



Just because we cannot all worship together in our church building does not mean we cannot worship.

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home.

There are links to 'YouTube' for each of the hymns (**Press Ctrl/click to open them**)

You can hear David Suchet read the Gospel reading. Just hover over the link for instructions

Call to Worship

This Advent, we hope and pray for:

Joy as we journey together,
Sight for the blind and healing for the sick,
Freedom for the prisoners
and good news for the poor,
Release for the oppressed with justice for all
and love for each other.
And the coming of God's topsy-turvy,
inside out, upside-down Kingdom.

Setting the Scene

The Gospel reading for today is set in Holy Week, a day or two before the arrest of Jesus. He had caused uproar in the Temple and spoken to the crowds in a way that antagonised the Sadducees and the Pharisees, who tried to trap Jesus in arguments. At first glance, this passage can seem full of big, threatening images. Yet, if we keep reading, we see the signs of hope: the buds on the tree heralding summer; the signs of God's kingdom; and the encouragement to 'raise your heads' (v.28). This reminds us that even in the most difficult of times, there are signs of life, and at such times, we need to look for those little signs of hope.

Opening Hymn – StF 363

Our opening hymn reminds us of the wonderful nature of Jesus whose birth, into this dark and difficult world, brought to many a message of hope.

My Jesus, My Saviour
Lord there is no one like you
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of Your mighty love

My comfort, my shelter
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King!
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of your name!
I sing for joy at the work of your hands

Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have in You

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Darlene Zschech (b. 1965)

<https://youtu.be/hGmZcTCXjmM>

OPENING PRAYERS

A Prayer of Approach

God of mystery,
we have stepped into Advent
and await your revelations.
We have stepped into Advent,
hoping that we and others
will see and feel and know your message.

You are a patient, persevering God,
who offers your all for us;
you offer to us the depth of your being,
the essence of life,
the gift of love beyond compare.
And we wait to celebrate again
the gift of Jesus born for us, given for us.
We look to you,
for you will show us true life bursting forth.

Amen.

A Prayer of Adoration

Eternal God, hope of the world,
we cannot grasp the immensity of your being,
and yet all around us,
we catch glimpses of your power.

You speak to us in nature's blessings.
You speak to us through science and creativity.
You reveal yourself in the love and the care
and the support of those around us.
You show yourself when we most need to see you.
When we least expect it, we see your hand at work.
We read your Word, time and time again,
and suddenly,
we are amazed by seeing something new.
Eternal God, we praise and adore you.

Amen.

A Prayer of Confession

But too often in our lives, we fail to give God the honour he is due, and our selfish nature comes to the surface. Too often we speak and act impulsively and do not follow in the paths he would lead us. And for that we are sorry and would seek his forgiveness.

Heavenly Father,
We wait, but don't always find it easy to wait,
and for that we are sorry.
We confess our impatience and our lack of attention to the journey and its signposts.
Teach us that preparation is part of the journey and that the journey is part of the gift.

You offer us a way to follow,
a path to tread,
a journey that leads to hope,
to joy, to trust and to love,
and we confess we do not always follow.
Now, may we step into this Advent as your faithful people,
seeking forgiveness and trying to follow your path,
and believing you will be walking with us every step of the way.

Amen.

God's Assurance of Forgiveness

God promises to all who follow,
that he will take away our sins
and set us on the path to life eternal.
Hear God's word, know God's forgiveness,
and feel God's peace.

Amen.

Setting the scene for our Gospel Reading

Luke's so-called 'little apocalypse' is a startling passage. There are sobering warnings of distressing times to come. Recently, there has been a real sense that the powers of the earth, if not the heavens, have been shaken, but, in the light of both, Jesus in his speaking and Luke in his editing offer signs of hope to look for, and ways of alert, hopeful living to be strong in. Maybe we too can lose sight of or appreciation of the glory of Jesus and we lose a sense of hope – something that Advent gives us the opportunity to rediscover, in both the wonder of the glorious one who is to come and the sign of the vulnerable baby of Bethlehem.

Reading – Luke 21 vv 25 – 36

https://1drv.ms/p/s!AmXAJQn6NbLHhfsd814Ba43_u6nDEw

²⁵ '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. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹ He told them this parable: 'Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² 'Truly I tell you; this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ '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. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ 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.'

The hymn before I share some reflections on the reading from Luke, is that well known advent hymn that anticipates the coming of Jesus as foretold by the prophets. Verse 2 reminds us that his coming brings hope to people right across the earth.

