First Sunday of Advent: Stop! Be Still…

*At Advent we welcome, wait, recognise and embrace God’s coming. Events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and raging wars and conflicts have created an even more unsettled world. This Advent season, we focus on God’s coming as the Prince of Peace and explore how the theme of peace intertwines with the Christmas story.*

**Scripture – Psalm 46:1-11 and Luke 2:1-5**

Key verse – ‘…Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.’ (Psalm 46:10)

Introduction

* The word Advent derives from words meaning ‘coming’ in Latin. During these next weeks the Church around the world will focus its attention on the anticipation of the coming of Jesus at Christmas.
* This Advent season happens at the end of a year marked with war in Europe, continued conflicts around the world, the ongoing health and financial consequences of Covid-19, record-breaking effects of climate change – whether it be excessive heat, drought or floods – the cost-of-living crisis, a change of Prime Minister and monarch in the UK, not to mention people’s individual situations: marriage breakdowns, failing health, financial pressures etc.
* The list seems endless. Will so much turmoil ever stop, will we ever have a moment of peace?

Context

* At Christmas we sing about a ‘Silent night’ and Jesus sleeping in ‘heavenly peace’, but the society into which he was born was far from silent, heavenly, or peaceful. Essentially, Jesus was born into an occupied country under an oppressive political regime.
* Luke 2:1-5 tells us that the Emperor Caesar Augustus decrees that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. In those days people were registered for the purpose of taxation. Some scholars believe that Rome demanded as much as 50% to 60% of what the common people grew and owned. So there wasn’t much income or goods left for their own survival.
* Moreover, appointed king of the Jews under the authority of Rome, Herod the Great was a firm and ruthless ruler, going to extremes to maintain and exert his power even to the point of killing family members who threatened his reign.
* While Psalm 46 isn’t a passage usually associated with Christmas, its words span the centuries and generations. It’s easy to lose sight of the fact that God is stable, unshakable and all powerful even in times of trouble (v2), when nature rages (v3), when war and conflict seem never ending (v6).
* Instead of frantically running in all directions, God tells us to be still, and know that he is God (v10). He is still the ultimate ruler, ‘the trouble around us is just another opportunity for him to be exalted among the nations, it is just another opportunity for us to re-learn that the Lord of hosts is with us’ (B.H. Carroll).
* It was in these circumstances that Jesus came, centuries ago, and it’s in these circumstances that he comes in 2022, this Advent season.
* Quote:

*‘Life is a constant Advent season: we are continually waiting to become, to discover, to complete, to fulfil. Hope, struggle, fear, expectation and fulfilment are all part of our Advent experience … The world is not as just, not as loving, not as whole as we know it can and should be. But the coming of Christ and his presence among us – as one of us – give us reason to live in hope: that light will shatter the darkness, that we can be liberated from our fears and prejudices, that we are never alone or abandoned …’* (CONNECTIONS, 11-28-93)

Reflection

* As we approach the celebration of the birth of Jesus, let’s reflect on the things that rule our hearts right now. If it’s not peace, let’s be honest with ourselves and realise that the gift of peace is real and we can take hold of it and elevate Jesus to his rightful place as ruler of our hearts, letting peace envelop our lives.
* For some at this time, being still may mean an act of physically stopping, whether standing, or kneeling, or sitting. For others it may mean switching off electronic devices, taking time to breathe, walking – whatever allows for this act of knowing that God is God. Recognising these moments is a habit that can be nurtured.

Prayer

Father, I declare that you are first in my life. Thank you for coming to earth so I can experience your amazing gift of peace. Help me to recognise your peace in the busyness of my day, enjoying this sacred moment of communion with you. Stop me in my tracks if need be, so that I can open myself up to you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.