

Worship for Advent Sunday (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to our worship for the first week in Advent.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

This is a time of waiting, this is a time of beginnings.

We are waiting Lord, beginning again our journey with you.

We are seeking Lord, wanting to know more of you.

Come amongst us, by your Spirit.

Amen.

Introduction

Today is Advent Sunday – yes it really is just four weeks to Christmas, and it is the start of our Christian year in the church. The focus of our service is Advent and, in our churches, and here, we light the first candle on the Advent Wreath and say the first verse of our Advent Hymn which is from *StF 165 v1*

Hymn: StF 165 – Advent Candles tell their story

Advent 1

Advent candles tell their story

as we watch and pray,

longing for the Day of Glory,

'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.

Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness

changed for gladness

on that day.

Mark Earey (b. 1965)

The first candle is lit.

As we light this Advent candle, may its flame be for us a sign of hope;
may its warmth be a symbol of God's love for us;
and may it inspire us to be hope bearers – people of compassion and integrity,
as we gather in the name of Jesus who is the light of the world.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 167 – Colours of day dawn into the mind

- 1. Colours of day dawn into the mind,
the sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
and let's give the message to the people we meet.
*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.***
- 2. Go through the park, on into the town;
the sun still shines on; it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
the people of darkness are needing a friend.
*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.***
- 3. Open your eyes, look into the sky,
the darkness has come, the sun came to die.
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.
*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.***

***Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.***

Sue McClellan (b. 1951), John Paculabo (b. 1946) and Keith Rycroft (b. 1949)

Opening Prayers

Lord Jesus

We praise you for this season of Advent,
this time for rejoicing and celebration,
for praise and worship,
for appreciating your goodness.

Help us to prepare for your coming to catch a
glimpse of your kingdom
through living by its values today.

Live in us now, so that the day may come when
we live with you for all eternity.

Eternal God, hope of the world, we cannot grasp
the immensity of your being,
and yet all around us we catch glimpses of your
power.

You speak to us in nature's blessings.

You speak to us through science and creativity.

You reveal yourself in the love and the care and
the support of those around us.

You show yourself when we most need to see
you.

When we least expect it, we see your hand at
work.

We read your Word, time and time again, and
suddenly, we are amazed by seeing something
new.

Eternal God, we adore you.

We wait, but don't always find it easy to wait,
and for that we are sorry.

We confess our impatience and our lack of
attention to the journey and its signposts.

Teach us that preparation is part of the journey
and that the journey is part of the gift.

You offer us a way to follow, a path to tread, a

journey that leads to hope, to joy, to trust and to
love,

and we confess we do not always follow.

Now, may we step into this Advent as faithful
people, seeking forgiveness and trying to follow
your path,

and believing you will be walking with us every
step of the way.

Amen.

God promises to all who follow, that he will take
away our sins and set us on the path to life
eternal.

We hear God's word, we know God's
forgiveness, and we feel God's peace.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Hallowed be your name,

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done,

On earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil,

For the kingdom, the power and the glory

are yours, now and forever

Amen

Hymn: StF 169 – Come thou long expected Jesus

**1. Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.**

**2. Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,**

**dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.**

**3. Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.**

**4. By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.**

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalms 25:1-10 (NIVUK)

Of David.

¹In you, Lord my God,
I put my trust.

²I trust in you;
do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.

³No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those
who are treacherous without cause.

⁴Show me your ways, Lord,
teach me your paths.

⁵Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Saviour,
and my hope is in you all day long.

⁶Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.

⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me,
for you, Lord, are good.

⁸Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

⁹He guides the humble in what is right
and teaches them his way.

¹⁰All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful
toward those who keep the demands of his
covenant.

Luke 21:25-36 (NIVUK)

²⁵There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars.
On the earth, nations will be in anguish and
perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.

²⁶People will faint from terror, apprehensive of
what is coming on the world, for the heavenly
bodies will be shaken. ²⁷At that time they will see
the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power
and great glory. ²⁸When these things begin to
take place, stand up and lift up your heads,
because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹He told them this parable: 'Look at the fig-tree
and all the trees. ³⁰When they sprout leaves, you
can see for yourselves and know that summer is
near. ³¹Even so, when you see these things
happening, you know that the kingdom of God is
near.

³²Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly
not pass away until all these things have
happened. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away,
but my words will never pass away.

³⁴'Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed
down with carousing, drunkenness and the
anxieties of life, and that day will close on you
suddenly like a trap. ³⁵For it will come on all
those who live on the face of the whole earth.
³⁶Be always on the watch, and pray that you may
be able to escape all that is about to happen, and
that you may be able to stand before the Son of
Man.'

