

REFLECTION FOR ADVENT SUNDAY

Isaiah 64:1-9 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 Mark 13:24-37



O that you would tear open the heavens and come down....

For you have hidden your face from us.

Isaiah 64 v 1-7

This is the first Sunday of Advent – our scriptures point to the coming of God and the yearning for that arrival.

During this section of Isaiah the author laments the dislocation of his community in exile. Standing in the rubble of the Temple and amid the ruins of faith he cries out for God. It is a cry that contrasts with the latter prophecies- which show the voice of comfort and expectation. (Comfort my people or Prepare the way of the Lord, make the valleys level and the highways straight.) This cry acknowledges the pain of dislocation, the pain of losing sense of God's presence, the pain of a whole community.

We can identify with these words for many of us know what it is like to feel dislocated, unsure of where God is. Many famous spiritual writers have experienced this cry- O that you would come down, GOD. Philip Yancey writes 'God's style often baffles me: he moves at a slow pace, prefers rebels and prodigals, retracts his power, and speaks in whispers and silence. Yes even these qualities I see as evidence of God's longsuffering, mercy and desire to woo rather than compel.'

Advent is about woo-ing; God wooing us. Even the most celebrated Pop Star in recent times, Ed Sheeran, writes 'I am in love with the shape of you!' Absence has a shape- when loved ones pass on they leave the shape of them behind. When children leave for university or married life, they leave a shape of them behind and in people asking after them even in absence they can be present. For Isaiah his cry for the shape of God is for his community's need of God. I think he is woo-ing God by asking for restoration. He is actively seeking God. Why? Because the verses that follow speak of the desire to be shaped by God's hand.

The New Testament describes our need to wait and actively watch for God using the imagery of a bride seeking her bridegroom and the apocalyptic image of Christ returning on clouds. We strain forward as we allow ourselves to hear our own and our community's deepest yearnings for Christ our saviour.

BEHOLD, the Bridegroom cometh: go ye out
With lighted lamps and garlands round
about
To meet Him in a rapture with a shout.

It may be at the midnight, black as pitch,
Earth shall cast up her poor, cast up her rich.

It may be at the crowing of the cock
Earth shall upheave her depth, uproot her
rock.

For lo, the Bridegroom fetcheth home the
Bride:
His Hands are Hands she knows, she knows
His Side.

Like pure Rebekah at the appointed place,
Veiled, she unveils her face to meet His Face.

Like great Queen Esther in her triumphing,
She triumphs in the Presence of her King.

His Eyes are as a Dove's, and she's Dove-
eyed;
He knows His lovely mirror, sister, Bride.

He speaks with Dove-voice of exceeding love,
And she with love-voice of an answering
Dove.

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go we out
With lamps ablaze and garlands round about
To meet Him in a rapture with a shout.

Christina Rossetti

Give yourself time this advent to woo God in loving prayer and charity.

Give yourself time to be wooed by God.

Why not use the short arrow prayers such as 'Come Lord Jesus' or 'Come down O love Divine, seek thou this soul of mine.'

Revd Becky

Hymn reflection MS

Two questions: Is *Lo! He comes with clouds descending* the best hymn of all? It must be a contender (though I'm told some Jews don't like it). And is it about the First Coming or the Second Coming, or both? We sing it in Advent, but every verse says Jesus is already dead; and it is partly based on Revelation Chapters 1 and 5.

It is amazing that such a superb hymn should have been cobbled together in the haphazard way it was. The words were written by "Charles Wesley and others". Wesley is actually thought to have completely rewritten a strange hymn (it talks about "Christ's bloody sign" and lots of trumpets and trumps) by John Cennick (1718-55) who was the first layman to be invited to preach by John Wesley. Various hymn book editors took a hand, including the one who had the bright idea of changing the last two lines to "O come quickly; come, Lord, come". All four verses are entirely different and should be played and sung very differently.

Hymns Old and New says Martin Madan (1718-55), a barrister, was one of the authors, but it seems more likely he was involved with the tune; one source says he wrote it. However, it is usually said to be based on an Irish tune which Thomas Olivers heard whistled in the street, and/or one he heard in the Music Hall. It may have been inspired by a similar tune by Dr. Arne, of *Rule Britannia* fame. Other tunes have been used, but towards the end of her life Queen Victoria was NOT AMUSED when the Organist of the Chapel Royal played one of them, and she decreed that it should only be sung to *Helmsley* from then on.

And the descant? Normally I don't like descants, but The Cathedral, tonight the last verse, and the first note of the second bar - the trebles' top A Flat banishes the last vestiges of darkness and sends us off into December full of hope. Listen to it on YouTube **from Lichfield**. Beautiful legato singing plus descant, and ideal visual presentation. (And the trolls are almost unanimous about what a wonderful hymn this is!)

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, God appears on earth to reign. [or Christ]

Every eye shall now behold him
Robed in dreadful majesty; [or glorious]
Those who set at nought and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing, Shall their [or the] true Messiah see.

Those dear tokens of his passion
Still his dazzling body bears;
Cause of endless exultation [or wondering]
To his ransomed worshippers;
With what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture Gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, amen! Let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory,
Claim the kingdom for thine own [or as].
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, [or O come quickly, as above] Thou shalt reign, and thou alone.

MGS