

**Lectionary readings: Isaiah 64: 1-9; Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9; Mark 13: 24-37 (First in Advent)**

**For reflection and prayer**

- **Isaiah 64:** v4 (The Message): *'No one has ever imagined, no ear heard, no eye seen, a God like you who works for those who wait for him.'* Isaiah goes on to outline the shortcomings of the people - lack of prayer, no desire for God, spiritually dried up. But he pleads with God in v9: *'Keep in mind, please - we are your people, all of us.'* As if God could forget that! v1: *'O that you would rip open the heavens and descend, make the mountains shudder at your presence.'* We, too, expect God to intervene in a powerful, earth-shattering way, but God showed Himself as a baby in a stable. And God comes to us today in quiet, gentle ways and so often we fail to recognise His coming to us because it's not as we expect. Let's go through Advent with our spiritual eyes open so that we find God in unexpected places and people.
- **Psalm 80:** Again we have the plea: *'Show us your mighty power. Come to rescue us.'* We want God to do something spectacular. The Psalmist feels that God is angry with His people and doesn't listen to their prayers. God's people are treated with scorn. Many today think that God doesn't answer prayer - even people within the church. And the church is treated with scorn today in many quarters. We also want God to fix things for us and rescue us. But God meets us where we are and wants to work with us and strengthen us to be all we can be by His grace. *'Let your face shine upon us'* is

repeated several times in the Psalm. Is that not what God has done in coming into the world as Jesus? Let's allow God to light up our lives this Advent with His presence.

- **1 Corinthians 1:** The church at Corinth was a troubled church with many problems, but Paul saw Christ at work. Let's learn a lesson from Paul, not finding fault, but affirming people and focusing on the work of God in our midst. The Corinthian Christians were waiting for Christ's second coming. This is Advent and we await Christ's coming to us. The truth is that Christ comes to us every moment. In this time of waiting let's take time to be still and look for God present in our lives and in the people around us so that we don't miss His coming.
- **Mark 13:** The message is clear - watch, keep awake, be ready for God's coming. Advent is a time to be alert to God's presence, not lamenting the awfulness of the world, as we so often do. Let's see all around us signs of God's presence. The best way to prepare for God's coming, I believe, is to live the present moment - God's gift to us - to the full, giving our full attention to what is to hand, discerning God's presence and His purpose for us. Then we have no need to fear what may lie ahead. May God surprise us all this Advent as we live reflectively, prayerfully and attentively.

**A prayer**

Lord, in our waiting and in our watching this Advent, may we sense your presence with us and be surprised at your coming to us moment by moment in ordinary, and yet extraordinary, ways. Fill us with wonder as we glimpse your presence. In all our busy-ness may we find time to be still and silently worship you, celebrating your love for us who wait for you. Amen.