

Christ Church, Woodley, Morning Communion Service 1st November

Call to Worship *Revelation 22:1-7*

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

⁶ And he said to me, “These words are faithful and true”; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.

⁷ “And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.”

HYMN StF 443 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5G5YHsAgAO>

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| 1. Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above. | 3. Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above |
| 2. Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost. | 4. Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee. |

Robert Walmsley

Prayers of Approach

Gloomy times, when the clocks go back, and four dark months stand in front of us. It is natural enough to resent the prospect of cold and dark, the gloom, draughty bus stops, colourless views, dank, depressing air, and too little time able to be spent out of doors. We shall thank God when it is over, and spring comes.

But there are other things, for which thanks are due. This is the time of cosy rooms, of shutting the door on the cold night; the time of the comfort of a hot meal, the time for bed when the weather is rough outside; for the cheerful life on London streets, with lit windows, and all the plenty of the shops and markets; for the amazing colours of autumn; for dry leaves in heaps; for the patterns of frost on windscreens; for bonfires; for purple twigs on misty mornings; for the stillness of a December afternoon; for the little animals, squirrels and cats as they go about puffed up against the cold; for the fox that hesitates on a corner; for the scrunch of boots on snow; for the hospitality that goes with the winter season and makes us more aware of kindness, and its importance, and for that gradual, counted lengthening of the days when the new year comes, and the first warm sunlight of February.

No season is without its benefits; few hardships are unremittingly bleak, however hard they may be in themselves. For all seasons, for all the little things that sneak in to bad times and make those times in a way precious; for the luminous colour of lights in a dark season; for these things, we thank you, Lord.

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We count ourselves lucky indeed and blest to enjoy these things. Too often, we complain about things when they are not quite perfect. Too often, we fail to see the beauty in a black cloudy sky, or the majesty of a rainstorm. We resent what is inconvenient, but do not see, lurking behind, its beauty, and your glory reflected in it.

God who is in all things, who shines out of the winter shade, help us to see you in your constant presence with us. Let us recognize you in light and dark, in warmth and cold, in the frosts of winter as much as in the new life of spring. Guide us when we cannot see the way; take our hand when we might slip, and bring us through the difficult times.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy name, *Amen*.

Lord's Prayer

Junior Church

Children's talk with Thwaite https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeWW5LUcYwcnzJP8M_ZP6EA

HYMN StF 121 Autumn Days <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiSLJwfHXI4>

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| <p>1 Autumn days when the grass is jewelled,
and the silk inside a chestnut shell,
jet planes meeting in the air to get refuelled,
all these things I love so well,
<i>So I mustn't forget,
no, I mustn't forget
to say a great big thank-you,
I mustn't forget.</i></p> <p>2 Clouds that look like familiar faces,
and a winter's moon with frosted rings,
smell of bacon as I fasten up my laces,
and the song the milkman sings.</p> | <p>3 Whipped-up spray that is rainbow-scattered,
and a swallow curving in the sky,
shoes so comfy though they're worn-out
and they're battered,
and the taste of apple-pie.</p> <p>4 Scent of gardens when the rain's been falling,
and a minnow darting down a stream,
picked-up engine that's been stuttering and stalling,
and a win for my home team.</p> |
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Estelle White (b.1925)

Junior Church Blessing

Reading Joshua 3:7-17

⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'"

⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. ¹¹ See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. ¹² Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

¹⁴ So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Commentary on the reading from Joshua by the Minister

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Psalm 106:7-45

⁷ When our ancestors were in Egypt,
they gave no thought to your miracles;
they did not remember your many kindnesses,
and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.
⁸ Yet he saved them for his name's sake,
to make his mighty power known.
⁹ He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up;
he led them through the depths as through a desert.
¹⁰ He saved them from the hand of the foe;
from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them.
¹¹ The waters covered their adversaries;
not one of them survived.
¹² Then they believed his promises
and sang his praise.

¹³ But they soon forgot what he had done
and did not wait for his plan to unfold.
¹⁴ In the desert they gave in to their craving;
in the wilderness they put God to the test.
¹⁵ So he gave them what they asked for,
but sent a wasting disease among them.

