

Christ Church Woodley – Order of Service

Sunday 13th December 2020 – Advent 3, Hope-Filled Expectation & Gift Service.



When the LORD brought back his exiles to Jerusalem,
it was like a dream!
We were filled with laughter,
and we sang for joy.
And the other nations said,
"What amazing things the LORD has done for them."
Yes, the LORD has done amazing things for us!
What joy!
Restore our fortunes, LORD,
as streams renew the desert.
Those who plant in tears
will harvest with shouts of joy.
They weep as they go to plant their seed,
but they sing as they return with the harvest.

Today's service is brought to you by Mr Neil Graham, but this service also comes to you from the love and compassion shown by the family of Christ Church in Woodley and the work its brothers and sisters have done and are doing in the community. Today is our gift service but this year it's a gift service with a twist as it looks at the wider gifts that we all give and have given.

Welcome from the Worship Steward and News

Advent Liturgy

The Holly and the Ivy Verses 1 to 4 for the lighting of the first 3 Candles

This is followed by a video of the services introductory Advent Poem shown below.

A secret seed is rich with promised fruit,
for seeds are buried when it's time to grow.

This life begins with one seed, tiny, mute,
like treasure in a field, like yeast in dough,
a secret seed is rich with promised fruit.

We wait in darkness, wait in earth, below,
seek out the signs of life in root and shoot:
for seeds are buried when it's time to grow.

A secret seed is rich with promised fruit,
for seeds are buried when it's time to grow.



Call To Worship

The third candle in our crown, like John the Baptist, lights the way, preparing for Jesus, coming soon, in ancient times just like today.

Jesus, help us make way for you; O come, O come Emmanuel. In words and acts and in our lives, O come, O come Emmanuel.

A prayer of approach

Lord if any of us have come to you here today with signs of weariness or downheartedness upon us, please hold our hands, give us a smile and remind us of the hope-filled expectation of your coming. Let us approach you with confidence, because you have always been with us, let our hearts sing with joy, as we wait with you for your second coming. Lord sit with us here as we come to worship you, to praise you, to sing of our joy filled expectations. **Amen**

1st Hymn – O come all ye faithful

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TghcwAoV8U0&feature=emb_logo

O come all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to
Bethlehem.
Come and behold him,
born the king of angels.

Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation!
Sing, all ye citizens
of heaven above,
'Glory to God
In the highest!'

We'll give him all the glory,
we'll give him all the glory,
we'll give him all the glory,
Christ the Lord!

O come, let us adore him,

For he alone is worthy,
for he alone is worthy,
for he alone is worthy,
Christ the Lord!

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

God of God,
Light of light –
lo, he abhors not
the virgin's womb
Very God,
begotten – not created.

O come, let us adore him,



Prayers of praise and Adoration

Lord, we thank you that, in the birth of your Son, you have made the down payment on your promise that you will always be with us. In all the twists and turns of life – you are there, always there.

You have promised in Jesus to share the whole of life with us, and we are thankful – so very thankful. We thank you too, Father, for the help, care and strength we receive from our families, friends and fellow Christians. When we are low, sad or afraid, your love, through them, enables us to come through with hope and joy, and our eyes even more firmly fixed on him.

Thank you for each time, when in the midst of our troubles, problems, difficulties, anxieties or pain, we have been made more aware of your love and our need to trust you in everything; for each and every opportunity you give us to share the love and knowledge we have of you with those who feel unloved, unwanted, and unnecessary.

We ask that through your love we may be enabled to make that love real for others, too.

Forgive us our words of fear, our thoughts and feelings of uncertainty; forgive our anger, bitterness, and our refusal to forgive. Father forgive us that so easily we allow the things that crowd into our lives to crowd you out.

Forgive us and make us new. This we ask in Jesus' name. **Amen**

Gift Service talk – (all age chat)

I would like to share some history with you, in the form of a little story.

On the night that Jesus was born there were some shepherds on the hills outside Jerusalem. They were looking after their sheep. It was very dark. It was very quiet. And then all of a sudden God surprised the shepherds. A bright light shone in the night sky and an angel made a big announcement to the shepherds.

