

Advent Carol Service
“Voices in the Wilderness”

3rd December 2023
6.00 pm

WELCOME TO OUR CHURCH

For over 190 years a community has gathered at St John's to worship God and to demonstrate faith at work in our daily lives. Our Parish Church serves the Hyde Park Estate, the area north of Sussex Gardens, Praed Street and the Paddington Basin, but our members come from across our city. This building provides a sacred space for prayer and meeting between God and his people.

We have carefully designed our service this evening to help us celebrate life, to comfort us where we hurt and to challenge us where we have grown complacent. In all we do, we seek to equip each other to live out our faith wherever we may be. As a tangible expression of Jesus' openness to all, St John's welcomes all people regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic circumstances or spiritual background to our worshipping community and Eucharistic table.

We welcome all who seek God and invite you into our efforts to be a strong facilitator of good in our city. Come join us as we seek to build the Kingdom of God in our souls, our lives and our communities here in London.

Stephen Mason
Vicar

Further information about St John's can be found on our website:

stjohns-hydepark.com

Follow us: [@StJohnsHP](https://twitter.com/StJohnsHP)



Voices in the Wilderness

Advent marks the start of the new Christian year and is one of the two great penitential seasons of the church, along with Lent. Advent is a time of preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ. The coming of our Lord is foretold in the Old Testament, most notably by Isaiah in the eighth century B.C.

John the Baptist was an ascetic Jewish prophet and is synonymous with Advent as he foretold the coming of the Messiah and prepared the faithful for the first Advent of our Lord. He is seen by many as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. It is John's voice who cries out in the wilderness and asks that we prepare ourselves for the coming of our Lord. All four Gospels mention John the Baptist and through them we get a full account of his life, from his dramatic and miraculous birth in the first century BC to his aged parents Elizabeth and Zechariah, as foretold by the Angel Gabriel, through to his brutal execution by Herod Antipas, on the request of Herodias' daughter, in 30 AD. It is John who baptises Jesus in the River Jordan and it is John's call that asks us to prepare and repent and make ourselves ready for the coming of our Lord.

In our service this evening the voice of John the Baptist's call of preparation will be joined by the voices of Isaiah, St Luke and St John who will provide the voices of preparation, surrender, repentance, forgiveness, witness and hope, which we will hear through readings, hymns, choral and orchestral music. And in hearing these different voices we will be given an opportunity to discern what Advent means for each of us as we begin to prepare ourselves for the Nativity of our Lord.

This Advent, may you hear the voices in the wilderness as they prepare us to receive the light that is to come and dwell among us this Christmas.

*Please sit for the readings and choral pieces and stand to sing the hymns.
Please stand for the entry of the choir and clergy.*

HYMN

**O come, O come, Emmanuel!
Redeem thy captive Israel
That into exile drear is gone,
Far from the face of God's dear Son.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, thou Branch of Jesse! Draw
The quarry from the lion's claw;
From those dread caverns of the grave,
From nether hell thy people save.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, O come, thou Dayspring bright!
Pour on our souls thy healing light;
Dispel the long night's lingering gloom
And pierce the shadows of the tomb.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, thou Lord of David's Key!
The royal door fling wide and free;
Safeguard for us the heavenward road
And bar the way to death's abode.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, O come, Adonai,
Who in thy glorious majesty
From that high mountain, clothed with awe,
Gavest thy folk the elder law.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*Tr T A Lacey 1853-1931
Melody from 15th century French Franciscan Processional
Adapted & arranged by David Willcocks*

INTRODUCTION

The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you.**

An angel said ‘Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’

All **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Please be seated.

Beloved, we enter today the solemn season of Advent in which the Church bids us prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ; a coming that we recall in the Child of Bethlehem; a coming that we experience in the gift of his Spirit, in the bread of the Eucharist, in the joy of human lives that are shared; a coming for which we wait when God gathers up all things in Christ. Let us in this holy season reflect on the coming of Christ, who brings light to the world. Let us leave behind the darkness of sin, walk in the light that shines on our path and renew within ourselves the hope of glory to which he beckons us. And as we turn towards the light, let us have on our hearts all those who see no light, for whom all is darkness and despair. Let us pray that they too may be illuminated by Christ who is our light.

COLLECT

Let us pray:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

The Voice of Preparation

Isaiah 40: 3-5

Read by Keri Norris

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.’