¹⁶ In the camp they grew envious of Moses
and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the LORD.
¹⁷ The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan;
it buried the company of Abiram.
¹⁸ Fire blazed among their followers;
a flame consumed the wicked.
¹⁹ At Horeb they made a calf
and worshiped an idol cast from metal.
²⁰ They exchanged their glorious God
for an image of a bull, which eats grass.
²¹ They forgot the God who saved them,
who had done great things in Egypt,
²² miracles in the land of Ham
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.
²³ So he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him
to keep his wrath from destroying them.

²⁴ Then they despised the pleasant land;
they did not believe his promise.
²⁵ They grumbled in their tents
and did not obey the LORD.
²⁶ So he swore to them with uplifted hand

that he would make them fall in the wilderness,
²⁷ make their descendants fall among the nations
and scatter them throughout the lands.

²⁸ They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor
and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods;
²⁹ they aroused the LORD's anger by their wicked deeds,
and a plague broke out among them.
³⁰ But Phinehas stood up and intervened,
and the plague was checked.
³¹ This was credited to him as righteousness
for endless generations to come.
³² By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD,
and trouble came to Moses because of them;
³³ for they rebelled against the Spirit of God,
and rash words came from Moses' lips.

³⁴ They did not destroy the peoples
as the LORD had commanded them,
³⁵ but they mingled with the nations
and adopted their customs.
³⁶ They worshiped their idols,
which became a snare to them.
³⁷ They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to false gods.
³⁸ They shed innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,
and the land was desecrated by their blood.
³⁹ They defiled themselves by what they did;
by their deeds they prostituted themselves.

⁴⁰ Therefore the LORD was angry with his people
and abhorred his inheritance.
⁴¹ He gave them into the hands of the nations,
and their foes ruled over them.
⁴² Their enemies oppressed them
and subjected them to their power.
⁴³ Many times he delivered them,
but they were bent on rebellion
and they wasted away in their sin.
⁴⁴ Yet he took note of their distress
when he heard their cry;
⁴⁵ for their sake he remembered his covenant
and out of his great love he relented.

Sermon

The reading we heard right at the beginning of the service – our call to worship – was from the Book of Revelation. In looking with you at the meaning of it, I want first to set it into context.

The Book of Revelation is part of the 'Canon', in other words, officially part of the Bible, but not everyone accepts that. Some significant biblical scholars such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin and more recently Rudolf Bultmann refused to recognise it as a full part of the New Testament, because of its overtones of mysticism. On the other hand, a number of important thinkers, from the fathers of the early church onwards, have said that Revelation lives up to its role in the New Testament by providing direction and sustenance for congregations, particularly in difficult times.

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Revelation was written about the year 90, so roughly 20 years after the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and about 30 years before the Gospel of John.

This was a time when Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire, and Christians could be arrested and in some cases executed for their faith. Christianity then was a religion of the lower orders and of slaves, and therefore looked down upon by the authorities as 'vulgar'.

We have to think of Revelation as a product of these circumstances. We can't just take it up and read it as though it applies directly to our own times. Interpretation is needed. For instance, it talks about Babylon as the oppressing power, but this is code for Rome. The 90s were a time of prosperity, but the poor did not reap benefits from this, and most Christians were categorized as 'poor'. Because they did not subscribe to the gods of their cities, they were regarded as atheists, outsiders, spiritually impoverished, culturally lacking, and scapegoats for disasters (such as the great fire of Rome in Nero's time). John, the author of Revelation, feared a systematic persecution of Christians which might wipe them out. There was an increasing conflict between church and state,

Revelation was written as a letter, to be read aloud in its entirety to an audience (it's 48 pages long in the modern book). It is a book of prophetic visions, and the visions are intended to unfold in the mind's eye. They are not, as some have suggested, predictions of the future, like Nostrodamus wrote. Instead, it is a letter to the people of the time about their own time. It was written in metaphors which would have been accessible to the people of the time. It was its own evidence that the gift of prophecy had been revived and was active in their own lives. It drew heavily on the Old Testament (500 references), and used the palette of their colours to enliven his visions. However, for us, nearly 2000 years later, the imagery can be hard to fathom. More on this later.