In the announcement the angel told the shepherds three things about the baby Jesus.

1. it's just what we were hoping for

The first thing the Angel told them was that the baby was just what they were hoping for.

I've got three presents that I thought I'd let you help me open. (I know its not Christmas yet but with all these presents here I asked Helen to arrange some for me so I could share with you and she put them in a stocking but I can't seem to find it. [Cue: 'It's behind you gags!'])

Let's open my first present. That's just what I was hoping for. I've really wanted a Neil Diamond vinyl for a long time. My dad told me how good it was and so I was hoping that someone would buy it for me. What are you hoping to get for Christmas?

When the angels told the shepherds that Jesus was the Christ, the shepherds realised that Jesus was just what everyone was hoping for. Everyone had been looking forward to a time when God would send his special king. That's what the name Christ means. Jesus is the king that God had promised to run everything. And that's just what we've been hoping for.

It's great when we get a present that's just what we were hoping for. And Jesus is just that.

2. it's more than we were expecting

The second thing that the angel told the shepherds was that the baby was more than they were expecting.

Let's open my second present. It's a card. It's from Uncle Ian, Let me read it to you, 'Dear Neil & Helen, Happy Christmas. Hope that you have a terrific day with your lovely family. Lots of love Uncle Ian'. But there's something else in the envelope. What is it? It's a couple of twenty pound notes. I wasn't expecting that. I haven't spoken to Uncle Ian for ages. He's given me 40 pounds, isn't that fantastic! That's so much more than I thought I'd get.

When the angels told the shepherds that Jesus was the Lord the shepherds realised that Jesus was more than everyone was expecting. Everyone knew that God would one day send a special king but they hadn't realised that he was going to be God's Son. Jesus isn't just a king, he's God. And that's more than we were expecting.

It's great when we get a present that's just what we're hoping for and it's more than we're expecting. And Jesus is just that.

3. it's just what we need

The third thing that the angel told the shepherds was that the baby was just what they needed.

Let's open my third present. It's a woolly hat. That's just what I need. I get really cold on winter days and so a hat is ideal.

When the angels told the shepherds that Jesus was the Saviour the shepherds realised that Jesus was just what everyone needed. Everyone knew that we need someone to save us so that we can be friends with God. We can't save ourselves. We need someone to do it for us. Jesus is the saviour that God has sent us. And that's just what we need.

It's great when we get a present that's just what we're hoping for and it's more than we're expecting and it's just what we need. And Jesus is just that.

Conclusion

We're going to get some great presents at Christmas, I'm sure. But God has already given us the best present we could ever get because he gave us His Son, the baby Jesus. He grew up to be

- the Christ, the special king who came to rule us and take care of everything
- the Lord, who's not just a person like me but he's God as well
- the Saviour, the one who came to save us so that we could be friends with God

BUT what about the things all around the stage today

These are all gifts that we hope will be just what was hoped for, more than is expected and just what is needed for the people that these gifts will go to. I can certainly say one thing, these have all been given with God's Love and I know God will make sure they get to the people whom need them, and he will do it using people like you, and the charities that we are supporting this year.

1. CIRDIC

Based in Reading, CIRDIC is recognised as a safe and welcoming drop-in centre for homeless people who are disadvantaged and living in the local community.

2. Woodley Food Bank

I don't need to explain the importance of this local charity, especially in a year like the one we have had. We have supported them for many year's through the dedication of Sandra and this year have reached out into the community and not just our own congregation to continue our support.

3. Woodley Lunch Bunch

This charity sprung up in Woodley this year to support young people during lock down, the idea was to provide lunches and activities to those that would normally get free school meals but were not during lock down. They have also delivered advent calendars to these young people and will be delivering Christmas hampers for the families they support. This Christmas they are looking to match people in need of a Christmas Lunch with those near to them that are willing to plate up an extra meal and deliver it.

4. The Cowshed

The Cowshed is a Christian charity that provides clothing and other items for individuals and families in Berkshire experiencing hardship. They offer their services to people from all faiths and none. They work in partnership with support services such as GPs, Health Visitors, Churches, charities and social service agencies who provide Cowshed with referrals.

