

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 29/11/20
Advent Sunday – Theme Holy Suspense

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Intro Poem ¹

This long, dark, restless night is nearly done.
The morning star shows: it is nearly day.

The morning lark and owl now sing as one,
the owl is flying home, the lark will stay.
This long, dark, restless night is nearly done:

As from my darker dreams I turn away
and cling to dawn's faint hope, rise with the sun,
the morning star shows it is nearly day.

This long, dark, restless night is nearly done.
The morning star shows: it is nearly day.

Advent Candle lighting ¹

The first candle is lit for the first time Jesus came to earth.
A shining example of how we should live, Light of the World from his humble birth.

Jesus help us live more like You,

O come, O come Emmanuel.

Spirit-filled and shining bright,

O come, O come Emmanuel.

HYMN – STF 180

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| <p>1. O come, O come, Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
<i>Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.</i></p> <p>2. O come, O come, Thou Lord of might
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud, and majesty, and awe.
<i>Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel</i></p> <p>3. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave.
<i>Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel</i></p> | <p>4. O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
<i>Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel</i></p> <p>5. O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
<i>Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel</i></p> <p>Latin. 18th Century,
based on the ancient Advent Antiphons
translated by John Mason Neale (1811-1866)</p> |
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Prayer of praise

We praise You Jesus, Lord and Saviour. We acknowledge the many names by which You are known and which reveal something of Your wonderful nature.

You are Immanuel, God with us, always present revealing the heart and truth of God.

You are the Lord of might, powerful courageous and strong.

You are the Rod of Jesse, a branch from King David's family line bringing freedom and victory over death.

You are the Key of David unlocking the door to life for evermore.

You are the Dayspring, the dawn of the light of the new day, the day of hope that scatters the darkness of sin and evil.

Jesus we rejoice in Your coming and long for Your coming again when You will be seen by all; when every knee will bow and every tongue confess You are Lord. We praise You now in anticipation of that great day of Your coming - You alone are worthy of all praise and glory. Amen.

Bible readings

Romans 13: 8 and 11-14 ²

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 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.

Luke 21: 25-36 ²

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.

Truly I tell you, 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 carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on 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.

Reflection - Part 1

Who hasn't been on the edge of their seat when they are watching a film or TV drama! Tension is a powerful force, isn't it? It moves stories forward, making us want to keep turning the pages of the book, or keeping our eyes glued to a film in suspense. Tension is also powerful in creating physical movement - think about a bow and arrow. It is no use having a loose, relaxed bow string; you need the tension to make the arrow fly.

The problem is, often tensions are uncomfortable. If we know two people are having an argument, expressing their differing points of view, we say we can feel the tension in the room. Tension asks us to hold in balance two things which seem to be opposing each other, and that can be a challenge. This is often true when we try and wrestle with some of the big questions of the Christian faith. Is God our friend, or is he our judge? Is God close to us, or distant, holy and other? Is God in charge, or do we have free will? When questions like this get too much we often give up and collapse the tension, rather than trying to wrestle with the apparent contradictions and so find the creative power of the tension within.

Today we begin the season of Advent, and we heard last week Advent means 'coming'. The 'coming' of Jesus refers to his first coming as a human baby 2000 years ago. The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus began the Kingdom of God on earth, the beginning of the kingly rule and reign of God which had been long promised by the prophets. At the same time, the fullness of Jesus' Kingdom won't be complete until he comes again. As well as the first coming of Jesus, there is also a second Advent, a 'second coming' of Jesus. This is a clear expectation which the New Testament church had. Jesus speaks of: 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.' (Luke 21:27) Or take for example this verse from Hebrews: 'Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.' (Hebrews 9:28)

This confident expectation of the return of Jesus shapes much of the New Testament understanding of what it means to be a Christian and, crucially, how we are to live in the world as we anticipate it. Our Bible readings today encourage us to be aware of the 'time' we live in - for example this from Romans 13: '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.' (Romans 13:11-12)

This is the 'time' we live in as Christians. The night is almost gone and the day of Jesus' Kingdom has started to dawn. And yet, that Kingdom 'day' has not yet arrived in all its fullness. We live with the suspense, the tension in our lives, sometimes called the 'now and not yet' of the Kingdom:

- 'Now' Jesus is King, and at the same time his Kingdom is 'not yet' here in its fullness.
- 'Now' Satan is defeated, and at the same time we are waiting for all evil to be finally overcome and so our lives are 'not yet' free from temptation.
- 'Now' Jesus has healed the sick and has given us authority to do the same in his name, and at the same time we live in an era where sick people are often 'not yet' healed and where all creation groans while waiting to be healed.

This 'now' and 'not yet' calls us to a radical form of living. It asks us to be both hope-filled and also realistic. Life is not all roses and sunshine this side of Jesus' second coming. We all struggle with pain, temptation, disappointment and loss. The earth continues to groan, the oppressed continue to cry 'How long?' And yet in the middle of these challenging realities we have seen the sun beginning to rise and we are called to live in its light. So let's pause and recognise before God the reality of this aching longing in this prayer of lament.

Lament ¹

We join with the psalmist, their spirit in anguish.

We join with the broken, the beaten, the famished.

