



Call to Worship - Let us pray

We gather together at the beginning of Advent to wait for the coming Messiah.

We look up to the darkness of the heavens, and we see the first faint glimmer of the sunrise creeping over the horizon. The day is not yet upon us, but its dawning is announced.

Hymn - STF 178 - Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness *Tim Hughes*

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MmRGSEG2LM>

Light of the world,
you stepped down into darkness,
opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore you,
hope of a life spent with you.

*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

King of all days
oh so highly exalted,
glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came
to the earth you created,
all for love's sake became poor.
So here I am to worship ...

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.
So here I am to worship ...

Prayer

Almighty God, king of kings, Lord of life, we adore you for who you have revealed yourself to be.

We see you revealed in Christ Jesus – and we are astonished at what we see: the king of the ages as a tiny, helpless child; the eternal judge as a powerless refugee; the ruler of creation as a created being. And in this revelation, we catch a glimpse of you that takes our breath away – you are God come to earth! Your response to the sin and hurt and pain of our world is to enter into it and be part of it. Because of your resurrection, we can see new possibilities, we can see transformation, we can see restoration. Not only have you entered into our world and identified with it in all its awfulness, you have also transformed frail flesh and breathed new life into dry bones. So we thank you for what we see revealed of you in Christ Jesus, and we adore you for who you have revealed yourself to be. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins to God, trusting in his mercy and forgiveness.

Keep awake,' you said, 'for the day is coming'; and we have tried, Lord. But our world seems stuck in a groove like a scratched record. As one war ends, another starts and as one relationship is healed, another breaks down. Nothing seems to change and you seem no nearer. So surely you can understand if our eyelids droop and we take time out?

You understand only too well, Lord, for you know us inside out. But that is why you gave us the warning, 'Beware, be awake, be alert'. Forgive us for not heeding your advice. Wake us up, shake us up, so that when you come again in glory we will be ready. 'I am making all things new,' says the Lord. This is Christ's gracious word 'Our sins are forgiven.' **Amen.**

Scripture: St Mark's Gospel Chapter 13 verses 24 – 37.

Reflection

Well, here we are again at the start of another Church year as this Sunday marks the beginning of the season of Advent. In Western Christianity, Advent is a time of preparation and expectant waiting for both the celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas and Christ's Second Coming. A common symbol used in Churches is an Advent Ring consisting of various elements. The wreath crown is traditionally made of fir tree branches knotted with a red ribbon and decorated with pine cones, holly, laurel, and sometimes mistletoe. It is also an ancient symbol signifying several things; first of all, the crown symbolises victory, in addition to its round form evoking the sun and its return each year. The number four represents the four Sundays of Advent, and the green twigs are a sign of life and hope. The fir tree is a symbol of strength and laurel a symbol of victory over sin and suffering. The latter two, with the holly, do not lose their leaves, and thus represent the eternity of God.

The Advent wreath is adorned with candles. In the Methodist tradition the four candles representing the four Sundays of Advent, tend to be all red ones with a central white one representing Christ. For the first Sunday in Advent just the first red candle around the edge is lit, which has the theme of Hope.

The lectionary reading this year is from the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, verses 24 to 37, in which Jesus talks about his Second Coming. Firstly he warns his disciples to be wary of people claiming to be him but then goes on to say that no-one, only the Father, knows when he will return. But His return is guaranteed. Can we stay awake, so that we are ready for that time? **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession *Let us pray.*

A prayer of waiting

Almighty God, we look at the world around us, and we despair. We see the hungry on our TV screens at teatime, and we don't know what to do. We see oppression and injustice, and we are overwhelmed. We see poverty, and we are shamed. We see disease, and we are scared. We see unbelief, and we are saddened. We see war in the name of God, and we are horrified. **Lord, we are waiting for you to act.**

Almighty God, we look within ourselves, and we despair. We see the darkness that hides in our hearts, and we don't know what to do. We see our capacity for sin which seems unabated, and we are overwhelmed. We see selfishness, and we are shamed. We see illness and old age before us, and we are scared. We see our unbelief, and we are saddened. We see violence within, and we are horrified. **Lord, we are waiting for you to act.**

Almighty God, we look to the coming Jesus and we see the answer to our despair. We see the promise of comfort, forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation. We pray that you will not leave us for ever in our isolation and our despair. **Lord, we are waiting for you to act. Amen.**

Lord God, we pray for the world in which you have placed us. We affirm before you that we believe you are the creator God, and we believe that the coming of Jesus Christ is good news to the world. But we are frustrated that it seems so many people are deaf and blind to this good news. We long for you to open the ears and eyes of the world to the good news of the coming of Jesus. **Amen.**

A prayer for patience

God who is beyond all time, help us who are bound within time to be prepared to trust you. We confess that all too often our faith in you falters. We think we know what needs to be done, and how it should be done, and when you fail to dance to our tune, we wonder if you ever move at all. Lord, open our eyes to see the world as you see it. Open our eyes to see that our limited perception of the world is only a tiny part of your eternal story.

Help us to trust you, help us to have faith that you act at the right time, in the right way.

Lord, give us the patience to wait and to endure to the end. **Amen.**

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray: **Our Father, who art in heaven**

Hymn – STF 180 - O come, O come, Immanuel Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q_Q-4

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 your 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 :

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

Blessing : The Advent blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you and those you love, this day and for ever more. **Amen**