

A service for 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2024 – Advent 1 (StF)

Advent Sunday Liturgy

The Light of Hope

O come, O come, Emmanuel.

**Come, Lord Jesus.**

*The first candle is lit*

We dare to light a light of hope,  
Despite the darkness of our world.  
In the face of cruelty and suffering,  
Of oppression and inequality,  
We dare to Hope!

In a world that sometimes seems hopeless

**We dare to hope!**

With the patriarchs of old,

**We dare to hope!**

We light a candle in the darkness,

**We dare to hope!**

O come, O come, Emmanuel.

**Come, Lord Jesus.**

**Call to worship: Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 31 and 32**

“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. Amen.

*On this first Sunday in Advent, when we remember how Almighty God made a new covenant with humankind, not through commandments, nor through animal sacrifices, but through the gift of his Only Son – the ultimate gift of redemptive love, we shall sing hymn number 168, ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come’ which was written in 1986 by English Roman Catholic teacher and liturgical musician Francesca Leftley.*

**1. Come, Lord Jesus, come.**

**Come, Lord Jesus, come.**

**Come, Lord Jesus, come,**

**To this world of ours.**

**2. Lord, we need you now; (X3)**

**In this world of ours.**

**3. Fill us with your peace; (X3)**

**In this world of ours.**

**4. Touch us with your love; (X3)**

**In this world of ours.**

## **5. May we see your light; (X3)**

**In this world of ours.**

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### ***Let us pray to the Lord our God.***

Lord our Redeemer, we come to worship you this morning filled with awe and joy that you care for sinful humankind so much that you made an unshakeable covenant with us through your dear Son, Jesus Christ. God of power and might whose Word fashioned our universe and all that lives within it, you gave Christ to the world, knowing that he must suffer and die, for only by becoming the one perfect sacrifice could Jesus redeem us from the power of sin. In your boundless love for us, unworthy though we are, you raised Jesus from the dead, thereby offering us everlasting life through your grace, not through anything we might earn or deserve. Lord of faithful goodness, we sing your praises with joy, pray to you in faith and listen to your holy word with reverence, for you alone are worthy of our worship.

Heavenly Father, thank you for all the good things we enjoy, for people who have loved cared for and inspired us, for your guiding hand in both good and bad times, for the spiritual food that builds us up in love, faith and truth and for the gospel message that guides our discipleship. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, we remember his promise to return in glory, so we prepare our hearts to receive him and welcome him into our lives.

Merciful God, help us to amend our sinful ways, so we live Christ-centred, not self-centred lives. In Jesus' dear name, forgive us for the thoughts, words and deeds that have hurt other people and grieved you, but also pardon us for failing to take the opportunities to do good that have come our way, either from pride, or fear, or meanness, or sheer indifference.

Lord, we believe you hear and answer our prayers so, trusting that we have been forgiven and restored, let us serve you in the power of the Holy Spirit, answering your call by sharing the love you give us in such abundance with our neighbours, both friends and strangers, in Jesus' glorious name. Amen.

### ***We shall say the prayer that Jesus gave us:***

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day 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.**

***Our next hymn was written in 2001 by Revd. Tim Hughes, who, with his wife Rachel, are senior pastors at Gas Street Church in the centre of Birmingham and have founded Worship Central, a worship training and resources centre. Tim was born in High Wycombe, but moved to Harborne as a teenager when his father became vicar of St. John's church. We shall sing hymn number 175, 'Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness'.***

**1. 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. Chorus:**

*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.*

**2. 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. *Chorus:***

**3. And I'll never know how much it cost  
To see my sin upon that cross.  
And I'll never know how much it cost  
To see my sin upon that cross..... *Chorus:***

© *Tim Hughes*

***In our intercessions, we remember neighbours nearby and far away.***

Lord of glory, we recognize your faithfulness in meeting our daily needs and for loving us so much that you sent your Son, Jesus, as the Servant King, who is the model for our discipleship. We pray for our neighbours, nearby or far away, asking you to grant us the faith and compassion to act as your earthly hands, as we seek to support people who are in need or distress, but where the best we can offer is inadequate, we ask you to intervene, for all is possible to you.

