

Christ Church Woodley 29th November 2020 – Advent 1

Welcome to worship. You are joining a small group of folk at church, technicians, steward and preacher, plus a good number on Zoom, to worship the great who came to us, is with us and will come to us. This is the first Sunday in Advent and in the material we are using at Christ Church the theme is 'Holy Suspense'. Our worship will begin with the lighting of the first candle on our Advent ring. In church this will be done by Ruth Taylor. You are invited to picture it, sing the 2 verses below, and share in the anticipation.

Candle lighting and singing 'The Holly & the Ivy'

The Holy and the ivy
Are dancing in a ring,
Round the berry-bright red candles
And the white and shining King

Oh, one is for God's people
In every age and day.
We are watching for his coming
We believe and we obey.

Greeting and intro to first hymn

For many of us the seasons are marked by the hymns we sing. Advent is sometimes squeezed so we can get to sing Christmas hymns (carols). This hymn reflects the longing of God's people for the Messiah to come. Whether you sing it or read it I invite you do it reflectively.

Hymn StF 180 'O come, O come Emmanuel' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1VLZNCsQec>

- 1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear :
*Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*
- 2 O come, O come, O Lord of might
who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe :
- 3 O come, O Rod of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny ;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave :
- 4 O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home ;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery :
- 5 O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer
our spirits by your advent here ;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight :

Latin, 18th century, based on the ancient *Advent Antiphons*
translated by John Mason Neale (1811-1866)

Prayer

God who is with us in Jesus,
in this time
when hearts tremble with fears about tomorrow:
come to us.
In those moments
when our hearts are parched
from wandering through the wilderness of worry:
come to us.
Come to us,
to fill us with your hope.

God-who-is-our-Gift,
in these days
when the powers of the world
can distract us from faith:
come to us.
In this season
when our rush to Bethlehem
keeps us from seeing you
in every one we push past:
come to us.
Come to us,
to fill us with your grace.

God-who-kindles-the-fires of faith,
in those opportunities,
when we struggle to tell others
what you really mean,
come to us.
In the nights
when our souls grow cold with doubt,
come to us.
Come to us,
to fill us with your Advent.

(Thom Shuman, adapted.)

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day 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 forever more. Amen.

Junior Church hymn StF 447 Jesus be the centre <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kq1AJxftCk>

1 Jesus, be the centre,
be my source, be my light,
Jesus.

2 Jesus, be the centre,
be my hope, be my song,
Jesus.

*Be the fire in my heart,
be the wind in these sails ;
be the reason that I live,
Jesus, Jesus.*

3 Jesus, be my vision,
be my path, be my guide,
Jesus.

*Be the fire in my heart,
be the wind in these sails ;
be the reason that I live,
Jesus, Jesus.*

4 Jesus, be the centre,
be my source, be my light,
Jesus.

Michael Frye

Readings:

Romans 13 v 11 – 14

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Luke 21 v 25 – 36

²⁵ “There 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. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

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

³² “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven 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. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be 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.”

Hymn ‘We have heard’ – sung to ‘Good King Wenceslas’

We have heard the distant bells
ring out “Christ is coming”.
We have heard the angels tell:
God is on his way.
We’ve seen first-fruits, signs of life,
bursting through the darkness.
In a world of fear and strife,
hope is here to stay.

*How long, until you come to reign?
How long, until you come again?*

One day there will be no pain,
sorrow or injustice.
Jesus will return again
wiping tears away.

Now we sing lamenting songs,
while the chords are broken,
join in the martyrs in “How long?”,
how long must we wait?

Rays of light, a glimpse of dawn,
while the night still lingers.
Earth it groans to be reborn,
help us watch and pray.
Clothe us in the ways of Christ,
ready for his coming.
Worshipping through daily life,
hastening the day,
when you come to reign.

Sermon

Listen again to those words of Luke with which our gospel reading began:

‘There will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars. One the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

Ouch! And this extract is part of a larger whole which includes other disturbing elements! Wars, revolutions, nation v nation, great earthquakes, famines, pestilences, fearful events ...