5. Christian Community Action Reading

Demonstrating God's love by meeting people's physical needs and restoring self-worth. CCA support people in Reading who are in need of everyday household items.

A prayer for the gifts we have collected together

Dear Lord, you have blessed our communities with your love which shines out from all those involved with these charities we have just heard about and are supporting. You have showered us in your love through all the people that bring these gifts, some new, some recycled.

Please dear Lord we ask that these gifts make their way to those that need them and that like you are to humanity, these gifts are to them, what they are hoping for, more than they expect and just what they need.

We thank you Lord for calling us to support your work and allowing us to be part of sharing your love and grace.

Amen.

There is no Junior church today and I will try to keep the service of interest to all of the younger ones with us but first before we continue I believe James Allen will do his usual part

James Allen – Prayers and intro of 2nd Hymn

2nd Hymn – StF 476 – One more step along the world I go

<https://youtu.be/leAFwKfLFXc>

One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go ;
from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you :

*and it's from the old I travel to the new ;
keep me travelling along with you.*

Round the corners of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn ;
all the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me :

*and it's from the old I travel to the new ;
keep me travelling along with you.*

As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me travelling the way I should ;
where I see no way to go
you'll be telling me the way, I know :

*and it's from the old I travel to the new ;
keep me travelling along with you.*

Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough ;
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you :

*and it's from the old I travel to the new ;
keep me travelling along with you.*

You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me ;
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you :

*and it's from the old I travel to the new ;
keep me travelling along with you.*

Sydney Carter (1915–2004)

Some words about the young people and a prayer

Normally here at Christ Church this is the point where our young people would be leaving us, but today you're staying, so I will do my best to keep it interesting for you. I have sent you some activities to have a go at, so please feel free to have a listen and have a go at the activity pack I have sent you.

Poem entitled John the Wrecking Ball

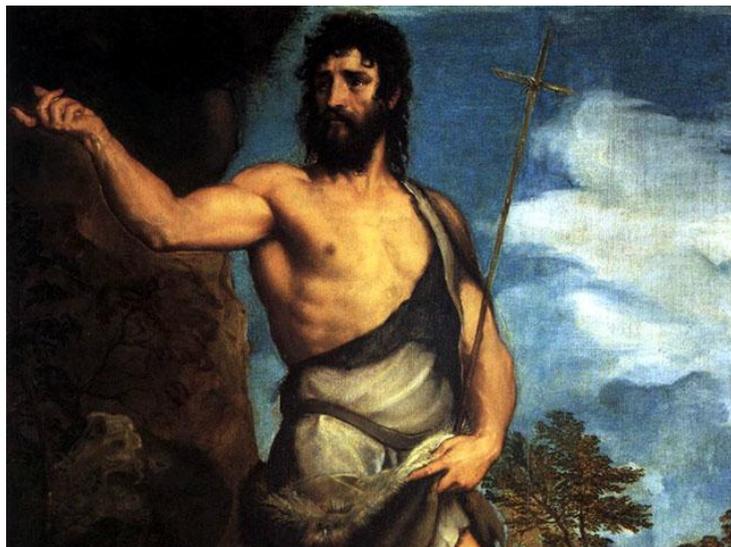
John the Wrecking Ball
John the Baptist,
John Bulldozer,
John the wrecking ball:
levelling mountains, laying roads,
shouting out his call:
No time left!
The Saviour comes!
Get ready, one and all!



Prepare the way,
make straight the path,
and fill the valleys in;
knock down the mountains of your doubts,
make smooth the soil of sin,
the Lord is coming, shout it out!
His glory will be seen!



John the Baptist,
wild and hairy,
eats what he can find.
Not one to tiptoe round the truth,
he says what's on his mind:
No time left!
The Kingdom comes!
Now don't get left behind!



Prepare the way,
make straight the path,
for we are grass and flowers;
we die and fall, but our Lord lives
and now he comes in power.
Fear not, Judah,
shout good news:
His word will live forever!

John the Baptist
calls the people:
"Hear the words I say,
turn from sin and be baptized,
wash your wrongs away!
No time left!
that longed for Lord
is here today, today!"



Prayers including Lord's prayer & confessions.