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 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)

<https://youtu.be/7jWf7k9xQik> (Tune - 'Stuttgart')

Reflection – 'Be Alert ! Be Watchful !'

Do you have a smoke alarm in your house? I hope so. In the event of a fire, a smoke alarm could save your life and the lives of your loved ones by providing a warning that would give you the chance to escape. Smoke alarms don't cost very much, and they are easy to install. It is one of the best safety devices you can buy and install to protect yourself, your family, and your home.

A word of caution about smoke alarms -- some people think that once they have a smoke alarm installed in their house, they are safe from the dangers of fire. They forget that their smoke alarm is only as good as the battery inside. If the battery has lost its power, the smoke alarm will not work, and you will not receive the warning needed to allow you time to escape. You need to check the effectiveness of your alarm on an occasional

basis to make sure the batteries are in good working order.

Just as we must make sure our smoke alarm is ready in case of a fire, Jesus tells us that we must be ready for him when he returns. This is one of the themes running through our reading today. We don't know when that time will be, so we need to make sure that we stay ready. We need to keep our spiritual batteries charged by regular worship, Bible study, and prayer.

As we embark on this season of advent, our emphasis is usually on the coming of the Christ Child and the events which centre around the town of Bethlehem around two thousand years ago and it is right so to do. His first coming is one of the most significant events in history so far, but only when we understand the reason for his coming and the message of hope that he brings can we anticipate his second coming. This time of advent is about his coming as a babe, but it is as important that we are in a state of readiness for his second coming and the passage from Luke today reminds us of that fact.

The opening verses of our reading carry with them an apocalyptic message which perhaps some would describe as very 'unchristmas-like' in their emphasis. But when Jesus is speaking these words to his disciples shortly before the events of Holy Week, he was reminding them that he had come to put right the relationship between God and his creation, between God and humankind.

There was much happening 2000 years ago which filled people with a sense of fear and foreboding and if our daily news is anything to go by there is much in the 21st century which causes people to worry about what the future holds and at the root of much of what is happening is the frailty and selfishness of the human condition. You could say that things have not changed much throughout the period of human history, but this is not so. Countless lives have been changed, turned around, by the message of hope that Christ brings.

The message of hope is very much at the heart of the Christmas season, for as we see through scripture, Jesus' ministry very often focuses on encounters with individuals and the healing and wholeness he brings to them, and such a ministry is within the gift of all of us because of what Jesus has done in our lives.

Just over a hundred years ago my maternal grandfather, had an encounter with his padre in the trenches on the Western Front. In the midst of the killing and carnage taking place, he berated the padre and Christianity for the state of the world as it was then. The padre turned to my grandfather and challenged him to think about the contribution that he had made to the state of the world as it was then. He then pointed out to him the impact that Jesus had made in the lives of individuals working to live out the message of love, hope and healing that was at the heart of their faith experience even in the midst of war.

To cut the story short, my grandfather having reflected on the padre's words went back to him and said that he had come to a decision that what he said was right and that from that day forward he was going to follow Christ and make a difference in the lives of the people he would meet. He would be a bringer of hope. After the war he became a Methodist Minister and spent much of his time ministering in the settings where people lived and worked

Hope, as I have said, is very much at the heart of the Christian message and perhaps it is magnified during the Advent and Christmas season. As we read on in our passage from Luke, we receive messages from Jesus to 'stand up', to 'look up' when Jesus comes. He refers to 'sprouting leaves' on the fig tree indicating that summer is near and draws the analogy of the Kingdom of God being near.

I think one message among many that we can take from the passage is, that 'Yes', we need to see the world as it is, but it is our calling to recognise and nurture people and situations where Jesus is at work. Where hope is breaking through.

To illustrate my point, I would like to share with you a story I came across about recognising hope in difficult circumstances

Two friends were walking across a barren concrete wasteland. One commented on a single blade of grass pushing through a tiny crack. Years later, they returned to the site and found the sea of concrete now covered

in a carpet of grass.

I think this illustration begs the question, what small signs or shoots of hope can we see in difficult circumstances today? What would it take to nurture them and help them to grow? In what situations has God placed us that we can partner with to bring forth good and hopeful things? And how might prayer that is alert to such things contribute to this?

