MethodistIC
The Ipswich Circuit of the Methodist Church of Great Britain
At the heart of the community

Printed Service – Sunday 29th November 2026
Prepared by Liz Cope
"Preparation not calculation"



Call: Stop! Wait! Watch!
Stop: in the busyness, take time to be with God.
Wait: pause and think about who we are waiting for.
Watch: look for signs of Jesus' coming.

Let us pray: God of our waiting, when all around us is busy and forever changing, you call us to stop. Help us to watch and wait with you as we prepare for the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymn: STF 89 Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9SDIs145v8

Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord,
we will wait upon the Lord,
we will wait upon the Lord.
(Repeat)

Our God, you reign forever.
Our hope, our strong deliverer.

You are the everlasting God,
the everlasting God.
You do not faint, you won't grow weary.
You're the defender of the weak,
you comfort those in need;
you lift us up on wings like eagles.
(Repeat)

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Prayer: Eternal God, ruler over time and space, Lord of history, before all, in all, and beyond all, we worship and acknowledge you, recognising afresh that your ways are not our ways, nor your thoughts our thoughts. We praise you once again for this time of Advent, when we take time to stop, to wait and to watch. When we prepare for your coming, give thanks for all that you promise us and reflect on what this means to us. We praise you that you came to our world in Christ, in fulfilment of your eternal purpose, revealing the extent of your love and showing us the way to life. We praise you for the promise that Christ will come again, to establish his kingdom, to begin a new era, and to bring us and all your people life everlasting.
Forgive us that we so easily lose sight of the message of Advent, rushing on in our busyness, not wanting to wait and failing to watch out for signs of your presence in our lives. Too often we neglect the signs of need and want in the world around us. So often we chase the wrong dreams, looking to satisfy our desires in our own strength. Forgive us that we forget your promises and lose sight of your love. In this Advent season, stop us in our tracks, help us to wait patiently and to watch with eagerness, in the knowledge that we are blessed and so we are forgiven. Amen

Hymn: STF 171 Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeBRYhG86x0

Hark the glad sound! the Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long;
Let every heart prepare a throne,
And every voice a song.

He comes the prisoners to release,
In Satan's bondage held;
The gates of brass before him burst,
The iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,
The bleeding soul to cure,
And with the treasures of his grace
To enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, prince of peace,
Your welcome shall proclaim,
And heaven's eternal arches ring
With your belovèd name

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Bible readings: **Isaiah 64:1-9 (NLT)** Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down! How the mountains would quake in your presence! As fire causes wood to burn and water to boil, your coming would make the nations tremble. Then your enemies would learn the reason for your fame! When you came down

long ago, you did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations. And oh, how the mountains quaked! For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him! You welcome those who gladly do good, who follow godly ways. But you have been very angry with us, for we are not godly. We are constant sinners; how can people like us be saved? We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind. Yet no one calls on your name or pleads with you for mercy. Therefore, you have turned away from us and turned us over to our sins. And yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand. Don't be so angry with us, Lord. Please don't remember our sins forever. Look at us, we pray, and see that we are all your people.

Mark 13:24-37 (The Message) "Following those hard times,
Sun will fade out, moon cloud over, Stars fall out of the sky, cosmic powers tremble.
"And then they'll see the Son of Man enter in grand style, his Arrival filling the sky—no one will miss it! He'll dispatch the angels; they will pull in the chosen from the four winds, from pole to pole. "Take a lesson from the fig tree. From the moment you notice its buds form, the merest hint of green, you know summer's just around the corner. And so it is with you. When you see all these things, you know he is at the door. Don't take this lightly. I'm not just saying this for some future generation, but for this one, too—these things will happen. Sky and earth will wear out; my words won't wear out. "But the exact day and hour? No one knows that, not even heaven's angels, not even the Son. Only the Father. So keep a sharp lookout, for you don't know the timetable. It's like a man who takes a trip, leaving home and putting his servants in charge, each assigned a task, and commanding the gatekeeper to stand watch. So, stay at your post, watching. You have no idea when the homeowner is returning, whether evening, midnight, cockcrow, or morning. You don't want him showing up unannounced, with you asleep on the job. I say it to you, and I'm saying it to all: Stay at your post. Keep watch."

Hymn: STF 177 Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UGjMYdPbXU

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.

Every eye shall now behold him
robed in glorious majesty;
we who set at nought and sold him,
pierced and nailed him to the tree,
deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see.

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.

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.

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Message:
How good are you at waiting? My experience for waiting has been varied – anxiously waiting in A&E when I broke my arm, excitedly waiting for the birth of a first grandchild, frustratingly waiting for the delivery of a parcel. There are many emotions associated with waiting.
Advent is a time of waiting for the arrival of Jesus.

Today we celebrate the first Sunday of Advent, and traditionally this is a time when we remember the prophets and also, we think about hope.

The Old Testament is a collection of books, many of which were written by the prophets who all too frequently were bringing a recurrent message of warning to the people of their time of God's judgement on a people who had turned from God, but also a message of hope and redemption for the repentant people. The Old Testament people were living and waiting in hope for the coming of the Messiah, the chosen Son of God who would come and release them from their oppressors and bring them closer to God. How good were they at waiting? Anxiously, excitedly, frustratingly?