This is the word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

CHOIR: O Fortuna

C. Orff

*O Fortuna, O Fortuna,
velut luna statu variabilis,
semper crescis aut decrescis; vita
detestabilis
nunc obdurat et tunc curat ludo mentis
aciem;
egestatem, potestatem, dissolvit ut glaciem.
Sors immanis et inanis, rota tu volubilis,
status malus, vana salus semper
dissolubilis,
obumbrata et velata mihi quoque niteris;
nunc per ludum dorsum nudum fero tui
sceleris.
Sors salutis et virtutis mihi nunc contraria;
est affectus et defectus semper in angaria.
Hac in hora sine mora cordae pulsum
tangite;
quod per sortem sternit fortem, mecum
omnes plangite!*

*O Fortune, O Fortune,
like the moon you are changeable,
ever waxing and waning;
hateful life first oppresses
and then soothes as fancy takes it;
poverty, power, it melts them like ice.
Fate, savage and empty,
you are a turning wheel,
your position malevolent,
vain health always dissolves,
shadowed and veiled you
plague me too;
now through the game
my naked back I bring to your villainy.
Fate, in health and in virtue,
is now against me, affection
and defeat always enslaved.
So at this hour without
delay pluck the vibrating string;
since Fate strikes down the strong,
everyone weep with me.*

The Voice of Surrender

Luke 1: 8-25

Read by Damon Greeney

Once when Zechariah was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you will name him John.

You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' Zechariah said to the angel, 'How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years.'

The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.'

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them and they realised that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After those days, his wife Elizabeth conceived and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, 'This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.'

This is the word of the Lord.
All Thanks be to God.

Please stand.

HYMN

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee.**

**Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.**

**Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.**

**By thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to thy glorious throne.**

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)
Tune: Cross of Jesus (Stainer)*

Please be seated.

Choir: Water Nights

E. Whitacre

*Night with the eyes of a horse that trembles in the night
Night with eyes of water in the field asleep
Is in your eyes, a horse that trembles is in
Your eyes of secret water
Eyes of shadow-water, eyes of well-water, eyes of dream-water
Silence and solitude, two little animals moon-led
Drink in your eyes, drink in those waters
If you open your eyes, night opens doors of musk
The secret kingdom of the water opens
Flowing from the centre of the night
And if you close your eyes*

*A river, a silent and beautiful current, fills you from within
Flows forward, darkens you:
Night brings its wetness to beaches in your soul.*

The Voice of Repentance

Isaiah 55: 6-13

Read by Alice Hindhaugh

Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

This is the word of the Lord.
All **Thanks be to God.**

Please stand.

HYMN

**Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding!
"Christ is near," we hear it say.
"Cast away the works of darkness,
All you children of the day!"**

**See, the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heav'n.
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all, to be forgiv'n;**

**So, when next he comes in glory
And the world is wrapped in fear,
He will shield us with his mercy
And with words of love draw near.**

**Honour, glory, might, dominion
To the Father and the Son
With the everlasting Spirit
While eternal ages run!**

*Edward Caswall (1814-1878)
Tune: Merton (Monk)*

Please be seated.

CHOIR: How to return home

K. Kerrigan & B. Lowdermilk

Your bare feet sliding on the old wooden floorboards, Home just as you left it but still you're shaken, Like walking into a museum somehow out of time. It's all the same except the girl in the hallway, where she's been and who she will ripen into, your childhood's on the other side of a sprawling divide... too wide. Take a silent breath.

Hold in the change. Tell yourself you still live here.

Take your bags upstairs. It's the only way you'll get through today. Count the hours. Take a shower. Wash yourself away. The house is pulsing with an alien heartbeat, was it always here but you never listened? It's calling you to be the girl that you were way back then... again. Take a silent breath. Hold in the change. Tell yourself you still live here. Take your bags upstairs. Put away your clothes, take it nice and slow. Be their daughter. Nothing's harder When nobody knows How to return home. How to return home, and how to survive, There's no written guidelines. How to go back. How to show up and unpack. How to show up. How to grow up. How to take a breath. Take a silent breath. Hold in the change. Tell yourself you still live here. Take your bags upstairs. You still share a name but you're not the same. You don't fight it. You don't hide it. It's a whole new game of how to return home. How to return home. How to return home. How to return home.

The Voice of Forgiveness

John 3: 16-21

Read by Ian Smith

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

This is the word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

CHOIR: Sinfonia Kyrie Annelies

Words from the Diary of Anne Frank, music by J. Whitbourn

Kyrie eleison
Help us. Rescue us from this hell.
We must be brave and trust in God.

The Voice of Witness

John 1: 19-23 & 29-34

Read by Rachel Keller

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 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.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptising with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

This is the word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Please stand.

OFFERTORY HYMN

During this hymn there will be a collection. If you are a UK taxpayer, please fill out a Gift Aid envelope and place it on the plate when it comes to you.

**We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.**

**Tell of his birth at Bethlehem,
Not in a royal house or hall
But in a stable dark and dim:
The Word made flesh, a light for all.**

**Tell of his death at Calvary,
Hated by those he came to save;
In lonely suffering on the cross
For all he loved, his life he gave.**

**Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
Empty the tomb, for he was free;
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share his victory.**

**Tell of his reign at God's right hand
By all creation glorified;
He sends his Spirit on his church
To live for him, the Lamb who died.**

**Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
This gospel-message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.**

*Edward J. Burns (b.1938)
Tune: Fulda (Gardiner)*

Please be seated.