We all have our longings, faithful Lord, and we bring them to you as part of our worship.

Abraham and Sarah spent 25 years, longing for their promised son. Moses waited 40 years, longing for his people to enter the Promised Land. David endured 15 years, longing to take his rightful place as king. Esther waited, fasting and praying, for three days before she went before the king.

We all have our longings, faithful Lord, and we bring them to you as part of our worship.

Israel waited 600 years between exile and the coming of the longed-for Messiah. Hebrews tells us: “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” [Heb 11:40]

We all have our longings, faithful Lord, and we bring them to you as part of our worship.

Today, some of us are waiting for answers to prayer. Some long for relationships to be mended, or to begin. Some ache for a world of justice where all are treated fairly. Some are hungry for meaning, purpose, and joy in their lives.

We all have our longings, faithful Lord, and we bring them to you as part of our worship.

Let’s take a moment of silence now, to bring our personal longings before God. [pause]

Let’s say together one more time:

We all have our longings, faithful Lord, and we bring them to you as part of our worship. Amen.

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**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 us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**



Loving God, the great festival of Christmas is drawing nearer and we are busy preparing for it – choosing presents, planning get togethers, buying food, much that has become an accepted and expected part of this season.

Yet, in all the bustle, we so easily forget the most important thing of all: responding to the wonderful gift of your Son.

You have come to us in Christ:

forgive us when we fail to serve him

We tell ourselves that we are different - that we will be worshiping you Sunday by Sunday, sharing in services of lessons and carols, hearing again familiar and well loved verses of Scripture, but we know that this is not enough in itself, for these two can become just another part of our traditional celebrations, washing over us rather than communicating the great message of the Gospel. We become so concerned with the wrapping that we fail fail to recognise the gift concealed underneath.

You have come to us in Christ:

forgive us when we fail to serve him

Forgive us for relegating Jesus to the periphery of our celebrations, rather than placing him at the centre where he belongs; for turning this season in to a time for material extravagance, rather than an opportunity for spiritual fulfilment; for doing so much to prepare for Christmas on the surface, yet so little to make ourselves ready within.

You have come to us in Christ:

forgive us when we fail to serve him

Loving God, open our heart to hear again your word, to welcome the living Christ, and to reflect on our response to his call. May this advent season teach us to welcome him afresh into our lives and to rejoice in his love not just at Christmas but always.

You have come to us in Christ:

forgive us when we fail to serve him

We ask it for his name's sake

Amen.

1st Reading - Isaiah 35: 1 – 10

Joy of the Redeemed

35 The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, ² it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendour of our God.
³ Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
⁴ say to those with fearful hearts,
"Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you."

⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.
⁷ The burning sand will become a pool,
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.
In the haunts where jackals once lay,
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

⁸ And a highway will be there;
it will be called the Way of Holiness;
it will be for those who walk on that Way.
The unclean will not journey on it;
wicked fools will not go about on it.
⁹ No lion will be there,
nor any ravenous beast;
they will not be found there.
But only the redeemed will walk there,
¹⁰ and those the Lord has rescued will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.



2nd Reading Matthew 11: 2-11

New International Version

²When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

⁴Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^[a] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

⁷As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.”^[b]

¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

3rd Hymn - Longing for a hope filled Morning

<https://youtu.be/xHkYbuK2uP4>

Longing for a hope-filled morning,
kingdom of the Son, draw near!
Waiting for the day soon dawning,
light of love that casts out fear.
Dayspring, come from heav’n, in lowly birth,
come to warm this cold, dark earth.

Reaching out through human history,
bring your scattered children home,
such an act of love! What mystery:
God appears in flesh and bone.
Come, Emmanuel, in lowly birth,
show how heaven embraces earth.

Sorrow through the world is sweeping,
bitter conflict rages still,
heaven hears its children weeping:
price of humankind’s freewill.
Come, O Prince of Peace, in lowly birth,
come to mend this broken earth.

