ever did this must be a close relative of Scrooge. Christmas is a time to escape the tragedy and ugliness in the world and focus on God's great gift of his son and why he came to earth. It is not hard to see parallels in our world today of leaders who "rise up... against the Lord," who would use the Bible as a prop and appear to have no clue what it says and teaches. But the writer of this Psalm does not seem to know my God, the God that I worship. God does not laugh or scoff at those who think they are in control or all powerful. He weeps for them because they have lost their way.

I am reminded of old story I heard many years ago which comes to mind when I think of Christmas. I will call it "The Parable of the Birds." One Christmas Eve a father and husband was sitting alone in his easy chair enjoying a crackling fire while his family had gone to church for the Christmas Eve service. He let his wife handle all the "religion" and saw no need to celebrate Christmas other than the joy it brought his children with all the presents. It had never made sense to him that God had to send his son to save us all. It had begun to snow, and he was enjoying the beauty as the ground was being covered. Then he noticed the birds that were trying to find something to eat and even looking in his window as if there could be shelter there. It occurred to him that he had a nice barn in his yard that could provide shelter, so he put on his coat and went out in the cold and opened the barn door. He backed away and watched, thinking the birds would find their way to shelter. They did not. He circled around behind the birds and tried to shoo them toward the barn. They flew away and came back to where they were. He sprinkled seed on top of the snow and made a trail to the barn. The birds ate the seed and went right back to his window. Frustrated, he went back inside, saddened that refuge was there for his birds if only they could find their way home. He thought to himself, "If only I was a bird, I could fly down and show them the way." Then, for the first time in his life, he understood Christmas. Mankind had to be shown the way home.

I am not naïve enough to think this Christmas will change our world, but we as Christians can do our part. As we approach this joyous season let us be grateful that God has sent us his Son to show us the way. We have only to follow.

- Mr. Larry Armstrong

Revelation 19:6; 11:15; 19:16

“Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” (Revelation 19, v.6); “The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11, v.15); “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.” (Revelation 19, v.16) “Hallelujah!”

What a challenging assignment to reflect and meditate on the verses from Revelation that inspired one of George Frideric Handel’s most famous works, the Hallelujah chorus from Messiah. I started by searching for recordings of the oratorio and found many beautiful performances by notable choirs around the world to enjoy. However, I would have to say, my favorite performance of the Hallelujah chorus is the finale to our annual Christmas music at my home church, Enfield Baptist Church, performed by family and friends. This piece of music is meant to take you on a journey; and what better way to journey, whether it is an Advent journey or any other trip, than to journey with the familiar faces of family and friends. So, let’s journey through these verses together.

In the sixth verse of Revelation 19, the writer, John the Apostle, uses descriptions from nature to describe the awesome sounds that will praise our God. If you have ever hiked by a river or stood in the sand at the beach, you have heard rushing water and seen or possibly felt its power. We’ve all heard the peals of thunder announcing the coming storm. John uses these mighty sounds, to describe the bold proclamation of the multitude, “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns!” Handel matches this bold proclamation in his chorus with robust instrumentals that let the audience feel the power and might of God.

In the fifteenth verse of Revelation 11, John further describes God’s reign by saying the kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and He shall reign forever and ever. Our world has many competing voices, all pulling us in numerous directions. How comforting to think of the chaos surrounding us in this world becoming God’s world, full of His peace, love, and harmony. Handel, again, coordinates the chorus and instrumentals to the sentiment of the inspiring verses and thus continuing our journey.

Finally, we move on to the sixteenth verse of Revelation 19 where John identifies our God as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. John does not leave any room for doubt putting our God at the head of all things revered and exalted here on earth. This title is repeated by the choir building excitement and anticipation for Christ our King, both His birth and His return. Handel continues to complement the theme and sentiment of the chorus with instrumentals, both together culminating in a final “Hallelujah” praising God and ending our journey through the Hallelujah chorus from Messiah and these verses from Revelation.

I pray your Advent journey will be full of family and friends, accented by joyful sounds of praise, peppered with quiet moments of peace, and underscored by the revelation that this Little Babe is, indeed, the King of Kings.

- Mrs. Julia Andrus

Job 19:25-26

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Job's words rise from one of the darkest valleys in Scripture. He has lost family, health, security, and reputation. Yet from the depths of his suffering comes one of the most remarkable confessions of faith in the Old Testament: "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Before Israel had kings, before the prophets spoke of a coming Messiah, Job already believed in a living Deliverer who would one day stand upon the earth and make all things right. When Handel placed this text in *Messiah*, he recognized its beauty: a cry of hope from the ancient world that points directly to Jesus.

