

PREPARING FOR ADVENT

22ND NOVEMBER 2020

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“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5)

Welcome to today’s written service. Today is the last Sunday before Advent and I thought that together we could use this time to prepare ourselves for the great celebration which starts next week and goes right through until and including Epiphany.

Pray with me:

Lord Jesus our Saviour, the One who is to come,

We come to you now.

Our hearts are cold;

Lord, warm them by your selfless love.

Our hearts are sinful;

cleanse them with your precious blood.

Our hearts are weak;

strengthen them with your joyous Spirit.

Our hearts are empty;

fill them with your divine presence.

Come, Emmanuel:

enter our lives,

possess them always

and only

for Yourself.

(St Augustine of Hippo)

HYMN: StF 169

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 forever,
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)

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Creator God, the whole universe is your work. We worship you.

Timeless God, you are the beginning, the present, the eternal of all time. We worship you.

Redeeming God, you love us so much that you gave us your Son, Jesus. We worship you.

Sustaining God, you provide all our needs. We worship you.

Ever present God, you have given us your Holy Spirit to be with us always. We worship you.

We worship you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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.

THOUGHTS 1

As we start on our journey towards Christmas our lives are full of stress, of concern, of fear of the unknown. Our lives are still dominated by the Coronavirus and this Christmas Season will be like none other we have ever experienced. We cannot see the end of the tunnel.

Today gives us space to look ahead, to try and understand what the four Sundays in Advent really give us.

Today gives us time to look deeply into the event of Christmas Day even before we think about opening our Advent Calendars and lighting our Advent candles.

Today gives us space to look back over the past year; to give thanks for the good experiences; to contemplate on the unhappy events; to join with others in their loss and difficulties; to rededicate ourselves to the service of Christ in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

Today gives us space to look at the people involved in the story of Christmas. We go back to the beginning of all time as we start with Genesis and work our way through to the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

HYMN: StF 181

1. Of the Father's love begotten
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega.
the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore.
2. By his word was all created;
he commanded, it was done;
earth and sky and boundless ocean,
universe of three in one;
all that sees the moon's soft radiance,
all that breathes beneath the sun,
evermore and evermore.
3. This is he whom seers in old time
chanted of with one accord,
whom the voices of the prophets
promised in their faithful word;
now he shines the long-expected;
let creation praise its Lord,
evermore and evermore.
4. O you heights of heaven, adore him;
angel hosts his praises sing;
all dominions, bow before him,
and extol our God and King;
let no tongue on earth be silent,
every voice in concert sing,
evermore and evermore!

(Aurelius Clemens Prudentius 348-c.413)

THOUGHTS 2

Genesis 1:1

"In the beginning God"

John 1

John starts his gospel with the words "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." The word of God is eternal and has always been at work. It is the Word that created the universe and communicated God's will. Now this Word has become a human being to reveal God's character and show God's love. Jesus is the Word of God who comes to share our human life. Jesus reveals the Father's glory in the signs he performs, but it is seen most clearly and movingly as he dies on the cross. He reveals his Father's glory in obedience to his Father and his sacrificial love for the world.

Isaiah 9: 6 and 7

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."
Here Isaiah celebrates the birth of a royal heir. The king's reign will be an extension of God's rule. They are a prophecy of the birth of Jesus – a superb description of the Christ.

We now move to the New Testament and look at the major part played by four people – Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary and Joseph.

Zechariah was a priest in the temple in Jerusalem, married to Elizabeth and, as a couple, childless. While Zechariah was burning incense in the temple he was visited by the angel Gabriel who told him that he and his wife would have a son who would have the task of preparing the people for the coming of the Lord. Zechariah was sceptical and unbelieving, and, consequently, was struck dumb until the promised child was born. It was not until the child was named John that he regained his speech.

John became God's forerunner announcing the coming of the Christ, eventually baptising Jesus in the River Jordan and, perhaps, witnessing the settling of God's Holy Spirit upon his cousin Jesus and hearing God's words to Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." **(Mark 1:9-11)** At his baptism, Jesus is recognised as God's chosen king.

Gabriel also visited Mary, a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end." **(Luke 1:30-33)**

Mary was young, but her faith and trust in God were strong. She accepted God's will for her and was completely willing for God to use her life.

The fourth person involved in this story is Joseph. He found himself in the middle of a very human dilemma. He was betrothed to Mary and discovered that she was pregnant. But he too was visited by an angel as he was contemplating divorcing Mary quietly. The angel tells Joseph that the baby is the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and he will become the Saviour of his people. He is to be called Jesus, the Greek version of Joshua, which means "the Lord (God) saves." **(Matthew 1:18-21)**

As with Elizabeth, Zechariah and Mary, Joseph listened, absorbed, and accepted the message the angel brought him.

Putting all this together I found links that, perhaps, I hadn't really realised before. And for me, this preparation for Advent gave me a much deeper sense of awe and wonder.

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph all showed deep and total faith in God, showed obedience, showed the personal relationship they had with God and showed an unquestioning acceptance of God's will for them.

I found this among all my bits of paper. I find it very profound and very moving and wanted to share it with you.

CHRISTMAS DREAM

Among the shadows
of a low-roofed stable
the child was born.
No midwife regularised his arrival.
He was hungry and cried.
His mother held him close to feed him;
he slept, eventually, and dreamt:

and into the shadows merged the hazy lights
of a distant glory:
echoes of laughter, snatches of song,
flashes of colour,
glimpses of kingship, and rumours of community.

Dream on then:
time enough for
conflict in desert places,
homelessness and pressing crowds,
loneliness in the garden,
betrayal and pain.

Dream on of times to come:
boyhood delights and developing craftsmanship,
friends to share the journey,
mornings of solitude and prayer;
Hands stretched out, diseased, desperate to touch –
withdrawn, with wonder, whole;
love expressed in death,
new life at Easter –
work ahead. (Anonymous)

And so we have come full circle, from the beginning of time to the end of time; beginning with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit and ending with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And this is what we find in Advent – the promise of Jesus Christ with us through all ages.

John 1v14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

PRAYERS

We have looked at some of the people who played such an important part in the Nativity.
We have seen their great faith in the unseen God.
Father God may our faith grow stronger throughout our lives.
We have seen their obedience in what you asked them to do.
Father God help us always to obey you and to follow where you lead.
We have seen their personal relationship with you.
Father God may we be aware that we too have a personal relationship with you.
We have their acceptance of your leading into the unknown.

Father God help us always to accept your leading, even when you take us into the unknown.
Amen.

HYMN: StF175

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.

*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.*

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 become poor.

So here I am to worship.....

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.

So here I am to worship.....
(Tim hughes)

BLESSING

The wisdom of the Wonderful Counsellor guide you,
The strength of the Mighty God protect you,
The love of the Everlasting Father enfold you,
The peace of the Prince of Peace be within you.
And the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now, during this Christmas season and for ever. Amen.