



Today's celebration marks the turning of the year in the Christian Calendar. It runs from today all the way through to the last Sunday before Advent next year. The journey through the lectionary which begins today finds us travelling through the great festivals of Christmas, Epiphany, Candlemas, Lent, Easter, the Ascension, and Pentecost. Sunday by Sunday we will have the opportunity to worship and learn of the love that God has, in Christ, for humankind. *(In homes and in churches candles will be lit today and through Advent. You may wish to light a candle yourself during the second hymn)*

Hymn Sing we the King who is coming to reign (STF 185) *Charles Sylvester Horne* <https://youtu.be/mvaoxZkDlcy>

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| <p>1. 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.</p> <p><i>Come let us sing: praise to our King, Jesus our King, Jesus our King: this is our song, who to Jesus belong: glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.</i></p> <p>2. All shall be well in his kingdom of peace, freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;</p> | <p>justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring; wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:</p> <p>3. 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:</p> <p>4. Kingdom of Christ, for your 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:</p> |
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Let us pray. O God of all hope, we thank you for all your promises which find their fulfilment in your Son. So we rejoice in his coming in the flesh and look for his appearing in glory. By your Word and Holy Spirit make us ready to receive Christ truly as our only Lord and Saviour, and with thankfulness to praise him now and for ever. **Amen**

Reading Luke 21: 25 - 36

Hymn Light a candle in a darkened place (STF 174) *Claire Stainsby* <https://youtu.be/ZMl0Fyk-SwY>
(A candle may be lit)

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| <p>1. Light a candle in a darkened place, in its flame see hope on every face, Christ our Saviour will be born, heralding a brand new dawn, so let it burn.</p> | <p>2. In the darkness, see the coming light, Word of God speaks through the darkest night, keep a watch, the time is near, time for hope and not for fear, so let it burn.</p> |
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Sermon

I shall never forget the first Advent Sunday celebration I was involved in fresh from leaving theological college. My first church was in Tunstall, one of the five towns of the Potteries, Stoke on Trent. The town and city was soaked in Methodist history. It was where the Primitive Methodists had their origins. The "Prims" grew out of the revivalist camp meetings held in the area and their first chapel was built in Tunstall. Consequently, the membership and congregation was in the hundreds back in the late 70's and the Advent Worship has stayed with me through the years. There was a robed choir, some 40 strong, singing 'Sing We The King' as they processed towards the sanctuary, followed by the senior minister and myself (I was more or less in a curacy role), the great doors would swing open and when the congregation heard the choir they rose and began singing too. It was electrifying and uplifting and all the more so when later the only illumination in the sanctuary came from the lit candles held by everyone there.

It is such a special festival and marks the beginning of a new year in the Christian Calendar and the cycle of Old And New Testament lessons that take us Sunday by Sunday through the year from hereon in. Lessons that will take the church through the great Biblical and gospel themes So this represents another occasion for a fresh start and we temporarily say goodbye to Mark's Gospel and greet Luke's whose gospel will provide so much for the year ahead.

But, more immediately, today we embark on that shorter, but immense, spiritual pilgrimage that takes us all the way through to Candlemas at the beginning of February next year! It will involve a journey leading us to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem and the Stable Manger.

The Christmas Mystery novel by Jostein Gaarder (of *Sophie's World* fame) describes a captivating adventure of a Norwegian child, Elizabet Hansen, who, while out Christmas shopping with her parents, glimpses a lamb fleeing the store and tears off in pursuit. So begins an adventure that takes our young hero across the continent of Europe and back through the centuries. Along the way she meets, and accumulates an entourage of animals and characters, who accompany her all the way to the nativity.

And as we go through this season of Advent we will engage, similarly, with those who are central to the events surrounding the Saviour's birth. Principally over the next two Sundays that will be John the Baptist heralding and preparing the way for Jesus and calling a wayward people to repentance with the assurance of forgiveness and restoration. But, on the way, we will meet others central to the story. Joseph and Mary, of course, Shepherds, Rulers, Prophets and Priests, Magi and Angels. It's going to be an exciting ride as we arrive to worship the Christ child.