Advent is a season made for this kind of hope. Like Job, we live in the tension between what God has promised and what we have not yet fully seen. We wait, long, and trust. Job's confession becomes our own: the Redeemer is alive, and because He lives, our hope lives also.

Job's words reveal several things about Jesus coming life and ministry.

Jesus is the living Redeemer.

Job's Redeemer is personal—"my Redeemer." In Jesus' birth and earthly ministry, we see God drawing near to His people not as an idea but as a person. Jesus heals the broken, restores the outcast, forgives the sinner, and ultimately conquers death itself. Every act of Christ's ministry shows the heart of the Redeemer Job anticipated.

Jesus "stands upon the earth."

Job believed the Redeemer would one day take His stand in the world. Jesus fulfills this hope in the incarnation. He stands—not far off, but in our dust, our joys, our sorrows. Advent celebrates this miracle: the eternal Son of God choosing to walk among us, fully God and fully man. In Bethlehem, Job's ancient expectation stepped into human history.

Jesus allows us to "see God."

Job held to a hope that even after his body failed, he would see God. Jesus clarifies and fulfills this promise. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." In His resurrection, He becomes the firstfruits of all who will one day rise and behold God with glorified eyes. Because He lives, Job's hope—and ours—is secure.

Job's declaration reminds us that Christian hope is not rooted in circumstances but in the character of a living Redeemer. Advent invites us to wait with the same confidence. Even when God feels distant, even when brokenness surrounds us, we can proclaim with Job: Our Redeemer lives!

As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, we also look beyond the manger to the promised return of the Messiah—when He will stand again upon the earth and make all things new. Advent teaches us to long for that day with holy expectation.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22

“For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep. Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Hallelujah! Christ is risen indeed from the dead! In this scripture and other passages we are familiar with as His disciples and children we know this to be true. What wonderful news this is for us to hear again as we celebrate His birth. We know the rest of the story and this news is not just good news. It is fantastic news.

In this scripture, Paul proclaims it as truth. Paul was not always known by this name. His given name at birth was Saul of Tarsus. He was a learned man in the Jewish community. Paul was educated in Jerusalem by the prominent Pharisee Rabbi Gamaliel who served in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court.

In Acts 22, Paul offers a description of himself. In chapter 22 of Acts he says, 3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. 4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.”

This is Paul’s testimony of who he was. Just like Paul, we all have a testimony of who we were. As you see from his testimony Paul was not proud of who he had been before meeting Jesus. I expect many of us are like Paul as we look at who we were before becoming followers of Jesus, too.

But, Paul changed. He had a conversion experience and in this experience he had a direct encounter with Jesus. Acts 22 describes his encounter. It occurred along the Damascus road on a journey Saul (before he was known as Paul) was on. It was intense and left him forever changed. Look at how Acts documents just some of the changes in Paul’s life.

- He no longer sought to persecute Christians. Rather, he became a follower and disciple of Jesus. In fact, he was not just a disciple but an apostle. What a huge change and look at the impact on him.
- When Paul was transformed he went to see Ananias who told him in Acts 22 he had been called to a new life. It is described in Acts 14- 16 in this way. 14 “Then he (Ananias) said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”
- In verse 17 we find Paul doing something he would never have done in his prior life. He says, 17 “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw the Lord speaking to me ...”

Continued next page

In another scripture Paul gives instruction for Jesus's followers. For me, these verses are also an indication of how he has changed. He says in Romans 12:1-2 12 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." I do not believe he could have written these verses as Saul.

Paul lived this scripture. In his living it he was blessed beyond measure. Yes, he had trials in life but his walk with Jesus led him to a rich and blessed life. Like Paul, we are given the opportunity to walk with Jesus when we become His followers and walk our own path in life as Paul did. The path Paul walked was one of seeking Jesus in every aspect of life and following His guidance and direction.

Paul's encounter with Jesus changed him mightily. It led him to the knowledge and certainty of what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15: 20-22: "20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

Like you and me Paul was in a blind state and just dead to Jesus prior to his encounter with the living Jesus. He did not believe or know that Jesus was alive and indeed risen from the dead until his conversion. He could not have a relationship with the living Christ. Jesus got his attention and the good news is Paul paid attention to Him.

