

**ADVENT 2017 (1)**  
**St Mary's Pro-Cathedral**  
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**Programme**

- Welcome to Advent 2018
- Focus: the readings from Isaiah in the Lectionary
- Advent 1B: Is 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8
- Context of writing
- Reading poetic texts
- Back to Second Isaiah
- Place in the Advent Readings
- Prayer

**Lectionary**

Advent Readings					Themes
Advent 1	Is 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8	Ps 80 (79)	1 Cor 1:3-9	Mk 13:33-37	End of Time
Advent 2	Is 40:1-5, 9-11	Ps 85 (84)	2 Pet 3:8-14	Mk 1:1-8	John the Baptist
Advent 3	Is 61:1-2, 10-11	Magnificat	1 Thess 5:16-24	Jn 1:6-8, 19-28	John the Baptist
Advent 4	2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11,16	Ps 89 (88)	Rom 16:25-27	Lk 1:26-38	Mary

**Context of writing**

- Isaiah is the longest prophet book
- Parts of it are easy to read; part of it are difficult
- Everyone needs some kind of help to read it
- The whole book covers 750-500 bc
- Isaiah the most quoted prophet in the New Testament
  
- Isaiah 1-39 — Uzziah, Ahaz and Hezekiah, in the Assyrian period
- Isaiah 40-55 — Cyrus, in the Babylonian period
- Isaiah 56-66 — in the Persian period, after the Exile
- Of course, things are not so simple!
  
- After the return from Exile
- After 539 bc to around the 400s
- A time of reconstruction and frustration
- In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah

**Reading poetic texts**

- You own experience
- In the bible:
  - “twin lines”
  - images and metaphors
  - kind of writing

**Isa 2:1** Here is the message about Judah and Jerusalem that was revealed to Isaiah son of Amoz.

- 2** In the future  
the mountain of the Lord's temple will endure  
as the most important of mountains,  
and will be the most prominent of hills.  
All the nations will stream to it,
- 3** many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the Lord's mountain,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob,  
so he can teach us his requirements,  
and we can follow his standards."  
For Zion will be the centre for moral instruction;  
the Lord will issue edicts from Jerusalem.
- 4** He will judge disputes between nations;  
he will settle cases for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nations will not take up the sword against other nations,  
and they will no longer train for war.

- 56:1–8: Yahweh Will Gather Yet More Worshipers
  - 56:9–57:13: Punishment for the Idolatrous Oppressors of the Faithful
  - 57:14–21: God Will Lead the Humble Faithful
  - 58: The Fast That Yahweh Wants
  - 59: Those Who Repent in Zion Will be Saved
  - 60: Zion's Glory
  - 61: The Prophet Is Sent to the Poor
  - 62: Prayer for the City's Restoration
  - 63:1–6: Day of Punishment for the Nations
  - **63:7–64:2: Communal Lament**
  - 65: The Righteous Are Upheld in Judgment: They Shall Inherit the Land
  - 66:1–16: Judgment in Jerusalem in Favour of the Righteous
  - 66:17–24: Jerusalem as the Goal of the Nations' Pilgrimage
- A lament is a type of liturgical song in which a nation bewails its fate following a calamity
  - Elements of the lament include
    - a description of well-being prior to the calamity, an account of the resulting desolation and suffering, and often exhortations to mourn, appeals to deliver the survivors,
    - and such formulaic expressions as "alas" or "how."
    - Lament rhythm ("qinah"): 3 beats + two beats
  - Examples appear in Lamentations 1; 2; 4; 5; and Psalms 44; 60; and 79
- 63:7–64:2: Communal Lament
  - This is a very heart-felt prayer, expressing considerable distress, at a time when people were wondering (not for the last time) where is God is all of this?
  - The lectionary excerpt has a frame, at the start and at the end: "you are our Father."
  - This initial title expands into a wonderful description of God and those who believe in God.
  - Notice that there are two sides each time.
  - We read: Is 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8

**Isa 63:16** For you are our father,  
though Abraham does not know us  
and Israel does not acknowledge us;  
you, O Lord, are our father;  
our Redeemer from of old is your name.

