

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 3rd December 2023
Advent 1

Prepared by the Revd Peter Rayson

This week marks the first Sunday in advent and we begin our spiritual preparation for the coming incarnation of God in the Christ-child. As you prepare for worship, if you have one, prepare a candle for lighting. If you do not, sit by a table lamp which is turned off.

Sit quietly for a few moments and then say the following prayer as you light your candle or turn on your lamp:

“Almighty God, we begin this Advent Season as an 'Advent People' – people of hope, ready to do your will. Let your blessing come upon us as this light fills the room. May it turn our hearts to you in the days ahead. Grant us the peace and joy we long for, as we await the coming of your Son with patient hearts. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.ⁱ

Sing, listen to or read Singing the Faith 178, “Long ago, prophets knew”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI8QXJUsIXO>

- 1 Long ago, prophets knew
Christ would come, born a Jew,
come to make all things new;
bear his people's burden,
freely love and pardon:
Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
When he comes,
when he comes,
who will make him welcome?
- 2 God in time, God in man,
this is God's timeless plan:
he will come, as a man,
born himself of woman,
God divinely human:
- 3 Mary, hail! Though afraid,
she believed, she obeyed.
In her womb, God is laid;
till the time expected,
nurtured and protected:
- 4 Journey ends! Where afar
Bethlem shines, like a star,
stable door stands ajar.

Unborn Son of Mary,
Saviour, do not tarry!
Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
Jesus comes!
Jesus comes!
We will make him welcome!

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

A prayer of approach:

Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
as we gather before you
to worship and adore you,
help us to focus our hearts and minds on you,
the source of all our being.
Give to us the hope, the joy and the faith
to worship you as we should,
so that we might become the people
you made us to be;
united in Christ,
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

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 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. Amen.

Listen to this excerpt from Handel's Messiah
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dDjva1ecYo>
or read the following passage from Isaiah 40:1-2
(AV):

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

²Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.”

Now read the following from 2 Peter 3:1-2, 8-16a (NRSVA):

“This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you ² that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour spoken through your apostles.

⁸ But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you,^[a] not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.^[b]

¹¹ Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³ But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also, our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, ¹⁶ speaking of this as he does in all his letters.”

And so, as Peter reminds us, we wait for the coming of the Lord but for how long must we wait? “Time is an illusion. Lunchtime doubly so.” So wrote Douglas Adams in his famous ‘Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy’. Like the rest of the series, he was writing this in a humorous context but like most good humour, there is an element of truth in it.

We usually think of time as absolute; it is defined by science according to the rate of vibration of caesium-133. Yet, cast your minds back to your

youth and remember how long a year seemed back then. When the new year dawned, next Christmas seemed like a lifetime away; I suppose that when we were really young, it almost was! Now I seem to be planning for next Christmas almost before this one has even happened. Indeed, I already have engagements in my diary for next Advent!

We also tend to think of time as perpetual but according to the best current theories, time began at exactly the same point as the rest of the universe and it even took a while to settle down! Everything created is inside time but time itself is a part of that creation. If this is so, what about the creator? If God created the universe, then God created time. If God created time, then God cannot be in time. God must be beyond time just as his is beyond space. When Peter wrote, “[W]ith the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day,” he was showing great wisdom. He also tells us that, “God is not slow about his promise,” because slow only exists within our experience of time. For God, everything happens only when the time is right.

Even Jesus, when he lived among us, did not know when he would return because, in becoming human, he had constrained himself to be inside time. “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Matt 24:36 NRSV).

Peter exhorts us to remember the words of the prophets; the prophets of old foretold the coming of Christ but they did not know when it would occur. When it did occur, many were not prepared for it. Just as his birth, since the ascension, there have been many efforts to predict Christ’s return, all of which have been, not surprisingly, futile. We know that he will return because his return, like his birth, has been foretold. There is a well-known ‘bumper slogan’ which reads, “Jesus is coming. Look busy.” Whilst humorous, this too contains more truth than it perhaps intends, although looking busy in itself is certainly not sufficient.

Rather we need to, as Peter writes, be busy in striving to be constantly ready for Christ’s return; waiting for and preparing for that day.

As Isaiah foretold, God will fulfil his promises. We can have confidence in this because we can see

that, as promised, he comforted his people with the coming of his Son. So therefore, as Peter foretells, he will also fulfil his promises of the return of his Son; the day of the Lord is coming. Will we be ready?

A Prayer:

“Lord our God,
keep us your servants alert and watchful
as we await the return of Christ your Son,
so that when he comes and knocks at the door
he may find us vigilant in prayer,
with songs of praise on our lips.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.”ⁱⁱ

In hopeful expectation, **read, sing or listen** to Singing the Faith 169, “Come thou long expected Jesus”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBGx_4PxO3g

- 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)

As we hope for Christ's return, **we pray** in hope for those affected by war:

“In a world that God made good
let us pray
for people seeing things
no human being should see
for people seized by terror
no human being should experience

for people whose depths of suffering
no human being should know.
God of unquenchable hope
Confirm our belief that
this is not how things should be;
Affirm our belief that
things can and will be different;
Strengthen our belief in
Jesus
who opens the way from
death to resurrection, and
Help us, as his disciples
to be your
agents for change
in our broken world.
Amen”ⁱⁱⁱ

A prayer for all in need:

Lord God,
you promised through your prophets
that you would comfort your people.
Bring that comfort;
that strength and hope,
to all who are suffering
or in need at this time.
May all people know your presence
in their lives
and may the world be reconciled to you
through the incarnation of the Son.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

In joyful anticipation, **read, sing or listen** to Singing the Faith 172, “Hills of the North rejoice”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYi6pKL4i5o>

- 1 Hills of the north, rejoice,
river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice;
valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love,
he brings salvation from above.
- 2 Isles of the southern seas,
sing to the listening earth;
carry on every breeze
hope of a world's new birth:
in Christ shall all be made anew;
his word is sure, his promise true.
- 3 Lands of the east, arise!
He is your brightest morn;
greet him with joyous eyes,
let praise his path adorn:

your seers have longed to know their Lord;
to you he comes, the final Word.

4 Shores of the utmost west,
lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest
in whom the dawn has come:
he brings a never-ending light,
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.

5 Shout, as you journey on;
songs be in every mouth!
Lo, from the north they come,
from east and west and south:
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.

Charles Ernest Oakley (1832-1865) and Editors of English
Praise, 1975

Look at the light you lit at the beginning of your
worship. The light before you symbolises the
coming of the light of Christ but, as you travel
through advent, may it be the light of Christ shining
in your life dispersing the darkness and heralding
his return. And may God's blessing guide and
sustain you on your journey. Amen
Now extinguish your candle or lamp.

ⁱ Taken from

<https://catholicidentity.bne.catholic.edu.au/prayer/SitePages/AdventPrayerWeek1YearB.aspx>

ⁱⁱ Methodist Worship Book 1999, Peterborough: Methodist
Publishing House, p 523

ⁱⁱⁱ Taken from <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/israel-palestine/prayers-for-israel-palestine/>

Church Copyright Licence No 30794