But from our Gospel passage all of that seems in stark contrast to the terror that looks as though it's going to be unleashed on the world and humanity. They paint a picture that seems to correspond to the stark apocalyptic drama in the book of Revelation. Though actually this is an insightful anticipation of what will become of Jerusalem and the Jews of the first century as a result of their very evident uneasy relationship with the occupying power of the Roman Empire; of a failure to embrace the values and teaching espoused by Jesus in his life - peace, reconciliation and a reaching out to others

And as bewildering as these verses appear in this closing section of Luke Ch 21 they describe literally and figuratively those crises that are never so far from the reality of what so many have encountered, and will encounter. The long awaited collapse of the apartheid system and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall witness to how swiftly events can transform the world around us. Those who survived the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004 will be very familiar with the roaring of the seas and waves and the confusion, the disaster. With the Cop26, the Climate Crisis Conference, held recently in Glasgow isn't this apocalyptic picture, the picture which surely haunts environmental scientists and climate campaign groups across the world, unless we take ourselves in hand.

And isn't it the case when the world seems to be falling apart around us, both as a society, and personally that we all have those moments when we are "faint from fear". And it is in the midst of all this that Jesus exhorts his listeners, and us, to be alert, watchful, and to prioritise what is truly valuable so that when a day comes like a trap closing we're ready. For as you and I know, such a day does come to each of us "who live on the face of the earth"

Jesus invites us to trust in Him, the one who's words "will not pass away".

Are you ready for that journey of faith and trust?

Prayer. Loving and gracious God, help us to place our trust in you, knowing that you will never leave us or forsake us for you have entered your world, and are present in your world, and come to us, each one, as we reach out to you, through Jesus Christ, your Son. who lived and loved, and died and conquered. **Amen**

Hymn Come, thou long expected Jesus (STF 169) *Charles Wesley*

<https://youtu.be/0dmO8UPIWoo>

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.

Prayers for Others (*Methodist Worship Book. No. 15 p.121 & 122*)

In joyful expectation of his coming to reign we pray to our Lord, saying, Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.**
Come to your world as King of the nations. We pray for ... Before you rulers will stand in silence. **Come, Lord Jesus.**
Come to your Church as Lord and Judge. We pray for ... Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing to do your will. **Come, Lord Jesus.**
Come to your people as Saviour and bearer of pain. We pray for Enfold us all in your love and mercy, wipe away the tears of failure, fear and distress, and set us free to serve you for ever. **Come, Lord Jesus.**
Come to us from heaven with power and great glory, and lift us up to meet you, where with all your saints and angels, we will live with you for ever. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen. *Our Father ...*

Hymn, Lo, he comes with clouds descending (STF 177) *Charles Wesley*

<https://youtu.be/BlshvHjBxQ>

1. Lo, he comes with clouds descending,
once for favoured sinners slain;
thousand thousand saints attending
swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia!
God appears on earth to reign.
2. Every eye shall now behold him
robed in glorious majesty;
we who set at naught and sold him,
pierced and nailed him to the tree,
deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see.
3. Those dear tokens of his passion
still his dazzling body bears;
cause of endless exultation
to his ransomed worshippers:
with what rapture,
gaze we on those glorious scars!
4. Sing, amen, let all adore thee,
high on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory,
claim the kingdom for thine own:
come, Lord Jesus!
Everlasting God, come down!

Benediction and Blessing

Be people of hope. Let hope live in your heart and share the hope of Christ with all you meet. Share hope by noticing someone else's humanity. Share hope by listening to someone's story. Share hope by praying for our world. In this Advent season, we need to see, feel, and share hope. As you go out into the wonder of God's creations, share hope with those you meet. Now may the blessing of God, Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, rest and remain with you, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**