Lord of all, we pray for the leaders of the world's nations. Grant them wisdom and compassion to care for the well-being of the people they govern. Teach them to seek justice and to deal mercifully, for justice and mercy are essential for real peace to be established. Indeed, we pray for peace in this troubled world, especially for a just and swift end to fighting in the Holy Land and between Ukraine and Russia, besides Sudan and Somalia where their populations are threatened with famines as a result of the fighting. May the truce between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon be maintained and may tensions between Israel and Iran not escalate into open warfare. Lord, bless everyone who is working for peace: for negotiators, aid-workers and medics, particularly those who are putting themselves at risk by serving on the front line. Remember in your mercy, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression. May they receive the support they need to rebuild their lives and find healing.

We pray for the churches in our Circuit, in neighbouring circuits and, indeed, the World Church. Help us speak of the grace of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity of mission, so we build up our community in his name. Let us bear the gospel light bravely in a sceptical and sometimes hostile world.

We remember people who are sick in body, mind or spirit; for people living with a dementia and their carers; for all who are lonely, afraid, or in any kind of need or trouble. We pray in particular for everybody who is mourning the loss of somebody dear and finds bereavement unbearable. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned. ....  
Lord, while we ask you to help us provide them with both practical support and friendship,

enfold them in the warmth of your love, so they may be comforted, find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

Lord of life, recent terrible floods in Europe and the USA and wildfires on several continents, are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We offer our prayer for all disaster- stricken people and pray for them to receive swift, practical aid. Most of all, we pray that all humankind comes to recognize the need for change before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world in which to live.

Abba, heavenly Father bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us share the abundance of your love, day by day, with everybody we meet, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

### **Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 21 verses 25 to 36**

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

He told them this parable:

“Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” Amen.

*Charles Wesley wrote our next hymn 280 years ago and it is as relevant now as it was all then. It is worth noting that it was a hymn that older brother, John, did not alter! Hymn number 169, ‘Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,’*

**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.**

© Charles Wesley {1707 – 1788}

**Sermon:** *“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:36*

My parents used to worship at St. Phillip’s Cathedral in Birmingham and they disliked midsummer services when regular clerics went on holiday and were replaced by learned visitors from theological colleges. Not only were some poor speakers, but they used complicated specialist terms that even brighter members of the congregation, including my parents, could not understand. I am going to introduce you to two such words, explain them once and try not to use them again, today at least. The first is **‘eschatology’** which refers to the end of the world and human history. It is sometimes referred to as **‘end-times’** and occurs, not only in the Bible, but in several world religions. Second is **‘parousia’** which refers to the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the present age, not only by Christians, but by Moslems, too. Parousia is often substituted by the term **‘end-times’** and precedes **Judgment Day**.

When I was a schoolmaster, Ofsted inspections were announced some six months before they took place, not like nowadays. Following the news of a forthcoming inspection, Head Teachers and staff frantically updated paperwork, checked all lesson plans were properly recorded, all registers accurate and classroom displays both relevant and in good condition. Graffiti was cleaned up and pupils told to ensure their uniforms and hairstyles conformed to school standards. I am sure that Ofsted inspectors had as realistic an image of schools as visiting Air Marshalls have when they inspect Group Headquarters and find everything that doesn’t move has been freshly-painted! Woe betide Head teachers or Group Captains who have not prepared for an inspection!

Our Gospel reading is part of Jesus’ discourse with Peter, Andrew, James and John shortly after they had worshipped at the temple in the week of the Passover festival before Christ’s crucifixion. In response to a disciple’s admiration of the temple’s beauty, Jesus said, **‘You see these great buildings? Not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down.’** Like most contemporary Jews, the disciples thought that the destruction of the temple would mark the coming of end-times. Commentaries are uncertain when Luke wrote his gospel, so it is possible the work preceded the temple’s destruction in AD70, following the Jewish rebellion four years earlier, in which case the overthrowing of the temple was a metaphorical image of the replacement of the old covenant by the new covenant that resulted from Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.