There was a time in our lives we did not know Jesus either. The Advent season is a time of celebration for us because of our relationship with Him. It is a reminder of the gift He has given us to become part of His family. Who could possibly have thought the birth of the Christ child would have such a significant and great impact on the world or on us in life's journey. Who could have known He would conquer death and show the way to eternal life. At this Advent season let us not just remember His birth but let us remember His life, crucifixion, and resurrection. Paul offers assurance in verse 20 that He has indeed been raised from the dead and provides eternal life for us all when we accept Him as Lord and Savior.

- Mr. Jim Etheridge

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

“Pay attention! I’m going to tell you something you won’t believe—a mystery, a secret, something you have never heard before! You are about to experience a remarkable transformation!”

Can you imagine someone saying this to you? The Apostle Paul, the writer of Corinthians, addresses the church with these words in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. He speaks of a change that will transform each of us—dead or alive—“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”

We are so resistant to change. We’ve always done it this way before. We’re seniors now. We’re Baptists. It doesn’t really matter what causes us to fight change; we just don’t like it. Change is unpredictable. It catches us off guard; however, it will happen. Many times we experience an event that changes our earthly lives immediately—an automobile accident, a fall, a diagnosis. We must quickly make adjustments to our lives, our losses, our future. Paul speaks of a change that will occur much faster and more astoundingly than we could ever experience here on earth.

“The trumpet will sound, and those believers who have already died a physical death will be raised imperishable” (enduring forever). We, the believers still living on this earth, will be changed as well. Our aging, sometimes uncooperative body will be stripped of our earthly nature that is capable of dying and be replaced with an imperishable, immortal body that is forever free from death.

Change is not always negative. When the change referred to in 1 Corinthians occurs, we will live in the glory of our Lord forever.

- Mrs. Janice Byrd

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

"Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This passage focuses on the promise of "victory over death". When our mortal bodies are transformed into the immortal, the power of death is destroyed. This promise is not just for someday in the future, but for taking action and determining how we live in the present moment. We are encouraged to be steadfast in our faith and to be generous in our service to God and to mankind.

Prayer:

Father in Heaven,

We thank you for the amazing expectation of the resurrection. Thank you for giving us "victory over death" through your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to be strong in our faith and our witness, and to be generous in our service to God and to others. These things we ask in Jesus name. Amen

- Mrs. Debbie Stilley

Romans 8:31,33-34

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” ... “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us.”

— — — — —

In a world that can be seen as chaotic and yes, full of incendiary topics, we search for solace.

In our hands we hold a small microcomputer that does everything from checking our health status to teaching us how to make a homemade bomb. It also allows us to talk to our friends, read the bible, attend church from afar and gives us recipes to make delicious dinners. The cell phone can be an amazing helpful tool and it also can be a degrading force for evil.

Which do you choose?

We are often pulled into the world of “hot topics.” For instance, recently a young woman killed herself because her best friend was an Artificial Intelligence chat meme. The AI meme helped to guide her on her way down the dark abyss. Evil was working against her. We realize that the phone did not do this, the young woman did this to herself. She was already tortured and suffering but did not turn to God or family for help but to a fake meme. Why are so many young people turning toward the dark instead of the light? They need faith.

No, we of faith, are not exempt, there are many candles flickering for our attention. The internet and social media offer us wonderful intellectual discoveries, art, and understanding. Yet on the dark side we can be drawn into evil or sin, we can even be cajoled into committing suicide. God’s son on earth was witness of how to respond to such selfish sins even to the far extreme of his being killed for His faith. But Jesus did rise again into the light of God’s love. He is our mediator. As he shows us that we, too, can rise from sin to God’s love.

How can we lead those who have lost all faith and hope into the light? Yes, we can pray. And we can also write technology companies, elected officials, newspapers and talk among our friends to mandate controls on social media, to make positive stories more apparent in the algorithms. This is faith in action.

In our scripture, Paul talks about our faith of living in God’s world. God is telling us that He is on our side, he is not against us, He will help us. God has made His son, Jesus, our personal connector to the light. He is the great solace.

Dear God, please help those who are suffering in the despair of darkness. Let them see that faith can lift them out of fear and keep them in the light. Help us to know that you are on our side, that you are our friend and that you will always be there. Let us all see that our faith in God is an umbrella against sin and evil.

