

Communion Service 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020

First Sunday in Advent

Service with Peter Widdess



Personal preparation before the service begins.  
Please take time to remember where you are,  
and why you are here.  
Give thanks and become still  
in the presence of God

Prelude

Grace, mercy and peace  
from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ  
be with you.

**And also with you**

The first candle of the advent wreath

People of God: awake!  
The day is coming soon  
when you shall see God face to face.  
Remember the ways and the works of God.  
God calls you out of darkness  
to walk in the light of his coming.  
You are God's children.

**Lord, make us one as we walk with Christ  
today and for ever.**

**Amen.**

The candle takes her/his place on the wreath.

## Song

Light one candle for hope,  
one bright candle for hope.  
He brings hope to every heart.  
He comes! He comes!

Words and music: Natalie Sleeth

**Lord Jesus, light of the world,  
born in David's city of Bethlehem,  
born like him to be a king:  
be born in our hearts at Christmas,  
be King of our lives today.  
Amen.**

Collect for the 1st Sunday in Advent

Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your son Jesus Christ came to us in great  
humility;  
that on the last day,  
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to  
judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

The reading is taken from 1 Corinthians 1.3-9

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God  
**Our hearts and our minds are open**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God for you because of his grace  
given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been  
enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and  
with all knowledge— God thus confirming our

testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

The reading is taken from Mark 13.24-37

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

**Glory to you, O Lord**

But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 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.

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the

evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Homily

When I was a child I thought of advent as the time of waiting for Christmas, for the coming of the Christ child. I counted the days, and the excitement grew as the days got shorter and my parents talked to each other in Chinese (they always did this when there were secrets to be discussed at the dinner table - they had been missionaries in China). Opening the advent calendar windows each day brought the birth of Christ or, perhaps even more exciting, presents for me nearer.

When I was a teenager in confirmation class I learnt that Advent is really about waiting for the second coming of Christ. I wasn't sure what I thought about this, though I was aware of phantasy literature about the end of the world ( it was the time of cold war confrontation, the counting of nuclear weapons and the idea of mutually assured destruction), mixed with first uncertain confrontations with the Revelations of John at the end of the bible.

When I was a young student studying Theology at Cambridge I learnt that there was a very high expectation amongst the early Christians that Christ would come again very soon, in their own life times. We hear this in today's epistle when Paul writes to the Corinthians:

"He, Christ, will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In another letter, he comforts the bereaved that they need not worry about their loved ones who had died before the coming of Christ, and thus would miss out on his second coming.

Reading the letters of the New Testament carefully we can see how in time the perspectives slowly changed;

the second coming was delayed, put off for a distant future.

But the distant future starts right now. It is never really so far away as we would like it to be. For this reason there have always been groups of Christians convinced that they can see and understand the signs of the times, and that the coming of Christ is very soon. At a sherry party before dinner in my college in Cambridge I met an old man, he must have been at least 40 years old, an American minister who had been given a study year by his church to collate the signs of the time and calculate when Christ would come again. He was very frustrated. The more he had studied the various signs of the times given in the New Testament — the more he realised how often they had already been expected and fulfilled in the course of the last two millennia. In today's gospel we have the choice between the nuclear winter, earthquakes and natural disasters on the one hand and at the same time the Figtree in spring.

Jesus is convinced:

“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”

Was Jesus wrong?

Or rather, are we thinking in the wrong categories, bound too tightly on a lineal understanding of time? In the same passage Jesus also tells us:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

Jesus is not hedging his bets. Rather he is telling us not only that he doesn't know everything, but also that we should read his words carefully with discernment.

Now I am an elderly gentleman, and I read today's gospel as Jesus saying yes to life in all its facets. In our father's house there many people with different duties or obligations. We, each of us, have been given God's grace in Jesus, We are enriched and full of possibilities, as Paul writes in the epistle. In the gospel Jesus tells us to get on with living the gospel, sharing its promise of life, love, reconciliation and peace now in

whichever way it is appropriate where we are. Jesus doesn't fill out what the "assigned tasks" of the servants should be. In our own context it could be caring for those suffering under the pandemic, the sick, the lonely, the isolated and fearful. It could be answering the needs of the climate, or being aware of the political tensions of this world. Only one small group, the doorkeepers, have the duty to keep watch.

But, for what?

No, this is the wrong question. Better is for whom?

We are not waiting for things to happen. We are keeping watch for Christ.

In a few weeks' time we will hear how shepherds kept watch over their flocks and became witnesses of the birth of a child deep in the night.

God comes to us in many different ways; ways we do not expect or do not necessarily think are appropriate or proper. So in this time of Advent keep your eyes open for the signs of love and life, of trust and hope, signs of Christ.

### Intercessions

Trusting in the grace given to us in Christ Jesus, we pray:

- For your Church, that we may recognise the signs of your will, and become instruments of your life-giving love. We pray for Peter Widdess, and all who are guiding us spiritually during this period of interregnum, and for all involved in the selection of a new minister for our community.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

- For those in authority in our world, that they may lead others in ways that benefit all. We remember before you the leaders of the countries represented in this congregation; give them the wisdom to act in accordance with your love.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

- For our families and friends, that we may together recognise your presence among us. Help us to encourage and strengthen each other in faith.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

• For those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit, remembering especially Margaret, Brian and those who are feeling isolated. May they experience your healing love.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Song SoF 410

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q\\_Q-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q_Q-4)

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel.  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O key of David, come,  
And open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, desire of nations, bind  
In one the hearts of all mankind;  
Oh, bid our sad divisions cease,  
And be yourself our King of Peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.

CCLI Song # 31982  
John Mason Neale  
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'This is my blood, poured out for you and for many,  
for the forgiveness of sins.'

So Father, with this bread and this cup  
we celebrate his love, his death, his risen life.

As you feed us with these gifts,  
send your Holy Spirit,  
and change us more and more  
to be like Jesus our Saviour.  
Help us, Father, to love one another,  
as we look forward to that day  
when suffering is ended,  
and all creation is gathered in your loving arms.

We pray together as our Lord has taught us:  
**Our Father....**

The giving of Communion

Prayer after communion

O Lord our God,  
Make us watchful and keep us faithful  
As we await the coming of your Son our Lord;  
That, when he shall appear,  
He may not find us sleeping in sin  
But active in his service  
And joyful in his praise;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.



The Blessing

The God of all grace,  
Who called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus,  
Establish, strengthen and settle you in the faith;  
And the blessing of God almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
come upon you and remain with you always.  
**Amen**

## The Conclusion

Go in the peace of Christ  
**Thanks be to God**

## Postlude SoF 154

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,  
thy welcome shall proclaim,  
and Heaven's eternal arches ring  
with thy beloved Name.

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