Tune: PICARDY
words © Ally Barrett / Jubilate
administered by Jubilate Hymns Ltd



Sermon

Hope-Filled Expectation (Advent 3)

During Winter time, the natural world experiences a period of waiting. The leaves have fallen, the flowers are gone, things look grey and bare, although to be fair there is a remarkable number of plants still showing life in my garden this year. We know that there are seeds planted in the ground, hidden and dormant, but you might look out at your garden or at the flower beds in the park and wonder whether the colour and life of Spring will ever return.

Or think about long car journeys to see relatives around Christmas time, not forgetting this year we all have a travel window, so I guess there will be a lot of people out there at the same time this year, and in case you’re wondering that does not include Helen and I. But I digress, what is the eternal song that echoes from the children in the back seat? “Are we there yet?”

Their minds are fixed on the destination, so they wish the journey away.

I wonder if you have ever waited a long time for something - a parcel, a job, some news, or something else - and at the end of your waiting, when the thing finally came, it turned out to be very different from what you expected? Maybe you were surprised, even disappointed, that it didn't seem to live up to all that you had hoped?

For me I can embarrass my Dad with a story about a trip we took to the "Air Show" in Farnborough. I must say at this point in time we were not living in Berkshire, we were I think over in Hertfordshire, all I really remember about Broxbourne, was the dogs were bigger than donkeys, or so they seemed but again I am off topic...so after all the usual "are we there yet" questions from Alun and I, Dad informed us we had arrived in Farnborough, "start looking for the airport lads" he said. Unfortunately we soon realized we were in the wrong town, we were actually as far north of Reading as the Farnborough in Hampshire is south of Reading. Close but not there, you could say we were disappointed, but Dad being our true hero just got on with the job, looked at the map, realized what had happened and off we went to a great day out. It was an initial disappointment, but the day was far better than I had ever hoped for after we had arrived at the proper Farnborough an hour or so later and left me in love with aircraft and flying, a love I still hold to this day. But again enough about me, back to the point of this talk.

Beyond waiting for Spring, or for our destination, or waiting for parcels or jobs, some of us have waited on God. Maybe we wanted him to act, to answer a prayer, or to fulfil our dream. Perhaps you have experienced disappointment with God, if those things haven't come, or haven't lived up to your expectations. It is important that, rather than ignoring our struggles, we bring them to God. God can handle us being honest with him about how we feel.

John's Disappointment

John the Baptist is often someone we think about around Advent, because he proclaimed the coming of Jesus. John would have been well aware of the promises from Isaiah about the coming Messiah:

"Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;
say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come, he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution he will come to save you.'

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert." (Isaiah 35:3-6)

Put yourself in the place of John the Baptist for a moment. You've proclaimed the coming Kingdom of judgement and fire. You've criticised the "powers that be" and called them to repentance and radical life-change. You've seen Jesus baptised, sent out by the Spirit, and your hopes are well and truly set on him being the fulfilment of hundreds of years of waiting.

But then, suddenly, you're thrown in jail. And Jesus, although brilliant, isn't quite doing all the things you expected him to. The Romans are still in power. Corrupt priests and teachers are still in charge of the temple. The vengeance and divine retribution promised by Isaiah is not yet in evidence. Where's the judgement and fire you said was coming (Matt 3:7,11)? Matthew's gospel reports this:

"When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (Matthew 11:2-3)

John seems confused, even disappointed. This wasn't quite the glorious future he had imagined. Perhaps we can empathise with him in the areas where we've felt disappointed or discouraged. We should follow John's example of being honest with God about our disappointments - asking questions, lamenting difficult experiences, handing them over to Jesus. We see in this passage that Jesus is big enough to deal with our sadness and confusion.

A Surprising Kingdom

To understand what is going on with John, we can think back to the themes we've already explored in the past weeks. One is that Jesus is a different kind of King to the one everyone expected. His Kingdom is not about power and might, but love and self-sacrifice. His victory doesn't come with swords and chariots, instead it lifts up the poor

and sick and vulnerable. He doesn't force or coerce people to follow him, instead he reveals the heart of God to them and invites them to freely choose him as their Lord. So Jesus responds to John:

"Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor." (Matthew 11:4-5)

These are all fulfilments of Isaiah's prophesy. They are beautiful, remarkable acts of kindness and justice. They are not, however, the judgement and victory over their enemies that Israel had hoped for. This is not the goal that John had pictured, and he begins to doubt if Jesus is the Messiah after all.