**17** Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways

and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?  
Turn back for the sake of your servants,  
for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage.

**Isa 64:1** O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

**Isa 64:3** When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

- 4** From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.
- 5** You meet those who gladly do right,  
those who remember you in your ways.  
But you were angry, and we sinned;  
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
- 6** We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
- 7** There is no one who calls on your name,  
or attempts to take hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
- 8** Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.

- The surprise in all this is that it is God who is invited to “convert”!!
- God has to take some of the blame and the hope is that he will let his true self be seen again.
- The Hebrew word for “turn” is *shuv* and the range of meanings includes to turn around, to repent, to bring back, to refresh.
- When used of God it means to become devoted once more.
- It shows a certain courage to address God in these terms.

God	Israel
Lord, redeemer from of old, the liberator God of the Exodus (64:1-4), without equal, the potter	God’s servants, the tribe of God’s heritage, those who wait for him, those who right and remember God’s way.
God made the stray and hardened their hearts; God was angry and hid himself; God hid his face and delivered them to their enemies.	They strayed and no longer feared God; they sinned and transgressed; filth and unclean, faded like a leaf; iniquitous; no one calls on God

### Place in the Advent Readings

- There is a perfect fit between Isaiah and Psalm 80 (79).
- Psalm 80 mentions the catastrophic situation (vv. 5, 6, 12-13 and 16).
- It addresses God as shepherd of his people (v. 1) and vineyard owner (vv. 8-16).
- Finally, it calls on God to restore Israel, in the refrain: Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

### Psalm 80

<sup>2</sup>O shepherd of Israel, hear us,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock:  
enthroned on the cherubim, shine forth  
<sup>3</sup>upon Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh.

Rouse up your might and come to save us.  
<sup>4</sup>O God, bring us back;  
let your face shine on us, and we shall be saved.  
<sup>5</sup>How long, O LORD, God of hosts,

will you be angry at the prayer of your people?

<sup>6</sup>You have fed them with tears for their bread, an abundance of tears for their drink.

<sup>7</sup>You have made us the taunt of our neighbours; our foes mock us among themselves.

<sup>8</sup>O God of hosts, bring us back; let your face shine forth, and we shall be saved.

<sup>9</sup>You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

<sup>10</sup>Before it you cleared the ground; it took root and filled the land.

<sup>11</sup>The mountains were covered with its shadow, the cedars of God with its boughs.

<sup>12</sup>It stretched out its branches to the sea; to the River it stretched out its shoots.

<sup>13</sup>Then why have you broken down its walls?

It is plucked by all who pass by the way.

<sup>14</sup>It is ravaged by the boar of the forest, devoured by the beasts of the field.

<sup>15</sup>God of hosts, turn again, we implore; look down from heaven and see.

Visit this vine and protect it,

<sup>16</sup>the vine your right hand has planted, the son of man you have claimed for yourself.

<sup>17</sup>They have burnt it with fire and cut it down. May they perish at the frown of your face.

<sup>18</sup>May your hand be on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have confirmed as your own.

<sup>19</sup>And we shall never forsake you again; give us life that we may call upon your name.

<sup>20</sup>O LORD God of hosts, bring us back; let your face shine forth, and we shall be saved.

1 Cor 1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— 6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Mark 13:32 *“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*

Mark 13:33 [Jesus said:] Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

35 Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

### Pointers for Prayer

- Believers often long for a more tangible presence of God, a God who comes to meet us. What has been my experience of waiting for God?
- Clay can be made into many things (see Rom 9:21). How open am I to God’s creativity in my own pilgrimage of faith?

### Prayer

God, our loving father, when we are absent from you and when you seem absent to us, come again, be close to us, and let us know your presence and action in our lives. We place ourselves in your hands: we are the clay, you the potter.

We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Let’s talk!