PRAYERS

In the Advent wilderness,
let the voice crying out be a herald of hope,
preparing our hearts for the arrival of the Saviour.
As we journey through the quiet anticipation,
may his light dispel darkness
and his peace reign in our souls.
May the wilderness of our waiting be transformed into a sacred space
where the promises of God bloom.

All **Amen.**

Amidst the wilderness whispers of anticipation,
O Lord, guide us with the voice that heralds hope.
May our hearts be ready for the Advent of your love and grace.
As we navigate the stillness,
may the voice in the wilderness resound,
shaping our souls for the glorious arrival of the promised Messiah.
May the quiet of Advent be a sacred canvas for your redemptive story.

All **Amen.**

CHOIR: Inter Natos Mulierum

W. A. Mozart

*Among those born of women
There arose none greater than John the Baptist
Who prepared the way for the Lord in the wilderness.
Alleluia.*

The Voice of Hope

Luke 1: 68-79

Read by Alex Norris

‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty saviour for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who
hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.’

This is the word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

CHOIR: Songs for a New World

J. R. Brown

*A new world calls across the ocean,
A new world calls across the sky
A new world whispers in the shadows,
Time to fly, time to fly
It's about one moment,
The moment before it all becomes clear
And in that one moment
You start to believe there's nothing to fear
It's about one second
And just when you're on the verge of success
The sky starts to change and the wind starts to blow
And you're suddenly a stranger
There's no explaining where you stand
And you didn't know that you sometimes have to go
'Round an unexpected bend
And the road will end in a new world
A new world calls for me to follow,
A new world waits for my reply
A new world holds me to a promise,
Standing by, standing by
It's about one moment,
That moment you think you know where you stand
And in that one moment
The things that you're sure of slip from your hand
And you've got one second
To try to be clear, to try to stand tall
But nothing's the same and the wind starts to blow
And you're suddenly a stranger
In some completely different land
And you thought you knew, but you didn't have a clue
That the surface sometimes cracks
To reveal the tracks to a new world
You have a house in the hills
You have a job on the coast
You find a lover you're sure you believe in
You've got a pool in the back
You get to the part of your life
You hold the ring in your hand
But then the earthquake hits and the bank closes in
Then you realize you didn't know anything
Nobody told you the best way to steer
When the wind starts to blow
And you're suddenly a stranger
All of a sudden your life is different than you planned*

*And you'll have to stay 'til you somehow find a way
To be sure of what will be, then you might be free
A new world crashes down like thunder,
A new world charging through the air
A new world just beyond the mountain waiting there, waiting there
A new world shattering the silence
There's a new world I'm afraid to see,
A new world louder every moment
Come to me, come to me!*

Please stand.

HYMN

**Joyful, joyful, we adore thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flow'rs before thee,
Op'ning to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
Drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness,
Fill us with the light of day!**

**All Thy works with joy surround thee,
Earth and heav'n reflect thy rays,
Stars and angels sing around thee,
Center of unbroken praise;
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
Flow'ry meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird and flowing fountain
Call us to rejoice in thee.**

**Thou art giving and forgiving,
Ever blessing, ever blest,
Well-spring of the joy of living,
Ocean-depth of happy rest!
Thou the Father, Christ our Brother,
All who live in love are thine;
Teach us how to love each other,
Lift us to the joy divine.**

**Mortals, join the mighty chorus,
Which the morning stars began;**

**Father love is reigning o'er us,
Brother love binds man to man.
Ever singing, march we onward,
Victors in the midst of strife;
Joyful music leads us sunward
In the triumph song of life.**

Henry Van Dyke (1852-1933)

Tune: Ode to Joy (L.V Beethoven 1770-1827)

Please remain standing.

BLESSING & DISMISSAL

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,
scatter the darkness from before your path
and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

As we await our coming Saviour,
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

ORCHESTRAL VOLUNTARY

Back to the Future

A. Silvestri (arr B. Collyer)

*'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is
to come, the Almighty.*

Revelation 1:8

*Please stay and join us for mulled wine and
mince pies after the service.*

Seasonal Events at St John's

10th December, 4pm

Christingle

A festive celebration of Jesus, the Light of the World. The collection will go in aid of The Children's Society, who help vulnerable children throughout the UK.

17th December, 6pm

Nine Lessons & Carols

A traditional candle-lit service of lessons and carols. The service is followed by fizz and panettone.

24th December, 4pm

Crib Service

Children's service where we tell the story of Christmas, build our crib and welcome the baby Jesus into our midst.

24th December, 11:30pm

Midnight Mass

First Eucharist of Christmas with choir and orchestra.

25th December, 10am

Christmas Day

Fun family service to celebrate the arrival of the Christ child.

14th January, 6pm

Epiphany Carols

The third in our series of four great carol services, Epiphany Carols tells the story of Jesus' early life and ministry. Fizz and galettes des rois are served after the service.