John has his mind so fixed on his idea of the destination that he is missing the journey. He imagined a future of judgement and justice which has not yet arrived, and he is allowing this to distract him from the signs of the Kingdom of God which Jesus is already displaying. Like John, we need to allow God to meet us in our waiting, to see how he is bringing his Kingdom around us even though we've not yet reached our final destination.

A Two-Stage Process

The second reason why John was disappointed is that he failed to see the two-stage process of what God was doing in Jesus. We spoke during the last two weeks about the "now and not yet" of God's coming Kingdom. The promises of the Old Testament appear to say that in one decisive moment God would establish his Kingdom, judge wrongdoing, and put everything right. However, in practice it seems this plan has been split into two stages:

Stage One - Jesus, the Messiah is born to the world. He kicks-off the Kingdom of God on earth, bringing healing and truth and love. He dies to restore all of creation to God, and rises again the victorious King of the world. His resurrection body is like the first shoots of new life and growth coming out of the barren winter soil - a promise and a model of the new life which will come for all of creation.

Stage Two - God will complete the work he began in Jesus. The judgement of sin and injustice; the cleansing of heaven and earth; the putting right of all things - these promises have not yet been realised in their fullness.

The New Testament writers make it clear that we live in between Stage One and Stage Two, and that we are to wait with patience and hope for Stage Two to arrive.

Seeds of the Kingdom

In his letter, James uses an image of seeds planted in the ground to help us with this:

"Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near." (James 5:7-8)

God has shown us the seeds of his Kingdom. We've seen glimpses of the new life that came with Jesus, and hope for the restoration of all of God's creation. But right now, most of our seeds are still in the ground, and we won't see the fullness of the crop until Jesus returns. So God calls us to be faithful farmers - imitating Jesus wherever we find ourselves: using our gifts, caring for the sick, reaching out to the lonely, tending God's planet, proclaiming the good news - and trusting in that glorious day when the fullness of the harvest will come, and our disappointment will be no more.

Parting thoughts about our life at Christ Church Woodley

If I cast my mind back a year and think about when we started on the Mission Shaped journey, I had in my mind all these great expectations of the BIG things we were going to do in our community and how we were going to bring God to all in Woodley. Now fast forward to today, look at all these gifts arranged about the stage. These are not what I was expecting, but upon reflection they are what is needed and way beyond my wildest dreams.

That's because these gifts represent the work of Gods Kingdom, they follow in the way of Jesus, looking after the sick, the poor, those on the margins. We as a church have helped continue to build Heaven on earth, to continue bringing Jesus' kingdom to his people. We have opened our doors and welcomed people to come and give, we have

enabled others to share in our journey. What we have is great and now my mind looks to see how we continue to grow within Gods plan, and to help others hear Gods words and see more of his love.

I truly believe we are on a journey here at Christ Church walking alongside Jesus and I hope that these gifts get to those that really want them and that they exceed all expectations and are truly what is needed.

Amen.

4th Hymn - Light of Christ

<https://youtu.be/CVjSM4qBofs>

The light of Christ
has come into the world (2x)

1. All men must be born again
to see the kingdom of God
The water and the Spirit
bring new life in God's love

The light of Christ
has come into the world (2x)

2. God gave up His only Son
out of love for the world
So that all men who believe
in Him will live forever

The light of Christ
has come into the world (2x)

3. The light of God has come to us
so that we might have salvation
From the darkness of our sins we walk
into glory with Christ Jesus

The light of Christ
has come into the world (2x)

Journey of Joy and Disappointment – Reflection

I invite you to join in a kind of examen reflection as you think about your journey with Jesus. Please close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. Commit to taking this time to be with God.

First think back to when you first started walking with Jesus. For some of us, it was too early to fully remember, as we prayed trusting goodnight prayers in our cribs. For some it will have been a decisive moment when, as an adult, we chose to journey with him. And for many there is not one moment, but a gradual realisation that Jesus walks beside you. Whichever camp you find yourself in, choose a moment at least in the early stages of your Christian life.

