

The Methodist Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 13th December 2020



This short act of worship, based on the service which would have been held at Church today, has been prepared for you by Rev John Wiseman, to use at home. If you are well enough, why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

I have included some links to allow you to access versions of the hymns / songs / music via YouTube

Opening prayer

3rd Sunday in Advent...I encourage you to light a candle at the start of this act of worship as we sing / read / pray the first 3 verses of our advent hymn to the tune, 'Oh worship the King, all glorious above'

The candle of hope we light in this hour
Proclaims that the Lord is coming in power.
We wait for a future, now hidden from view,
When Christ in his glory will make all things
new.

The candle of peace shines bright with God's
plan;
The wolf will lie down and dwell with the lamb.
Our guns and our weapons, our hatred and
war,
Will give way to gardens that heal and restore.

The candle of joy reminds us to sing,
For God is at work to do a new thing.
The proud will be humbled; the lowly will rise.
God's kingdom is one of delight and surprise.
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www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6HNI5TRdHk

Pause for a few moments to reflect as you set out on your advent journey....

Father we thank you for the hope with which you have filled our lives. We give you thanks that in the coming of Christ you have given us assurance of your sovereign control over all things. Thank you that we can gather on this 3rd Sunday in advent, when we remember not only the coming of Christ into our world but also the promise of his coming again as Lord or all.

Thanks you for the hope with which Christ fills our lives. In our times of doubt and despair, the message of his coming, his birth, life, death and resurrection assures us and renews our hope. Thank you that because of Christ's coming and the promise of his coming again, we can live each day in the full knowledge that you are with us.

And ultimately you hold all things, including ourselves in your mercy, love and care. Lord come and come again. Come into your world. Come into our lives that we might have hope.
In Jesus name. Amen

@ Rev David Clowes. 40 prayers for Advent 2020.

Let's continue by singing together: a new song to the tune "Angels, from the Realms of Glory")

Prophets told us, "Pay attention!
God is working in the land.
Lo, the days are surely coming;
seek the justice God has planned!

Seek the signs of your redemption;
hear God's word and understand!"

Christ, you taught us: "Pay attention!
Nature's signs are sure and clear:
When the trees grow leaves and blossom,
summertime is almost here."
So it is in God's good kingdom;
be alert; God's reign is near!

As we welcome your salvation,
all around we see distress;
There is trouble in the nations!
There is greed and wickedness;
As we trust in your redemption,
may we live your righteousness.

May we work for what you call for;
may we labour for your reign.
Families cry out at the border;
children suffer grief and pain.
May your church, committed, prayerful,
work for justice in your name.

Christ, you taught us: "Pay attention!"
So we humbly serve and pray:
May we gladly live your kingdom
in a world that's gone astray.
May the hope of our salvation
guide the things we do and say.

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This morning's reading John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light...

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered

them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Let's sing again STF 175

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

Here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

King of all days
So highly exalted
Glorious in heaven above
Humbly you came to the earth you created
All for love's sake became poor

Here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross

Here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

Tim Hughes @2000 ThankYou music

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MmRGSEG2LM

Today's message.

As we heard last week the Jewish people were used to hearing prophetic voices...the prophets as you know form one of the three main sections of the Hebrew scriptures, alongside the Law and the Writings. The Jewish heritage had been rich with prophetic voices forth telling

and foretelling... Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and last but not least Malachi

Prophetic voices that by and large spoke to people of the day about the contemporary situation right there and what needed to be done to avoid disaster. Prophetic voices that spoke about the future and what would happen if those measures were not taken. Prophetic voices concerned with areas of religion, with politics, with economics, and sociology, areas often so closely linked together it was impossible to prise them apart. Prophetic voices issuing warnings. Voices offering comfort. Voices explaining how the people had strayed far from God. Voices calling the people back to God. Voices that had now fallen silent

Some 400 years earlier the last prophetic voice of the OT Malachi had delivered a message that suggested that God is not always sweet and gentle. Sometimes God gets in our faces, insists that we change our ways, and calls us to take brave action. Hands up any of you who has read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis? In that book, when the children are told they will meet Aslan they are wisely concerned.

"Is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man?" said Mr. Beaver sternly.

"Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood, and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion, the Lion, the great Lion.

"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he - - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will dearie, and make no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then, he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Of course he isn't safe. But, he is good. He's the King, I tell you."

Malachi advised God's to await God with the same caution. Just as we are often required to take medicine that does not taste very nice to cure an infection or undergo a series of exercise that are not very pleasant in order to get fit so Malachi's message suggest that

sometimes we must make hard changes and work hard to be the people God made us to be.