- Mr. and Mrs. Wayne and Suzanne Anderson

Revelation 5:12-14

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing, and honour, glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

In a world marked by unpredictability and discord, this vision of heavenly worship in Revelation 5 offers believers a source of hope and assurance in Christ’s ultimate victory.

Let’s set the scene:

- The throne room in heaven.
- The throne is radiating glory.
- Everything is grand and majestic.
- The atmosphere is full of awe and reverence.
- The imagery is vivid and powerful.

In a loud voice is heard “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” This is a powerful expression of reverence of the Lamb’s unmatched worthiness and greatness. All of these are attributes ascribed to Jesus (the Lamb).

Everyone is praising God and the Lamb for their glory and eternal reign. Everyone includes:

- Every creature in heaven,
- Every creature on earth,
- Every creature under the earth,
- Every creature in the sea.

This imagery of thousand upon thousands, ten thousand times ten thousand, underscores the immensity of this unparalleled worship, adoration and recognition.

Imagine a magnificent choir where the most talented voices converge to perform, captivating the audience with their unity and harmony. This Scripture presents a heavenly concert, where all creation joins in perfect harmony to honor Christ.

This account of heavenly worship should inspire us to lead lives filled with continuous praise and reverence for Christ reflecting the glory and honor due to the Lamb who was slain.

What words can more fully declare that Christ is and ought to be worshipped, equally with the Father, by all creatures, to all eternity.

How worthy art Thou, O God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, of our highest praises!

This passage emphasizes that the Christmas story is not just about a manger scene but about Christ’s ultimate power and authority as the King of Kings. With a loud voice and in harmony, we should proclaim and adore Christ’s majesty during this Christmas season.

Your name is the highest and greatest!

Your name stands above all!

All God’s creatures say, “How worthy art Thou”! AMEN!!

- Mrs. Beth Canada

26. Thursday, December 25

The last notes of the “Amen” continue to fade, and on this Christmas morn, we are left with questions of what’s next. Our search for answers should begin in those last notes as we revisit how we understand “amen.” Does “amen” simply mean for you “the end” or do you hold to a truer linguistic understanding of “so be it” or “I believe?” If it’s “the end,” then you can just shelve “Messiah” away till next Christmas and go into the unknown year ahead tossed to and fro with whatever tempest currently looms on the horizon. However, if you hold to “amen” meaning “so be it,” you have things to do, gifts to open.

What might those things be? Multiple things spring to mind. The first would be the gift of freedom. You have the freedom to operate in the coming year free from fear, free from the past, free to serve, free to be who God made and intended you to be, for truly the one who brings you freedom, your Redeemer, lives and reigns. Mental acquiescence is one thing, but living in it, Beloved, is far different. Live this freedom.

Secondly, embrace the gift of song. The “Messiah” has, since its first performance, been accompanied by a printed copy of the words. Indeed, the first wordbook announced the work's title and then declared “MAJORA CANAMUS,” which translates to “Let us sing of greater things.” I know not what we will face in the months ahead, as the warm glow of this Christmas morn is pushed into distant memory by the gale of life’s vicissitudes. I do know that living out the message of “Messiah” requires each of us to sing of the unwavering hope of the Christ child, the assurance that no one can bring a charge against God’s elect, and that the Christ reigns forevermore if we have any hope of buttressing ourselves against those gales.

Finally, be sure to open the gift of flexibility this Christmas morning. I was amazed to learn, as I read Charles King’s biography of “Messiah” titled “Every Valley,” that even after its initial offering in Dublin and for many years thereafter, Handel adjusted the music for whatever assemblage of musicians and choristers he had. It was much later that the grand cathedral sound that we know of today was codified for the piece. The message stayed the same; how it was presented changed. For me, that is one of the great gifts to open this morning. It provides me agency to take the other gifts and use them as situations arise, unfettered by unapplicable constructs and bound only by the impetus that the message is supreme, whether I have a full complement of tenors and only one cello or vice versa. The message of hope and love and grace to all the Earth must resound even if we are backed up on the “Hallelujah” by a quintet of kazoos for “surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” and all should hear of Christ’s victory over all that we face.

What will you do with the “Amen,” Beloved? For that is the key to fully appreciating the power of the oratorio we have just studied. A tremendous thank you to both Enfield and Grove Park for making this such a special Advent season.

Happy Christmas!

- The Reverend Dr. Marc Sanders

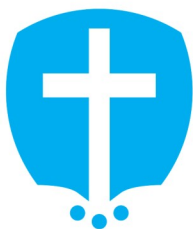


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