[pause]

Imagine that you stand at that moment, looking forward through time to today.

Take a moment to see the joyful times in your life journey: When have you felt extra close to God? When have you experienced answered prayers or a strong sense of calling? Notice these moments in the years, months and weeks leading up to today, and offer your thanks to God.

[pause]

Now, from your perspective of the early stages of your journey with Jesus, look towards today and notice the times of disappointment. When have there been difficult times? Times of unanswered prayer or unmet expectations? Notice these times, and bring them before God. Be honest when you express how you feel about these times, God can take it.

[pause]

Now, change your perspective to today. Look back at your disappointments from this perspective and open your heart to allow God to speak. Did God have a plan with this time of your life? Was there anything you learned from that part of your journey? Sometimes, this side of the new creation, we see nothing good coming out of suffering,

but be open to the possibility that God might whisper in your heart something he has grown in you through your difficulties. Let's listen in silence.

[pause]

Finally, let's bring to God our present and our immediate future. Are there things you are currently praying for, hoping that God will answer quickly? Issues in your life where you don't want to endure the journey, but would like to hurry God to a good end destination? Bring these things to God now. Ask him to help you on your journey. Be aware that Jesus walks with you and if you let him, helps you carry your burdens.

[pause]

Father God, We bring all these reflections to you. Thank you that you never leave us, and that, by the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to walk with us. Give us patience to endure and to not rush ahead, give us hope that your goodness will prevail. in Jesus' name, **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

LEADER: We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again, help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

We look at our world, so desperately in need of you. Deserts spread, harvests fail and people thirst. But you promise:

"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom." [Is 35:1]

We bring to you those who suffer with droughts and famines, that you would provide for their needs. And we pray for those who work for environmental justice, who battle for a better stewardship of your creation.

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again, help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

We look at our world, so desperately in need of you. Nations act selfishly, injustices deepen and people suffer with anxiety and depression.

But you promise to:

"Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear...'" [Is 35:3-4a]

We bring you those who suffer from fear and anxiety, that you would bring healing to their souls. And we pray for those who work to strengthen the fearful, the therapists, social workers, counsellors and pastors.

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again, help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

We look at our world, so desperately in need of you. Illness cripples potential, causing pain and suffering.

But you promise:

"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy." [Is 35:5-6]

We bring you those we know personally who are ill at this time, that you will bring healing to their bodies. And we pray for those who work tirelessly to care for those in physical need: the personal assistants, the nurses, the doctors and the medical missionaries.

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again, help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

Lord Jesus, we see in the gospels how you fulfil Isaiah's prophecies, and we hunger for those promises to be complete. As we wait for your return, help us be your hands and feet on earth.

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again, help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

In Jesus' name, **Amen.**

5th Hymn – Hark the Herald Angels come.

[Hark the Herald Angels Sing - Contemporary Lyric Video - YouTube](#)

Hark ! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies ;
with the angelic host proclaim :
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'

*Hark ! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.*

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see !
Hail, the incarnate Deity !
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel :

*Hark ! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.*

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace !
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness !
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth :

*Hark ! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.*



The Sending out and Blessing

Send us out, Lord,

to have faith that the waiting seeds will bear fruit.

Send us out, Lord,

to trust you through our disappointments.

Send us out, Lord,

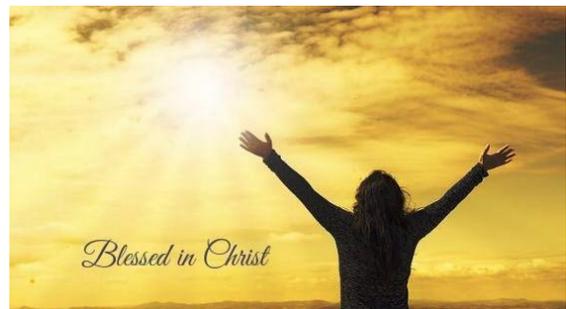
to take joy in the journey, rather than rush towards the destination.

Send us out, Lord,

to live with the tension of the now and the not yet.

Send us out, Lord,

to be patient and stand firm, because your coming is near.



The blessing of God, the Father, Son & Holy Spirit be with us all, now and in everything we do.