How long, Lord, how long?

We join with those suffering discrimination.
We join with the scapegoats in every nation.

How long, Lord, how long?

We join with the woman whose voice has been silenced.
We join with the girl who is subject to violence.

How long, Lord, how long?

We join with the martyrs, their voices as one.
Waiting and longing for justice to come.

How long, Lord, how long?

Reflection - Part 2

The reading from Romans continues with this instruction: '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.' (Romans 13:12-14).

If we knew we were about to meet someone important or attend a special event then we would need to put on the right clothes and prepare all we can for the coming moment. Similarly, when we know Jesus is coming we need to put on our 'Jesus' clothes - for example the Armour of God (Eph 6) and attitudes like compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col 3:12). Jesus reminds his disciples that nobody knows the time of his return; that we must always be ready and we should: 'Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on 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.' (Luke 21:34-36). In this passage and in many of his parables Jesus asks us to live in a holy suspense, alert, ready and waiting for his return. So let's consider this during the coming week asking God to guide and direct our response. Are you living a life which anticipates God's eternity and also celebrates God's goodness in your life, in the lives of the people around you, and the world which God has made? How can you live a life more confidently and more faithfully with the tension of the 'now and not yet'? How can you be honest about the reality of evil, pain and suffering while still holding fast to the certainty of the coming of the freedom from those things and the victory of God?

SONG – 'Take heart' written in response to the Bible readings today by Keiko Ying ³

Take heart, dear sisters, fear not, dear brothers,
for you who yearn for the Lord;
for the night is long and the fight is hard,
but know Christ has already won.

And though we see the sun go dark
and the moon give up its light, we'll know,
when all the heavens quake
and stars fall from the sky:

*He'll come in glory, glory, riding on the clouds.
The night shall flee, and every knee will bow
before his majesty and power.*

Take heart through trials, fear not,
though fires may burn, you shall overcome.
The pain of labour will soon be over,
our cry will turn to a song.

His word is true, our hope is sure,
and the Spirit holds us fast;
our waiting hearts will find their joy
when Christ returns at last.

*He'll come in glory, glory, riding on the clouds.
The night shall flee, and every knee will bow
before his majesty and power.*

Dawn of the Day Reflection ¹

Close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. For this activity, we are going to ask God to speak to us through our imaginations. *(Pause for a moment to invite God to speak.)*

Think about a time when you were about to meet someone you hadn't seen for a very long time, perhaps an old friend, work colleague or family member. Maybe you'd arranged to meet up at a celebration such as a party or wedding, or simply in town for a coffee or a meal together. Imagine yourself waking up on the morning of that special meeting. The sun breaks through your curtains, your eyes open and you remember that today is the day. How do you feel? What emotions are connected with that morning? I'm going to give you a moment to imagine yourself in that situation. *(pause)*

Now imagine a day in the future. It's the morning of a special party and you know that Jesus will be coming to that party. The sun breaks through your curtains, your eyes open and you remember that today is the day. How do you feel about finally meeting with Jesus? What emotions are connected with that morning? I'm going to give you a moment to imagine yourself in that situation. *(pause)*

Finally, reflect on the preparations you would make to meet with Jesus. If you knew you were meeting him face to face, what would you do? What would be your priorities as you got out of bed and started the day? How would you live in the light of knowing you were going to meet Jesus? *(pause)*

Let's pray: **Jesus we believe that You are coming again. You will return and there will be a celebration. Help us to live in the light of Your coming, anticipating Your arrival, being ready to meet with You. Amen.**

Prayers for others and ourselves

Advent Lord - May we be ready for Your coming

Loving God, we pray for those who are looking forward to better times:

- for nations at war who long for peace;
- for the hungry, desperately awaiting the coming of aid;
- for the oppressed, and for the prisoner awaiting release and freedom
- and for the sick, seeking healing and health.

Silence

Advent Lord - May we be ready for Your coming

Loving God, we pray for those who believe there is nothing to which they can look forward:

- for those who long only for times past;
- for those who are lonely or depressed;
- for those who feel their lives are stories of failure;
- for those who are seriously ill
- and for those whose lives have been devastated by loss

Silence

Advent Lord - **May we be ready for Your coming**

Loving God, we pray for ourselves, that we may be a forward-looking people:
ready to respond to each new vision that you give us;
ready to hear and act upon your word for us today;
ready to be renewed by the Holy Spirit;
and ready to walk boldly into the future with Jesus Christ.

Silence

Advent Lord - **May we be ready for Your coming**

Lord's Prayer

HYMN – STF 169

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.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King.
Born to reign in us for ever,
Now Thy gracious Kingdom bring.

Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

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)

What Time Is It - Sending Prayer ¹

Hold in your hand either your watch or phone or whatever else they use to tell the time.

What time is it? The hour has come to wake from your slumber!

What time is it? The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.

What time is it? Time to put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

What time is it? Time to go out, clothed in Christ. **Amen.**

Final Blessing

Let us live our lives this week blessed by the knowledge that we are shaped by the hand of the Father, enriched by the grace of Jesus Christ the Son, kept alert by the power of the Holy Spirit and may the blessing of the One God, three and one be with us now and always. Amen.

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