In our Old Testament reading from the great prophet Isaiah, he is calling on God to send a sign of hope, to deal with God's chosen people with compassion and tenderness, but also to punish those who would oppress and attack them. Isaiah reminds the reader of the time when God appeared in the burning bush, and the clouds on Mount Sinai, all signs of God's power, authority and sovereignty.

All that the Old Testament prophets spoke about was leading up to the time when the Messiah would come to fulfil the prophesies of the Old Testament, to save the people, not only the Jewish people but all of creation. But it was a recurrent theme, a revolving door, the people would turn to God but after a while they would go their own ways and forget about him, and God would have to send another prophet to bring his call on them to repent, they would promise to obey God, and so the cycle would repeat itself.

They were waiting for a long time, for hundreds if not thousands of years. The excited anticipation had possibly led to doubt and complacency. It was all too easy to slip back into sinful ways, to turn from God, and to go their own way.

When Jesus came, he referred back to the Old Testament and the prophesies of many of those prophets. In earlier verses of Mark 13 Jesus has spoken about the destruction of the temple and his disciples have asked him when this is likely to happen, and what will be the sign that this disaster is imminent. Jesus tells them that there will be wars, earthquakes and famines. He quotes from the prophet Isaiah, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." But it wasn't just Isaiah who used these words and this imagery. Other prophets speak of destructive times. Amos, Joel, and Ezekiel, speak of how the day of the Lord will be preceded by the darkening of the sun and moon. The people of Jesus time would have understood this imagery, they would have known of the Old Testament prophecies, and indeed at they were living in violent times. In AD 69 there would be four emperors in Rome within the space of a year because of violence and murder. Within 40 years there would be catastrophic volcanic eruptions, Pompei being buried under ash spewed out from Vesuvius.

What about today? We live in times of climate change with wars, famines, and earthquakes?
There are those who might want to use this similarity in imagery to try and predict, like some preacher on a street corner that "the end is nigh!"

However, in the second half of the reading from Mark, Jesus tells us quite clearly that "the day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, or the Son." Only the Father knows.
Jesus tells us to be on our guard, to be alert, to keep watch.
We cannot predict but we can prepare. We cannot calculate but we can equip.
The government recently advised us to prepare for possible emergencies, to stock up with tins and bottles of water. Sales of wind-up radios have rocketed. They have also counselled against panic.
As Christians we are called not to panic but prepare, not to calculate but be alert, to be on our guard and to keep watch.

How are we to do this? We are called to live by his Word, and to pray. We should be less worried about discussions around a prophetic timetable, and more inclined to live as Jesus tells us, in obedience to God's Word, in a world where it is increasingly ignored.

So how are you waiting this Advent? In obedience, in watchfulness, and in prayerfulness?

Prayer: You call me to wait on You, Lord, but I get tired of waiting. Your answers to my prayers, Your call for me to serve You, the promise of Your coming Kingdom, they all seem to take so long.
You tell me to watch for Your coming, Lord, but I'm not sure how to prepare for…
a thief in the night, an undisclosed time, and Your disconcerting habit of secrecy and mystery.
Yet, something inside whispers that You're not all that hard to find; That You're *always* coming to me,
and that both the waiting and the watching, are more about being open to You now, than about trying not to be surprised in the future. And so, I will keep waiting, and I'll try to stay alert, so that I can catch the glimpses of Your glory that fill my day, every day. Amen.
~ *written by John van de Laar*

Prayers of Intercession: Holy God, just as we are we come, and ask for your kingdom to come in us; increase our faith and love for you, so that we may become lights in darkness as we are called to be.
O God, keep us awake to you: **and alive to your call.**

Holy God, the signs in our world today of hate, distrust and greed are shown to us clearly every day. May we see with your eyes the signs of hope and victory; the opportunities for loving service, for encouragement, reassurance and thanksgiving. O God, keep us awake to you: **and alive to your call.**

Holy God, bless the nurturing and flourishing in all our relationships, and increase our love for one another. Give us humility to accept guidance and warnings, lovingly given and the courage to uphold one another in faith. O God, keep us awake to you: **and alive to your call.**

Holy God, we bring to you in love those who are weary with ongoing pain or illness, those who are frail with age and all who are vulnerable; pour your living strength into their lives and protect them from all that is harmful. O God, keep us awake to you: **and alive to your call.**

Holy God, we pray for all who have come to the end of their earthly life, and for those who feel empty without them. Give comfort to the bereaved, and everlasting peace to all you are no longer watching and waiting but who are now resting in your love. O God, keep us awake to you: **and alive to your call.**

Holy God, your faithful care has brought us safely to this moment; we thank you for your constant love, forgiveness, strength and protection. We ask these and all our prayers in Jesus' name. Amen

Hymn: STF 357 Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3Jpx0Rnmmo

Jesus - the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
And devils fear and fly.

Jesus - the name to sinners dear,
The name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
It turns their hell to heaven.

Jesus - the prisoner's fetters breaks,
And bruises Satan's head;
Power into strengthless souls it speaks,
And life into the dead.

O that the world might taste and see
The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
Would all the earth embrace.

His only righteousness I show,
His saving grace proclaim;
'Tis all my business here below
To cry: 'Behold the Lamb!'

Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
Preach him to all, and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb.

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Blessing: Dear Lord as we go about our daily lives, help us to be awake and notice the things around us; help us to be alert and ready for action to share your love; help us to be aware of the needs of others; help us to be alive to what you call us to do. Amen