

Call to Worship

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here; come bow before him now with reverence and fear.

Let us sing: There's a quiet understanding: STF 36

There's a quiet understanding when we gathered in the Spirit,
it's a promise that he gives us, when we gather in his name.
There's a love we feel in Jesus, there's a manna that he feeds us,
It's a promise that he gives us, when we gather in his name.

And we know when we're together, sharing love and understanding,
That our brothers and our sisters feel the oneness that he brings.
Thank you, thank you, thank, Jesus, for the way you love and feed us,
For the many ways you lead us: thank you, thank you, Lord;
Thank you, thank you, Lord.

For our prayers I want us to use the words of the hymn 741 in the MHB

Let us pray

We have not known you as we ought, nor learned Thy wisdom, grace and power;
The things of earth have filled our thought, and trifles of the passing hour:
Lord, give us light thy truth to see, and make us wise in knowing Thee

We have not feared Thee as we ought, nor bowed beneath Thine awful eye,
Nor guarded deed, and word, and thought, remembering that God was nigh:
Lord, give us faith to know Thee near, and grant the grace of holy fear.

We have not loved Thee as we ought, nor cared that we are loved by Thee;
Thy presence we have coldly sought, and feebly longed thy face to see;
Lord, give a pure and longing heart to feel and know the love Thou art.

We have not served Thee as we ought; alas the duties left undone,
The work with little fervour wrought, the battles lost or scarcely won!
Lord, give the zeal, and give the might, for Thee to toil, for Thee to fight.

When shall we know thee as we ought, and fear, and love, and serve aright?
When shall we out of trial brought, be perfect in the land of light?

Lord, may we day by day prepare to see Thy face and serve Thee there. AMEN

1st Sunday of Advent

Contrary to the way it is often celebrated in the churches, Advent begins not on a note of joy, but of despair. Humankind has reached the end of its tether. All our schemes for self-improvement, for getting ourselves out from the difficulties which we face have come to nothing. We have now realised at the deepest level of our being that we cannot save ourselves and apart from the intervention of God we are totally lost. So, Advent serves a dual purpose.

On the one hand, it is the culmination of the long weeks after Pentecost. For virtually half the year the church has celebrated the work of the Spirit in its own life and in the work of the world. During this time, we have been reminded of our responsibility to do the work of the kingdom. But now comes the realisation that, despite the very intentions of the people of God, the world has yet to be redeemed. And so, the prayer of Advent is that Christ will soon come again to rule over God's creation in power and in justice.

On the other hand, Advent also takes us back to the beginning of things. Back to that time so long ago when people of faith yearned for the first coming of the Saviour. The season thus attempts to capture that spirit of hope in the midst of hopelessness, a spirit of yearning for that which would be too good to be true; some new and unique expression of God's intention to save a world gone wrong.

So, Advent both anticipates God's fresh beginnings with the creation in the person of Jesus Christ and, at the same time, celebrates the promise that the same Jesus Christ will return to consummate all history under his gracious rule.

Let us sing O come, O come, Immanuel. STF 180.

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.

O come, O come, O Lord of might who to thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
in ancient times did give the law in cloud, and majesty, and awe:

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:

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:

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:

The OT lesson is from Isaiah chapter 64; verses 1-9. Good News Bible:

Why don't you tear the sky apart and come down? The mountains would see you and shake with fear. They would tremble like water boiling over a hot fire. Come and reveal your power to your enemies and make the nations tremble at your presence! There was a time when you came and did terrifying things that we did not expect; the mountains saw you and shook with fear. No one has ever seen or heard of a God like you, who does such deeds for those who put their trust in him. You welcome those who find joy in doing what is right, those who remember how you want them to live. You were angry with us, but we went on sinning; in spite of your great anger we have continued to do wrong since ancient times. All of us have been sinful; even our best actions are filthy through and through. Because of our sins we are like leaves that wither and are blown away by the wind. No one turns to you in prayer; no one goes to you for help. You have hidden yourself from us and have abandoned us because of our sins. But you are our father, Lord. We are like clay, and you are like the potter.

You created us, so do not be too angry with us or hold our sins against us for ever. We are your people; be merciful to us.

Reflection on the Old Testament reading:

These verses are a prayer to God by a people who are powerless and under oppression. The prayer exhibits the two main features of genuine Advent hope: on the one hand, a deep sense of desperation about a situation which is out of control. On the other hand, a bold and confident trust in God is voiced, addressed to a God who can intervene to make life peaceable and joyful. Life without God is unbearable, but with God it can be completely transformed. That is the urgent hope of the prayer

Let us sing: Come, Lord Jesus, come. STF 168

- 1) Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come Lord Jesus come. Come Lord Jesus come to this world of ours.
- 2) Lord, we need you now. Lord, we need you now. Lord, we need you now in this world of ours.
- 3) Fill us with your peace; fill us with your peace; fill us with your peace in this world of ours.
- 4) Touch us with your love; touch us with your love; touch us with your love in this world of ours.
- 5) May we see your light; may we see your light; may we see your light in this world of ours.

