



Call to worship

A voice cries out: "Prepare for God's arrival! Make the road straight and smooth, a highway fit for our God. Fill in the valleys, level off the hills. Smooth out the ruts, and clear out the rocks. For our God is coming!

Hymn STF172 Hills of the North rejoice Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYi6pKL4i5o>

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.

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.

Lands of the East, arise,
he is your brightest morn,
greet him with joyous eyes,

praise shall his path adorn:
your seers have longed to know their Lord;
to you he comes, the final word.

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.

Shout, as you journey home,
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.

Prayer

Almighty God, We praise You for the light that shines in the darkness — the light that no darkness can overcome. You are the Lord of promise and fulfilment, the Alpha and the Omega, the One who was, who is, and who is to come. In Jesus Christ, You came to us, showing Your love in human form, bringing hope to a weary world.

We adore You, Lord, for Your majesty wrapped in humility, for Your glory revealed in a manger, and for Your faithfulness that never fails.

Merciful God, In this season of waiting and preparation, we confess that we are often distracted and unready. We are so busy with so many things, that we so often fail to make room for You in our hearts. We have spoken of peace, but failed to live it. We have longed for joy, yet clung to worry and fear. Forgive us, Lord. Renew in us the hope of Your coming, and make us watchful and ready for the day when Christ shall come again in glory.

Gracious God, We thank You for the gift of Your Son, for the promise of Emmanuel — God with us. Thank You for the hope that shines in our darkness, for the peace that guards our hearts, for the joy that lifts our spirits, and for the love that draws us ever closer to You. Thank You for Your faithfulness through every season, and for the assurance that Christ will come again. May our hearts overflow with gratitude as we await the coming of our Saviour and King.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Hymn STF165 Advent candles tell their story

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

Advent candles tell their story
as we watch and pray,
longing for the Day of Glory,
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness
changed for gladness on that Day.

Prophet voices loudly crying,
making pathways clear;
glimpsing glory, self-denying,
calling all to hear.
Through their message --challenged, shaken--
hearts awaken:
God is near!

John the Baptist, by his preaching
and by water poured,
brought to those who heard his teaching
news of hope restored:
'Keep your vision strong and steady,
and be ready
for the Lord.'

Mary's gift, beyond all telling,
was to give Christ room.
She gave God a human dwelling
in a mother's womb.
Who could guess the final story?
Cross and glory;
empty tomb!

Bible reading -Romans 13:11-14 - The day is near

And do this, understanding the present time: the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 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. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Hymn - STF495 Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEZvQ8iLOig>

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives Thy service find,
in deeper rev'rence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with Thee

the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

Bible reading – Matthew 24:36-44

'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

'Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Reflection

Why is it when the house is tidy no one ever visits, but when it's a tip, you can guarantee someone will turn up!

Tom Wright tells a lovely story of the day he and his family were relaxing at home. It was a Saturday in August, and it was boiling hot. As the day progressed the house got messier and messier. Tom was wearing his shorts and a scruffy T-shirt, as you do.

Just then the doorbell rang. Tom went to answer it and there, stood in front of him, were 30 smiling faces. They were a local group who were really interested in architecture and Tom had completely forgotten that he had agreed that they could visit that day to look round his home! Thankfully it came to him quickly! He led them into the rear garden so that they could look at the architecture from outside before heading in. While he was outside talking to them, wishing that he had worn something different that day, his family were frantically tidying up inside!

He finishes by saying a house can be tidied relatively quickly, but a life, now that's a different job altogether.

In our gospel reading today we are reminded of Jesus's words when he said
"...be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

He could come at any time of the day and or night! He really could.

No one knows the time – He will come like a thief in the night

You might be trying to find your car keys...

You might be about to get into the shower...

You might be watching the TV

None of us knows when He is coming,

And here I think we have one of God's great and wonderful mysteries! For we know Christ is already with us. Remember His words, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you". And yet we wait in eager expectation for Him to come!

"For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Cor 13:12)

He is with and yet we wait for his coming. So how do we prepare?

Well, the answer's I think is found in Romans 13:14 where we are told to cloth ourselves in Christ. We are literally told to...Put Him on!

So, this is it, the start of Advent! Are you excited? Apparently 12 million Christmas jumpers are sold in the UK every year! During the advent of 2023 M&S sold 500,000 PJ's!

And then there's the Christmas socks, the party cloths and the outfits for the big day itself. A lot of people spend a lot of time thinking about what they are going to wear during the Advent season.

But as Christian we must always be mindful that above all else, we are to cloth ourselves in Christ! We prepare to meet Him by putting Him on!

You see, when we put on Jesus, we're literally covering our unrighteousness with His righteousness so that when God the Father looks at us, He sees only the righteousness of Jesus and nothing else! Through faith in Jesus, our sins are covered by Christ's perfect life and His sacrificial death. His blood covers every sin! Now that's good news indeed!

2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" Incredible!

And so, as we await His coming may this be our Prayer ...

...A Prayer to Be Clothed With Christ

Lord Jesus Christ, Cover me with Your grace today. Clothe my mind with Your truth, my heart with Your love, and my life with Your holiness. Where I am weak, be my strength; where I am tempted, be my refuge.

Dress me in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Let every step I take walk in Your light, and every word I speak carry Your peace. May I put off the old ways and put on the new life You have given me.

Jesus, wrap me in Yourself— Your righteousness, Your mercy, Your courage. Let all who see me today see a glimpse of You.

For I ask this in your precious name. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Come, Lord Jesus.

Lord we pray for the Church:

That the people of God may be a light in the darkness, proclaiming hope, peace, joy, and love to all nations.

Come, Lord Jesus, we long for you!

Lord we pray for the world:

That leaders may seek justice and peace, and that nations torn by conflict may find reconciliation, healing and peace.

Come, Lord Jesus, we long for you!

Lord we pray for those in need:

For the poor, the lonely, the sick, and the grieving — that they may know God's comfort and the care of His people.

Come, Lord Jesus, we long for you!

Lord we pray for our communities: That we may prepare the way of the Lord in our homes, workplaces, and neighbourhoods, welcoming Christ in the stranger and the outcast.

Come, Lord Jesus, we long for you!

Lord we pray for ourselves: That our hearts may be renewed by the coming of the Saviour, and that we may be faithful witnesses of His love.

Come, Lord Jesus, we long for you!

O God of promise and hope, hear our prayers and keep us watchful for the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

In the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Hymn -STF167 Colours of day

Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97q04r5z5RQ>

Colours of day dawn into the mind,
The sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
And let's give the message to the people we meet

(Refrain)

So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
Open the door, let Jesus return,
Take seeds of His Spirit, let the fruit grow,
Tell the people of Jesus, let His love show.
Go through the park, on into the town;

The sun still shines on, it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
The people of darkness are needing a friend.
(Refrain)

Open your eyes, look into the sky,
The darkness has come, the sun came to die,
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
But Jesus is living, His Spirit is near.
(Refrain)

Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, scatter the darkness from before your path, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory. And the blessing of God the Father God the Son and God the Holy Spirit Be with you now and for evermore. Amen