Sermon

Yes, today is Advent Sunday and the word
'Advent' means coming or arrival, and the focus

of these weeks leading up to Christmas, is the celebration of the birth of Jesus in the first Advent and the return of Christ today in our lives. In Advent we celebrate how God came in the divine and human person of Jesus, which enabled each of us to have a close relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

At the start of our service today, and during the weeks of Advent, in some of our churches, we display an Advent wreath which is a wreath made with evergreen leaves into which are fixed – not four candles, but five candles. These are usually red or purple candles surrounding one white candle in the middle. The red candles are lit in turn each Sunday in Advent leading up to Christmas, when the central white one is lit on Christmas day.

Today being the first Sunday in Advent, we light the red candle. This first candle symbolizes hope and this week we focus on the hope of all God's people. On each following Sunday during Advent, an additional candle is lit. We remember the Old Testament prophets in week two, especially Isaiah who foretold the birth of Christ; John the Baptist in week three; and Mary the mother of Jesus in week four. They also represent the four virtues that Jesus brings us: hope, love, joy and peace. The central candle representing Christ is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, reminding us that Jesus brings peace and is the light of the world.

In the care homes where I am chaplain, we used to progressively sing each week, the verses of 'The Holly and The Ivy' during Advent, as they appeared in Hymns and Psalms, the old Methodist hymnal – you might remember it

The words were this first week being:
Oh one is for God's people
in every age and day

we are watching for his coming
we believe, and we obey

Sadly that hymn has been left out of Singing the Faith, so we use the hymn, 'Advent candles tell the story' – as we did at the start of this service

The prophecy and expectation of Jesus the coming of the Messiah, we find in the Old Testament, mainly in Isaiah but also in the Psalms and Jeremiah. Our reading today from Luke's gospel is also one of expectation, which is echoed in different ways in the other New Testament Gospels. In Matthew, Mark and also in other chapters of Luke; also in Paul's letters to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians. These verses after were written after Jesus had died and rose again and returned to God and they're about what is referred to as the second coming of Christ. The verses use apocalyptic ideas and imagery of that time which is symbolic; and the reason for that is to evoke emotion about the message and to encourage people who were oppressed.

We can't just think of it in terms of our own cultural and historical setting, and we need to take into consideration what was happening at the time it was written. They seem to describe a world-shattering event, with Jesus returning in glory to put all the wrongs right in our world. This second coming is called in ancient Greek 'the Parousia', and various different religious groups in the past including the Essenes in Jesus's time, who we know about from the dead sea scrolls, have predicted when the world would radically change. But as we know, in the event it didn't. In our church we sometimes say the Nicene creed which includes these words:
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the father
he will come again in his glory to judge the living and the dead

and his kingdom will have no end
We look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.

Now in our reading today from Luke after describing a terrible series of apocalyptic signs, when the whole earth will be shaken, it goes on to say that 'at that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory'. And then there comes a verse which has caused a great deal of discussion over the years – verse 32 – it says, 'I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened '.

And so the obvious question you might ask is 'well they did pass away and why didn't it happen'? But another way of thinking about this is that Jesus may have been predicting a series of terrible things: a revolt, the extreme distress of the people, and the fall of Jerusalem when the Romans destroyed much of the city including the second temple – all of which really did happen in their generation. And that wasn't to say that all these things would end then, but would only be the beginning.

So Jesus, I feel, is not saying the world is going to end tomorrow but he's given a warning. He's saying, in effect, that terrible events will happen that we have little control over, and they will continue to happen, but we should not lose heart and give in to despair – instead we should live our lives in a way that makes ourselves prepared and ready for that eventuality, but also for the end of our lives on this earth.

Now although a spectacular return of Jesus could come about and it may offer many a sense of hope, many Christians, including myself, believe that Jesus was, when he was talking about coming again, referring to his coming again

through the Holy Spirit after he had returned to God.

In our reading today, Jesus says be careful or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. It's a warning not to become complacent, to be on guard and to be ready. It was a guide on how we should live: fully conscious, aware, not beaten down by the worries of life but ready to engage with, and to live with, Christ in our lives.

There is in Jesus words, after a warning about some terrible experiences to go through, a joyful expectation of a better life to come. Those thoughts have really resonated with me and perhaps yourselves over these past two years. We've experienced some terrible heart rendering situations where loved ones have died, and extreme distress caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. And as a chaplain in care homes I have witnessed this perhaps more than others.