Not a comfortable read. We may or may not recognise these manifestations, but I wonder if the human reactions described resonate more:

anguish perplexity fearfulness apprehension
a sense of what is known being shaken

I suspect many of the people with whom you and I worship today will identify with those feelings or at least acknowledge they have felt or know people who have felt like it since March.

So, the question arises

Where is hope to be found?

Daft question you may say it the light of recent weeks. Hope is to be found in the vaccine. Or to be more precise in the vaccines. The emergence of these vaccines is simply wonderful and transformative news. Our hope is that come April a vaccine programme will have begun and will soon have reached every person who chooses to receive it. The normal life can be resumed. Hurray!

The we hear the Chancellor during this last week tell us the end of virus pandemic is in sight but the economic emergency is just beginning. Record borrowing, an anticipated massive hike in unemployment, public sector wage freeze. So the question arise

Where is hope to be found?

For many of us including me we are already in a Climate emergency the consequences of which in my opinion will dwarf the consequences of the virus pandemic and economic crisis. So the question arises

Where is hope to be found?

In the passage hope is to be found in the coming presence of God. There's a challenge to me in that. Why is my first response to the above crises always human? In the case of the virus through the work of scientists developing a vaccine, for the economic emergency through measures to create jobs and support those most affected, for the Climate Crisis in the decisions made by world leaders not least in Scotland next year at COP 26.

Let me be clear I don't want to set up a false dichotomy – God on the one hand and human action on the other. That would be a false distinction.

God has been at work in the skill, training and dedication of the scientists. God has been and will be at work in the response to the economic emergency and will be present with the victims of both offering comfort and a future. God is at work convicting hearts and minds to the realities of human behaviour on this precious planet. God is doing all that, but God is offering more than that. Something more than a return to normal. Something more than relief from world events. Our hope in the advent of God is a longing for the establishment of God's kingdom – 'thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven'.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. Advent a season of waiting, of preparation, a season of hope, a time of longing for God's kingdom to come. That waiting in scripture is grounded in the realities of world events, grounded in the lived reality of human lives. Now is no different.

Where is hope to be found?

Hope is found in God, whose desire is more than we presently know or believe possible. Thanks be to God.

Taizé chant 'Wait for the Lord' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaM2DVdyAeI>

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Prayers (with grateful thanks to Jenny Dowding)

During our prayers, there will be short silences to enable you to make your own prayers.

Let us pray.

Imagine throwing a pebble into the centre of a pond, and the circles of ripples that move out from the centre.

As you throw the pebble, allow yourself to let go of all that harms you – failure and sin, anxieties and fears, your regrets. We pray for ourselves, open to God's forgiveness and healing.

(Silent prayer)

God who is with us in Jesus, Hear the prayers of our hearts.

As the ripples begin, we pray firstly for those closest to us, our immediate family and closest friends – for their health, needs, joys and fears.

(Silent prayer)

God who is with us in Jesus, Hear the prayers of our hearts

We pray for our extended family and friends, especially those we have been unable to meet with in recent times – for their hopes and fears, for their wellbeing.

(Silent prayer)

God who is with us in Jesus, Hear the prayers of our hearts

As the ripples reach out to our neighbourhood, town and nation, we pray for our communities, remembering those who have faced loss of jobs, business and income; and those who have lost through

broken relationships and bereavement.

(Silent prayer)

God who is with us in Jesus, Hear the prayers of our hearts

And as the ripples reach to the edges of the pool, we pray for this world and its people – for nations in crisis, for leaders facing enormous challenges, and for the earth itself.

(Silent prayer)

God who is with us in Jesus

Who speaks to us through thunder and whisper,

Who is with us in our frailty, pain and fear,

Who loves us as if there were but one of us to love

Hear the prayers of our hearts. *Amen.*

Our final hymn is another of those great Advent hymns. We began with one and so we end with one.

Hymn StF 169 'Come Thou long expected' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwa0a94wTCw>

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)

Blessing

May you wait with hope during this time of Advent.

May you prepare with hope as you wait for the coming of Christ.

May you live with hope, knowing the transforming wholeness that Christ brings to each of us.

Amen.