The NT lesson is from St Mark. Chapter 13, verses 24-37. Good News Bible

In the days after that time of trouble the sun will grow dark, the moon will no longer shine, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers in space will be driven from their courses. Then the Son of Man will appear, coming in the clouds with great power and glory. He will send the angels out to the four corners of the earth to gather God's chosen people from one end to the other.

Jesus said, "Let the fig-tree teach you a lesson. When its branches become green and tender and it starts putting out leaves you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening you will know the time is near, ready to begin. Remember that all these things will happen before the people now living have all died. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

No one knows, however, when that day or hour will come, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father knows. Be on your watch, be alert, for you do not know when the time will come. It will be like a man who goes

away from home on a journey and leaves his servants in charge, after giving to each one his own work to do and after telling the doorkeeper to keep watch. Be on your guard, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, it might be in the evening or at midnight or before dawn or at sunrise. If he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep. What I say to you, then, I say to all; be on the watch!"

Reflection on this Gospel from Mark.

William Barclay says that this is an exceedingly difficult chapter but, in the end, it has a permanent truth to tell us. What lies behind the use of this passage on the First Sunday of Advent is the churches traditional connection between the first advent of Christ and the Second Advent. In the season of Advent, the church always recalls the promise of the Second Advent, the promise that God's people will not be left on their own. By the same token, confidence in the Second Advent is only possible when the church recollects the fulfillment of the first advent. Something else is more important than the association of the two advents with each other. Advent is also a season of watching and waiting.

Watchfulness is necessary according to Mark, because there are those who, intentionally or not, mislead the faithful. What time is it, anyway? Who knows what time it is? Many voices, inside and outside the church, claim to know what time it is and what crisis is at hand – a political crisis, a religious crisis, an economic crisis, a social crisis. To which voices are we to listen? Not anyone knows what time it truly is or what response is appropriate.

Watchfulness is necessary according to Mark because only God knows what time it is. During Advent, the people of God wait even now knowing that we are in God's hands and not their own. We know that God will not leave us alone and that God will not leave them without hope.

But let us remember when every time at our communion service we say the words, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again" we are referring to the second coming, for Jesus Christ is already here within each one of us. When, before Christ ascended, He promised that He would always be with us. So Jesus is with everyone from the time they were born and it is only when we are converted and dedicate our lives to Him that we become aware that Jesus has been already there from the beginning. The things we are told will happen with the Second Coming is also happening in our converted lives. Our world is completely changed, and God's rule takes over in our lives.

So, after the resurrection Christ continues to be within us in a spiritual form but we await the Second Coming when God in some miraculous way which we using our earthly minds cannot think in what form that will take, will make his presence known. So, we keep watching and waiting.

Let us sing: "He Lives, He Lives, Christ Jesus lives today" written by A H Ackley.

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today,
I know that he is living, whatever men may say
I see his hand of mercy, I hear his voice of cheer.
And just the time I need him He's always near.

***He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.***

In all the world around me I see his loving care,
And tho' my heart grows weary I never will despair
I know that he is leading, thro' all the stormy blast
The day of his appearing will come at last.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, lift up your voice and sing
Eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King!
The hope of all who seek him, the help of all who find,
None other is so loving, so good and kind.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us Pray

Let us pray to the God of all time and space,
and in whose love, we exist and by whose love we are saved.

As we prepare ourselves for the time when Christ comes again in glory,
we pray for the grace and honesty to see what needs transforming in our lives,
as individuals and as members of the Church of God.

May we all be directed, inspired and upheld by the living Spirit of God,
and may there be a deepening of love and commitment in all Christians.

May the leaders of this nation and of all nations
be drawn to understand God's ways of justice and righteousness,
And be filled with the longing to do what is right and honest and good.

May all families on earth be blessed with mutual love
and consideration for each other; may arguments and misunderstandings
be properly resolved and difficult relationships refreshed and healed.

May those who are in pain or sorrow be given comfort and hope
and the anxious find peace of mind.

May those who have reached the point of death
be given the knowledge of God's closeness,
and may those who have died know the eternal peace and joy of heaven.

Let us pause and bring before our Lord our own personal prayers.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers
Whether spoken or remaining as our own thoughts,
for the sake of your Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples.

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your Name;
Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us,
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen.***

Let us sing STF 185: Sing we the King who is coming to reign

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 the song, who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.***

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.

The Benediction

May the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds
in the knowledge of the love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with each one of us,
and all those we love, and all those whom we ought to love, now and for always. **Amen**

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.

Kingdom of Christ, for thy 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