



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

Prophets and Peace

Sunday 7th December 2025

Isaiah 11:1-10

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

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There are various symbols that we use at this time of year to help us to reflect on the message of Advent and prepare ourselves and our hearts for that moment when God breaks into our world; when God the creator became incarnate through a young mother, became flesh and blood, entered the world as a baby and lived and journeyed through life as each one of us do, experiencing for Himself our lived experiences of pain and thanksgiving, of sorrow and joy, of triumph and despair. As the Christmas Carol Away in a Manger reminds us, “Tears and smiles like us he knew”.

One such symbol is the Advent wreath, made up of five candles: four outer candles lit on the four Sundays of Advent and the fifth, central candle, lit on Christmas morning, marking the moment the light of the world broke through the darkness and came to us as a perfect gift on that very first Christmas.

The four outer candles have been assigned various meanings according to tradition. For example, some say:

The first candle represents the Patriarchs

The second the Prophets

The third John the Baptist

The fourth candle the Virgin Mary

Or other traditions have them as Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

But today, the second Sunday of Advent, as we light the second candle, let us remember both the Prophets and something of the message of Peace which they bring.

Prophets were people who had a message to share with others which had been given to them by God. Many are recorded in our Old Testament, some as major prophets and some as minor prophets, but they were all responding to and acting upon something God had told them to share with His people.

In the Old Testament reading set for today we hear from one of the better-known Old Testament prophets, Isaiah. In this reading Isaiah gives us a message of Peace: that someone will be born from Jesse's shoot, Jesse's lineage, and the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him: he will be special, set apart.

²The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 11:2

And what is more, he will come to bring justice and peace, even for the poor.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; Isaiah 11:3-4

Isaiah then goes on to describe a peaceful kingdom, where predator lies down with prey and nothing will be harmed because the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord and we shall live by righteousness and faithfulness.

Well, this all sounds rather good, doesn't it. It all sounds rather promising.

But prophets rarely come with the message, "You are all doing just great – as you were, keep going, everything is grand!"

The message of the prophets is far more likely to be one of warning, one of showing people that this is how it could be, but you are falling short of God's expectations. This is how God intends things to be, this is what he wants for us, His children, because He loves us. But we in turn must play our part and live as the Lord wants us to live so that this perfect, peaceful existence can be achieved here on earth. Usually the prophet points out where the people of God are failing in this. And if we fail to live as God's children, well we are told the consequences in the latter part of verse 4 from the Isaiah passage:

he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

The role of the prophet was to try and set God's people on the right path.

Enter John the Baptist in our Gospel reading for today. John is a New Testament prophet who appears on the 1st Century Judean scene dressed a little strangely, with an odd menu choice, but nevertheless with a clear message for the people of God:

² 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' Matthew: 3:2

The message that John is giving is: you are not living as the Lord wants you to live; you must do something about it; you must repent. Turn from your wicked ways and start living a good and holy life as God intends.

And John is pretty clear in his message for the people who are not following God's word. He calls the Pharisees and the Sadducees, those who were supposedly upholding the word of God in the Temple, a "brood of vipers" and warns them that they need to be like a tree bearing fruit worthy of repentance because the sharpened axe is already at the foot of that tree, ready to cut it down and for the rotten fruit to be thrown into the fire. And he goes on to tell them that someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than John, someone who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire, and someone who will see that those who do not change their ways will meet an unpleasant end.

In the Epistle from Paul to the Romans, Paul refers to scripture as being for our instruction, in other words we should take notice of what the Patriarchs and Prophets said so that we might have hope to be reconciled to God, also remembering that God came for Jew and Gentile alike "so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". Romans 15:6.

What a wonderful description of Peace – everyone, whatever their culture, working together to glorify God.

Because peace is not just the absence of fighting. Peace is the ability to walk together, honouring differences, accepting and respecting opinions that differ from our own. Peace is letting go of pride, saying sorry, not demanding revenge.

This Advent let us let go of all that we are holding on to that does not lead to peace: hatred, desire, greed, envy, indifference, lust and pride. And instead make room in our hearts for the Prince of Peace. For this action will set us free from all that is holding us back, all that is stopping us from living in love and peace with all our brothers and sisters in Christ.