This is the last prophet voice the Jewish people have heard, and for over 400 years God's voice has been ominously absent. No word has been delivered to the people through their prophets. No word until now. When suddenly we hear a voice "like one crying out in the wilderness. "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness. 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'

Enter stage left John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus, taking words from the past, one that herald the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon, setting in a present day reality and context but whose focus points into the future and what is still to come

Words that are steeped in Jewish faith history mixing of Exodus 23:20, Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. Words spoken not in Jerusalem, not in the temple but in the wilderness, a location that would remind the Jewish people of the two major events in their faith history, the exodus from Egypt and the return from exile from Babylon. There out in the wilderness that would remind the Jewish people of giants of faith who had also spent time in the barren landscape...Moses and Joshua / David hiding from Saul / Elijah feeling from jezebel, simply wishing to die and then hearing that small quiet voice. There on the banks of the river Jordan, his feet splashing in the water...a scene reminded them of passage through Red sea

There in the wilderness dressed in a way that would have rekindled images of Elijah, the great prophet who was expected to return shortly before the Messiah. And it was there that John the Baptist stood

His finger pointing. Voice accusing. Calling out to any who would listen. Repent. Stop and turn around. Stop this life you are leading. This life of shallow ritual observance. This life of luke warm compliance. This life of indifference and injustice. This life of religious apathy

John the Baptist was not simply calling for people to say that they are sorry for what they have done, but to repent...to say sorry and then change their ways. To turn 180 degrees from the direction they were going down the wrong path, and face a new direction that will lead them to....what was it Jesus said...the way, the truth and the life.

That is the message John proclaims and it is interesting to note that Josephus the foremost Jewish historian of this time writes considerably more about John the Baptist than he does about Jesus. For contrary to what some might think John the Baptist was not just some minor figure at the time of Jesus. John the Baptist had an obvious following, John the Baptist had an obvious position, John the Baptist had some degree of fame, John the Baptist drew the crowds

Yet John is very careful to emphasis in his answers to the religious leaders just exactly who he is, or more specifically just who he isn't. Compared to 7 of Jesus' most famous sayings also found in John's gospel where Jesus categorically states I am....

John the Baptist's categorical answer is "I am not"

John the Baptist might not have been the one people were searching for yet John's role is critical. If anyone here goes to see a comedian, goes to see a pop group there will almost certainly not just be the main act that you have paid your money to see perform. Inevitably there will be some kind of support act, one of whose aims is to warm up the audience before the main attraction appears. If any of you have ever been to the recording of a TV show and especially a chat show or comedy show the warm up person is crucial. It is her / her job to bring everyone to a certain degree of excitement, to get everyone ready.

Before John exits stage right, he has this important role to perform in the greater scheme of things for just like the support act appearing before the main star of the show, John's role is to get the audience ready. His instructions have been to brief the audience, to introduce the initial part of the story, to give them clues as to what might happen. Now as the curtain draws slowly back and the main star is about to step on stage, John steps back into the shadows, as Jesus doesn't just step into the spotlight but is about to become the very light itself.

Over the past couple of weeks we have heard how important it is to stay alert, keeping awake, being vigilant. Last week we heard voices from the past echoing into the future through the prophets. Now this week it's all about preparation. Anyone getting ready to compete in Tokyo 2021 will know the importance of good training and being ready at

just the right time. Anyone taking part in a pantomime realises the importance of learning the lines. Anyone planning a Christmas tree festival or Christmas lunch knows it's all about the organisation done before hand. Anyone leading an act of worship should know that its 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration that produces the desired result.

Sometimes during this season of Advent thoughts and focus can become similar to these required to put up the family Christmas tree. We can get distracted by the tree itself . With the lights. With the tinsel. With the baubles. Or we can look beyond the glitter and the chintz, can we look beyond the superficial dazzle and focus on the one thing that really matters...the star of the whole show

Prayers of Intercessions

We pray for the issues that have dominated our news headlines during this past week

We pray for all those preparing the way for us to be able to return to worshipping together in the near future

We pray for those happy to work in the shadows enabling others to shine

We pray for International migrants' day and all those beginning again in new lands

We join together to say the words of the Lord's prayer...Our Father.....

Let us conclude this act of worship by singing STF 321 (a new interpretation on the video clip)

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds
And drives away his fear
It makes the wounded spirit whole
And calms the troubled breast
'Tis manna to the hungry soul
And to the weary, rest
And to the weary, rest

Dear Name, The Rock on which I build
My shield and hiding place
My never failing treasury filled
With boundless stores of grace
By Thee my prayers acceptance gain

Although with sin defiled
Satan accuses me in vain
And I am owned a child
And I am owned a child

Jesus my Shepherd, Saviour, Friend
O Prophet, Priest and King My Lord,
My Life, My Way, My end
Accept the praise I bring
Weak is the effort of my heart
And cold my warmest thought
But when I see Thee as Thou art
I'll praise Thee as I ought
I'll praise Thee as I ought

Till then I would, Thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath
And may the music of Thy name
Refresh my soul in death
Refresh my soul in death

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUZGojrDjwE

A blessing...

**Go from this place, ready to step back, to
allow the one we are to follow to stand fully
in the spotlight, for it is in his name that we
all aim to shine.**