It is evident that the four disciples wanted to know when the apocalypse would occur – like teachers waiting for an Ofsted inspection – but somewhat more important. They asked what signs would portend the Second Coming and Judgment Day, for then as now, many people have forecast the end of the world, most notorious of all being Nostradamus. Indeed, towards the end of the Twentieth Century a couple of Christian sects committed mass suicide, convinced that the end times had come.

Jesus did not give a direct answer to the four disciples, but warned them against false Messiahs who would lead people astray and against wars and natural disasters

which are more evidence of life's chaotic state than of the end of the world. Christ used the imagery from the Book of Daniel of **the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory**. Although others might faint with fear, his followers should stand and rejoice, for it would mark Christ's earthly reign and the end of their tribulations. He reassured them that, just as sprouting leaves mark the coming of summer, so the faithful would recognise signs of the Second Coming. Jesus added that followers should not allow themselves to yield to worldly values, of dissipation, drunkenness and materialism as they awaited the Second Coming, but should live in such a way that they would be righteous whenever Christ came again. This advice is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago. Rather than leaving it till the last minute to live out the gospel message, we should be living it out now.

Advent is a time of preparation: we send our Christmas cards – or, with escalating postage costs, E-mailed greetings to family and friends; we buy presents, wrap and address them; we decide how we are going to spend Christmastide; we plan the meals we intend to cook and start buying ingredients. Some of us may begin planning carol services; others may be listing people who might spend Christmas alone, so they can draw them into their celebrations. However, how many of us are in danger of being so overwhelmed by the minutiae of planning celebrations that we actually exclude Christ from Christmas? How many people will consider Christmas spoilt if they forget one item of the Christmas meal, or something as small as batteries for a child's new toy? I hope none of us will be thus affected, but in an increasingly secular society, many people still see Christmas in terms of presents and parties, luxury and laughter.

How different it was two thousand years ago when Mary and Joseph made their way into Bethlehem. They could find nowhere to stay, so the Son of God was born on a cold, dark night in an outbuilding of an inn usually used to shelter animals. Jesus came into the world, not as a prince in a palace, surrounded by midwives and servants, guarded by soldiers and laid on a soft bed on silken sheets, but as an outcast, laid on straw in a feeding trough. Don't be misled by some of our Christmas carols: There were no parties, or luxuries in Bethlehem that night, though no doubt Mary and Joseph rejoiced at the safe birth of their son and the angels sang his praises. Some of you may ask what about the Magi and their gifts: they arrived later, because they met Mary and Jesus at a house. Therefore, don't expect everything to be perfect in material terms at Christmas, but let it be a deeply spiritual time by preparing for it as for the birth of a new baby.

Let us make a room in our hearts and lives to house the Lord, giving ourselves time to reflect upon the love of God that sent Jesus to save us. Let us use Advent to make our peace with people with whom we have fallen out; let us offer situations that can't be altered to the Lord in prayer – and move on, free from their burden. Let us furnish our hearts with the warmth of our love both for God and our neighbours and illuminate it with the Good News Christ brought the world. Above all else, let us make time to thank God and keep Christ where he truly belongs: at the heart of Christmas. Amen.

*Our closing hymn was written by Charles Silvester Horne, father of Kenneth Horne of 'Around the Horne' fame! Its melody is known as "The Glory Song" – with good reason! We shall sing hymn number 185, 'Sing we the King who is coming to reign,'*

**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: *Chorus*  
*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.***

**2. 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: *Chorus***

**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: *Chorus***

**4. Kingdom of Christ, for thy coming we pray;  
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day  
When this new song thy creation shall sing:  
Satan is vanquished, and Jesus is King: *Chorus* © Charles Silvester Horne (1865 – 1914)**

***Benediction***

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us evermore. Amen.