When we think about the season of Advent we describe it as a time of preparation, a time of waiting and anticipating the coming of Christ both then and in the future. In the midst of the challenges we face in this world today Jesus is constantly at work. We need to keep our spiritual batteries charged so that we recognise his presence in the hustle and bustle of daily life and where we see 'seeds of hope' in our churches and in our communities, we are ready to partner God in nurturing those seeds. If I can repeat a quote by Mother Teresa I used in my last 'Home Service' contribution, 'Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.'

Be alert, be ready this Advent and Christmas season and seek out those opportunities when you can nurture hope in the life of those around you and may you feel His presence throughout this season and beyond.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God,
As we wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus,
Help us as we offer our prayers for others
and for ourselves.

We are told that one day Jesus will come again
In great power and majesty.
His power will be greater than any
That is found on the earth.
We pray for those who hold positions of power.
For our government, and our Queen.
For other governments around the world.
For those who control big companies.
Help them to remember
That their power is only temporary,
But Your power lasts forever.

***Lord, may Your kingdom come
And may Your will be done.***

We are told that when Jesus comes again,
Those who know and love Him
Will be able to lift up their heads.
We pray for the church everywhere.
May all those who love Jesus
Live in such a way that they are always ready
For when He will come again.

***Lord, may Your kingdom come
And may Your will be done.***

When Jesus comes,
He will do what is just and right.
We pray for those who seek to do right.
For judges, and others who work in the courts.
For police officers and community officers.
For all who work to see that laws are kept.
May they be safe in their work.
We pray too for those who have done wrong.
For those who are sorry,
and for those who are not.
Help them to understand what they have done,
And to change their lives for the better.

***Lord, may Your kingdom come
And may Your will be done.***

With the second coming of Jesus,
All sickness will be taken away.
We pray for those who are sick,
And especially for any known to us.

{Leave a moment of quiet to bring people and situations known to you to mind}

Be with them by Your Holy Spirit,
And give them the comfort
That only Your presence can bring.

***Lord, may Your kingdom come
And may Your will be done.***

Now we pray for ourselves.
Lord, we do not know when Jesus will come again.
Even Jesus himself did not know.
Save us from spending time worrying about it,
But help us to use our time well,
Thanking You for Your precious gift of life,
And using it to give You glory.

Father God,
every word in scripture points to the gift of hope
that we have because of Christ Jesus.
The Christmas story,
wasn't the beginning of that message of hope
because the Old Testament
is full of glimpses of your plan
to redeem your people
and restore them into a relationship with you>
But we are able to truly begin to see and
understand just how great your love for us is
As we remember the events of that first Christmas
when you gave us the gift of hope,
wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

Thank you, Father, for your immeasurable gift
and for His power to move in the lives and
situations about which we have just prayed
And to bring the light of his love into dark places.
Receive these our prayers and show us how we
can be part of the answer.
In Jesus' precious name, we pray.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

And let us draw all these our prayers together in the
words of the Lord's Prayer in its modern form.

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come
Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
Now and for ever.
Amen

Our final hymn reminds us that we need to be
prepared to confront and repel the forces of
darkness and despair within our world. And that if
we are to do this then we need to equip ourselves
with all the resources God provide to 'wrestle,
fight and pray . . . to win the well fought day'

Hymn – StF 637

1. Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armour on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through his eternal Son;
Strong in the Lord of hosts,
And in his mighty power,
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.
2. Stand then in his great might,
With all his strength endued;
But take, to arm you for the fight,
The panoply of God;
That, having all things done,
And all your conflicts passed,
You may o'ercome through Christ alone,
And stand entire at last.
3. Leave no unguarded place,
No weakness of the soul;
Take every virtue, every grace,
And fortify the whole:
Indissolubly joined,
To battle all proceed;
But arm yourselves with all the mind
That was in Christ, your Head.
4. From strength to strength go on,
Wrestle, and fight, and pray,
Tread all the powers of darkness down,
And win the well-fought day;

Still let the Spirit cry
In all his soldiers: come!
Till Christ the Lord descend from high,
And take the conquerors home.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

https://youtu.be/Hlov_jAo2uo

A Blessing

God of hope
be with us in our Advent journey
May the promise and the hope
of the Advent season
fill our hearts and minds
with the true spirit of giving
and send us out to live and work
for the good of all God's people.

And may the blessing of God the Father, God the
Son and God the Holy Spirit
Rest and remain with us through these seasons of
Advent and Christmas and beyond.

Amen