

It's been said that athletes need to be ready to go "on the 'B' of the 'bang'" of the starting pistol. We may not be elite athletes running a race. But we need to be alert to what's going on in our world and alert to what God's doing, ready to see and tell others of the signs that God is keeping His promises and will redeem and transform this world.

We need to tell the world that, in Jesus whose coming we're preparing for, we can find hope in despair; we can see light in the darkness.

To think and pray about:

- 1) What are some of the promises God makes to us - and the world - in the stories of Christmas? Are any of them particularly special to you?
- 2) Are you looking forward to Advent and Christmas? Why or why not?
- 3) Are there times when you find it hard to trust in God's promises? When? Why? Does anything help you to put your faith in them again?
- 4) In the sermon, we thought of some signs of God's hope being shown in the world (eg the day without violent crime in New York). This week, see how many other signs like these - big or small - you can see. Try to "keep alert" for them!

To think about for our Festival Service:

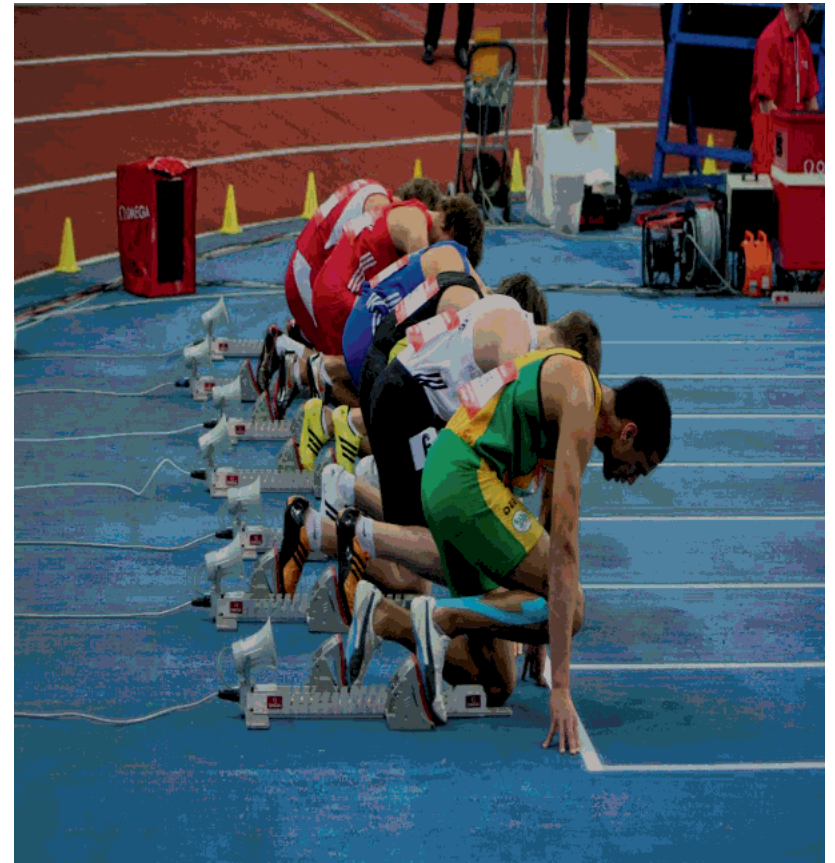
Read Luke 1:26-38 and 46-55. Do you think Mary was ready for Jesus' birth? Why or why not?

Read Matthew 1:18-25. Do you think Joseph was ready for Jesus' birth? Why or why not?

GREENFIELD CHURCH

PREPARING FOR THE COMING KING

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WEEK 1: On your marks

"On your marks..."

This week's Bible passages:

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Luke 21:25-36



Can we find hope in despair? Can we see light in the darkness?

Those are the questions that set us off on our Advent journey, our preparations for the coming King. And these are the questions that our two readings have as their theme - but in very different ways.

Jeremiah

The reading from Jeremiah seems full of promise - God's promises. God has made a promise to His people and He is going to fulfil it. He will lead His people to safety. He will bring justice and righteousness to the land. And they will be proud to call themselves God's People and to trust in Him alone.

And yet Jeremiah says all this as his country faces a terrible fate: it is about to be invaded by the great Babylonian nation. Jerusalem and the Temple, signs of God's presence and protection, will be destroyed. And many of the people will be taken prisoner and deported to Babylon, leaving only a small remnant. It was a national catastrophe - seemingly the end of God's people? How will God fulfil His promises in the midst of that?

"How will God fulfil His promises... Can there really be good news?"

Luke

The Luke passage is almost the opposite of this: there's plenty of despair alright! The first 4 verses are crammed full of almost frightening images: nations in anguish, the sea "roaring and tossing", people "fainting from terror", the "heavenly bodies shaking" - frightening stuff! And then the climax of it all: "the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory". It doesn't sound like people were expecting this to be a jolly event - in fact, it sounds terrifying!

But then Jesus says: "stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Jesus promises that somehow these terrible events will be a sign of something extraordinarily good for the disciples. He goes on to say in v31 that when they see all these signs, "you know that the Kingdom of God is near". Jesus talks about this like seeing trees come into leaf, a sign of goodness and new life.

Can there really be good news when the world seems to be falling apart?



God promised...

At Christmas, we'll hear all sorts of amazing promises. The angel Gabriel will tell us that Jesus has come to be a Saviour, to set people free and save us from our sins. He'll tell us that Jesus will reign over the whole earth with a kingdom that will never end. The whole angelic choir will tell the terrified shepherds that Jesus has come to bring "Peace on earth and goodwill to all on whom His favour rests."

Great!

"Jesus doesn't call us to give up - He calls us to be ready."

But if we read any newspaper, watch any TV news bulletin, or even just look at the people around us, these promises seem like a long way off. Alright, we may not be in such a dire situation as the people in either of our readings today. But things aren't great and, if we didn't know better, we'd wonder if God really meant what He promised.

One answer might be just to give up: these are great stories, we could tell ourselves, but they're not really going to happen. We could sing the Christmas carols we love without particularly meaning what they say.

The 'B' of the 'Bang'

But we don't want to do that!

Jesus doesn't call us to do that - He calls us to be ready:

To be ready to see signs of God keeping His promises - to see love triumph over hate, hope over despair, light over darkness.

To be ready to lift our worries about the world and us to God.

To be ready to join God in all He's doing - to find real ways we can tell and show others that God has not given up on them, no matter how desperate their situation seems.