Revelation comes in three parts: (1) God speaks to the Church in the City, (2) God Judges the great City, and (3) God redeems the Holy City. It is the last of these three sections that concern us today. The world is now redeemed and is seen in terms that describe its part earthly, part divine nature. God, who exceeds possible human understanding, and gives his own perspective of the future. Events unfold: there is the return of Christ, the last battle, the binding of Satan, the thousand year reign, the defeat of Gog & Magog (the primitive nations of the earth), the last judgement, and then, finally, the New Jerusalem. This is the last event of all, and it is from this last section that our reading came. Let us remind ourselves of some of its words:

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

The setting is the City, in which the interdependence of people is the main fabric, not the physical aspects of buildings and streets. Therefore, 'city' equals community. The community of believers is the temple in which God dwells. Every aspect of it has the number twelve attached, because this number connotes the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus.

At the time John was writing, the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins, having been demolished by the Romans in the year 72. That city is renewed as a community; the community is not made up just of 'the chosen', that is, Israel, but of the people of all nations. They are lit not by the sun and moon, but by God's glory, the lamp of which is 'the Lamb' – Jesus. Everyone is there, even the kings who previously persecuted them, and all are at peace. The tree of life which grows there whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. Because its function is to include all, the City is vast – 1500 miles each side – but it is not a human work; it is the product of grace freely given.

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The new Jerusalem is the culmination of the history which began in the garden of Eden. However, it is not the garden all over again. Whist elements of it are there – the tree of life and the river of life, they represent the original goodness of creation, which has been recovered. This recovered goodness is added to the redeemed nature of mankind, after all the experience of history. The world and its history are affirmed and nothing human is lost. All humanity is at one with God, and because this is the case, there is no longer any need for a temple. The city which is in a sense married to God, a ‘bride-city’, is constituted not just in religious piety, but in social justice. Everything that has contributed to the decency of human life is incorporated into it.

John quotes (but does not credit) Ezekiel (37:27) “my dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”; but John modifies the singular of ‘people’ to ‘peoples’. The peoples of the entire earth.

When I began this study, I did not expect to discover what I have. I knew I would be unravelling symbol and metaphor, but the content has come as a surprise to me. Revelation was written for a contemporary audience, but once we understand its method, its vision is profound and full of Christian hope.

HYMN StF 712 Put peace into each other's hands <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0TTaHVtFX4>

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| 1 | Put peace into each other's hands
and like a treasure hold it,
protect it like a candle-flame,
with tenderness enfold it. | 4 | As at Communion, shape your hands
into a waiting cradle ;
the gift of Christ receive, revere,
united round the table. |
| 2 | Put peace into each other's hands
with loving expectation ;
be gentle in your words and ways,
in touch with God's creation. | 5 | Put Christ into each other's hands,
he is love's deepest measure ;
in love make peace, give peace a chance,
and share it like a treasure. |
| 3 | Put peace into each other's hands
like bread we break for sharing ;
look people warmly in the eye :
our life is meant for caring. | | |

Fred Kaan (1929–2009)

Communion: Introduction

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the space is thin between them.
Distance may divide, but Christ's promise unites
Those bounded by time, and those blessed by eternity.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the church above and below is one.
Peter is here, and Paul, Martha and all the Marys,
Columba and Francis, Theresa and Luther King;
The saints from far back, and those who left us not long ago.
And only sight prevents us from seeing them,
One with us on the other side.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the God who made them is present.
The Lamb, glorious on the throne, sits beside us;
The Spirit of God, the Dove, makes her resting place among us.
God inhales the breath of our prayers and spreads a table for our satisfaction.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

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We come as we are, because Jesus told us only to have a loving heart, and we remember his invitation and his promise:

“Come”, he said, “all ye who travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you peace. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest”

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger; and he that believes in me shall never thirst. I will not cast out the one that comes to me. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; they shall be satisfied.”

We come today in that peace, to inherit that rest.

Song StF 651 Lord of Life (v.1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zro80EwVGA>

Lord of Life, we come to you
Lord of all, our Saviour be,
Come to bless and to heal
With the light of your love.

Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you
And also with you

Lift up your hearts
We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
It is right to give thanks and praise

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our pleasure to give thanks to God for his grace; for his bountiful creation, for the love which has fathered us forth, for his great gift to the world, our Lord Jesus; for his guiding ministry, for his death on the Cross, and for his presence ever with us, alive in the world, we give our heartfelt thanks and praise. Amen

Breaking

In doing this, we follow Jesus's example and command.

On the night when he was arrested, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me. Likewise, after supper, he took the cup, and said, “This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me.”

Sharing *Please take bread and wine/juice as you are able*

Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

And also with you

Song StF 651 Lord of Life vv 1 & 2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4A9taizp_w

Lord of Life, we come to you
Lord of all, our Saviour be,
Come to bless and to heal
With the light of your love.

Through the days of doubt and toil
In our joy and in our pain,
Guide our steps in your Way,
Make us one in your love.

Peace

On the evening of the first Easter Day, when the disciples were together behind locked doors for fear, Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you!” he said; then he showed

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them his hands and his side. On seeing the Lord, the disciples were overjoyed. Jesus said again, "Peace be with you".

Joyful in the presence of our risen Lord, let us share, as we are able, signs of peace.

HYMN StF 317 At the name of Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6AHbO29lpg>

At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word:

Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed.

Bore it up triumphant
with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true:
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour;
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory,
with his angel train;
all the wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel (1817–1877)

Let us pray. We bring to God our prayers of intercession and thanksgiving

Lord, In your will is my peace; you have fed me, you have fed us and sustained us, and we are your people. We give thanks for that, and we pray that as you have strengthened us in the past, you will give us help in the coming time, to know what is right, to do what is good, to extend your love to all, both in what we do and how we are with other people. Help us in this.

We thank you today for the fullness of harvest, for everything the earth provides, for all the plentiful and delicious food we have, and for freedom from worry about where the next meal will come from. We are truly grateful for this.

And now we turn our minds to others less fortunate than ourselves.

We bring before you Lord the troubles of people and of nations, the desolation of prisoners, the sorrows of the bereaved; the necessities of strangers, the helplessness of the weak, the despondency of the weary, the failing powers of the aged. O Lord, draw near to each; for the sake of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

And we remember particularly today all who have suffered or who have lost loved ones in wars and civil strife; in Palestine & Lebanon, in the conflict in Afghanistan, and in the continuing civil war in Iraq; and even in France. We pray for all those who go out in the morning to a normal day, but who never return; For those who go to the market, or to get work, and are torn apart by an explosion; For those caught in the cross-fire, who died for no reason, except that they happened to be there, where evil was.

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And we pray particularly for those in Africa, who have been caught in the epidemic of bereavement that AIDS brings; for families with missing generations; for grandparents who then have to bring up many grandchildren, often with no money and little to eat; with strength failing, and terrible hopelessness.

Dear God, Jesus taught us that to know and love the poor is to know you. Help us, and help those who lead us, to understand how to overcome this terrible plague of our world.

And we pray also for all those affected by mental illness. For those who live in the jagged landscape of paranoia, for those who are tortured by their own existence; for those who are cut off from others, isolated within a silent misery. Also for those who have lost their mental powers, who are confused and frightened; who cannot remember who they love, and are strangers in their own lives.

And we pray too for all who have gone before us, and call to mind those whom we love, who are no longer with us here on earth

O heavenly father, in whom we live and move and have our being, we humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit that in all the cares and occupations of our daily life we may never forget you, but remember that we are ever walking in your sight; for your own name's sake. *Amen*

HYMN StF 81 Now thank we all our God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JR9QD6mgeHM>

1. Now thank we all our God,
with hearts and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in which this world rejoices;
who from our mother's arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is hours today.
2. O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.
3. All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son, and him who reigns
with them in highest heaven,
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore,
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart (1586-1649)

Blessing

Let us stand for a moment in silence and value our souls, our minds and our bodies on which we will ask God's blessing.

May God bless us in our bodies with health

In our minds with understanding

In our souls with the company of the Holy Spirit

To the glory of Christ our Saviour,

Whose flesh we are, whose name we bear,

Whose love is all.

AMEN