But you know, we go now into this time of Advent, and as I said at the start the word Advent means coming or arrival; after the distressing and hard times we have experienced, let us now look forward to the coming or arrival of better times ahead. Just as Jesus urged his followers to look forward in expectation, so we should look forward in expectation - not only in celebrating Jesus's birth, but in going forward into the future with Christ. Let us use our experiences of the past months to ensure this Advent, that we really are more prepared and ready. It's a time to be sure that we have got our priorities right; that our relationship with ourselves and others is good; and most importantly that our love of God and our relationship with him through Jesus Christ is renewed and strengthened.

In the words of the psalmist
'show me your ways, O Lord
teach me your paths
guide me in your truth
and teach me
for you are my God and my Saviour
and my hope is in you
all day long to you, Lord I lift up my soul
in you I trust O my God'
Amen

THE RESPONSE

Hymn: StF 188 – There's a light upon the mountains

- 1. There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring,
when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King;
weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed so long;
but his triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.**
- 2. There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air;
and the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer:
for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit is the travail of his own.**
- 3. He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way;
he is calling for his angels to build up the gates of day:
but his angels here are human, not the shining hosts above;
for the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of our love.**

- 4. Hark! We hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell;
'tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our King, Immanuel:
Zion, go now forth to meet him; and, my soul, be swift to bring
all your finest and your noblest for the triumph of our King!**

Henry Burton (1840–1930)

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
to you we bring our thanks and praise for your promises through the ages,
for your first Word,
for the first utterance of Wisdom,
for the first indwelling of the Spirit,
for the first sensing of divinity,
for the first utterance of the prophets,
for the dreams of the dreamers,
for the visions of the visionaries,
for the stories of the storytellers,
for the journeys of the travellers,
for the obedience of the called.
God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to you we bring our thanks and praise.

Amen.

Come, Lord Jesus, come, to this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus.
Come to a world which worries,
worryes about image,
about money,
about family,
about health,
a world which worries about the future and has forgotten how to listen for your coming.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Lord, we need you now in this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus.
Come to a world which needs you,
which needs the hope and justice,
the forgiveness and cleansing
which you bring.
Come to those we know who are in special need
today.
Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Fill us with your peace in this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus.
Come to all who long to be filled with peace;
those who live with conflict,
whether in war zones or in the home.
Come to those whose minds give them no peace,
who are anxious, frightened and grieving.
Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Touch us with your love in this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus.
Come to your church throughout the world
and touch us with your love, that we may be
channels of that love
to those who are alone,
those who feel unloved,
those who are rejected and despised.
Come, Lord Jesus, come.

May we see your light in this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus.
Many live in darkness,
the darkness of slavery and oppression,
the darkness of pain and despair,
the darkness of famine and need.
Shine on with the light that can never be
overcome by darkness.
Come, Lord Jesus, come.
Amen.

The Offering & prayer

The anticipation is in the air.
We offer you our gifts of money and service, as
part of our active waiting for you:
as we prepare a space for the Kingdom to come;
for justice to be done;
and for love to reign in our hearts again.
Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 185 – Sing we the King who is coming
to reign

- 1. Sing we the King who is coming to reign;
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
joy to the nations when Jesus is King:**
*Come let us sing: praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
this is our song, who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*
- 2. All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
justice and truth from his sceptre shall
spring;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:**
*Come let us sing: praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
this is our song, who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*
- 3. Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
doubt shall not darken his witness within;
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
love is victorious when Jesus is King:**
*Come let us sing: praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
this is our song, who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*
- 4. Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day**

**when this new song your creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King:
*Come let us sing: praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
this is our song, who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.***

Charles Silvester Horne (1865–1914)

Notices

Before our closing prayer I would like to thank everyone who helped to prepare this worship. Our preacher was Methodist Chaplain Andy Metcalf, the readings were from members of Radford Road and Mickleton churches and the service was put together by the talented technical team. My name is Pam Weston.

Prayer & blessing

Loving God,
as we end our time together, let us go in hope,
live by hope,
and be signs of hope for all to see.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

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StF 167 – Colours of day dawn into the mind

Sue McClellan (b. 1951), John Paculabo (b. 1946) and Keith Ryecroft (b. 1949)

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StF 185 – Sing we the King who is coming to reign

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StF 165 – Advent Candles tell their story

Mark Earey (b. 1965)

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Bible Verses

NIV

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