

The Bride Valley Service for Advent Sunday 29th November 2020

In Church we would be lighting the first of our Advent Candles, you may wish to light a candle of your own if it is safe to do so.

Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, as the church prepares to celebrate the coming (adventus) of Christ in his incarnation and also looks ahead to his final advent as judge at the end of time.

Every eye shall now behold him robed in dreadful majesty (Charles Wesley).

Welcome in the name of Christ. God's grace, mercy and peace be with you. **And also with you.**

Stir up your mighty strength and come to our salvation. Turn us again, O God; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved. (Psalm 80.3,4)

Confession

When the Lord comes, he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and disclose the purposes of our heart. Therefore, in the light of Christ let us confess our sins:

Heavenly Father, you have created a universe of light: forgive us when we return to darkness. Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world: cleanse and heal our blinded sight. Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Holy Spirit, you give us light in our hearts: renew us in faith and love. Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Collect

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and forever. **Amen.**

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 64.1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,

you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
and do not remember iniquity for ever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

New Testament Reading: 1 Corinthians 1.3-9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading: Mark

‘But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.
Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Reflection

Advent: Watching and waiting ... for God! We seem to have had our fair share of watching and waiting this year, haven't we! Waiting to see what lockdown will look like, waiting to see if lockdown is working. Waiting to see whether there will be a second wave of the virus and now just this week, waiting to see what tier we will be in here in Dorset and across the country, especially where our loved ones live. And it's been very challenging. You may have had your own personal experiences of waiting too, waiting to hear if you or someone close has got the job they so desperately need, waiting to hear what your test results say, waiting for a loved one to return from surgery, waiting to hear the effects of illness.

Today's readings from Isaiah and Mark do nothing to allay our anxiety. There is something scary coming and we're not quite sure what to do about it. Maybe our instinct is to run around shouting '**Don't panic!**' like Corporal Jones from Dad's Army. I suspect that may have been the response of those disciples as they listened to the description of the coming of the Son of Man. What he is describing is nothing short of a catastrophe, and anyway: who is this 'Son of Man'? They suspect he is Jesus or associated with Jesus, but they would much prefer it if he made that clear. This impersonal way that he talks about judgement leaves them uncomfortable and uncertain about their own position. Are they among the elect or not?

And then, Jesus gives them the practical advice: Stay awake, keep alert, be prepared. He is not talking about a particular kind of busy-ness, nor frenzied activity, just an intentional watchfulness, a way of looking at the world to see the signs.

But it's not easy to look for where God is present around and about us. I'd go so far as to say: it's much easier to look at the world as meaningless, with no place for hope. The people in Isaiah have come to see the world as empty of God. God has withdrawn from them, they complain and fall into sin, is it any wonder?! This is all God's fault, if only God would behave like the old days, then people would believe in him again, they would serve him gladly – do something God, they say, send down fire from heaven and make the earth tremble, let's have something ..., anything ..., going on down here so that people can see a sign, see the signs that you are near.

Eventually they remember who God is, their creator and their Father. God has not hidden himself from them, they have been too busy with life, looking at other things, focussing on everything but God. They need to learn to look again at the signs of God's presence all over the world. Like the disciples waiting for the Son of God, they cannot be sure that what is to come will be comforting, but they do know that it will be real.

By comparison, the Christians in Corinth have the sense to stay and look at the evidence, a faithful God who, from our creation onwards, comes to us until we meet him as he is, in Christ. The Saviour of the World.

Advent then, is like a period of forced inactivity, where we have no choice but to watch and wait, learning to see the world as it actually is, full of signs, joyful or terrifying, of the coming of God. **Amen.**

Affirmation of Faith

We say together:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

We believe in God the Father who created all things: for by his will they were created and have their being.

We believe in God the Son who was slain: for with his blood he purchased for us God, from every tribe and language, from every people and nation.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit: the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!' Even so come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid we pray to Jesus.

Come to your church as Lord and judge. We pray for your church here and across the world, for all who minister in your name. Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing for your kingdom.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come Lord Jesus.**

Come to your world as King of the nations. We pray for Elizabeth our Queen, our Prime Minister Boris Johnson and all in government here in the UK and across the world, guide and protect them all at this unprecedented time of the global pandemic.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come Lord Jesus.**

Come to the suffering as Saviour and comforter. We pray for all those known to us who are ill, whether physically or mentally and especially those in hospital. We pray for all carers including NHS staff as they negotiate the effects of winter pressures alongside the added outbreak of Covid-19.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come Lord Jesus.**

Come to us as shepherd and guardian of our souls. We remember those near to death and ask you to be close to them and those caring for them and also those mourning the loss of

their loved ones. Give us with all the faithful departed a share in your victory over evil and death.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come Lord Jesus.**

Come from heaven, Lord Jesus, with power and great glory. Lift us to meet you, that we may come to know you better in each and every way, that we may live and reign with you forever.

Maranatha: **Amen. Come Lord Jesus.**

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay; give new courage to your people, who trust in your love. By your coming, raise us to share in your kingdom on earth as in heaven, by your light help us to shine for you, here on earth. **Amen.**

Blessing

May God himself, the God of peace, make you perfect and holy, and keep you safe and blameless, in spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

May the Lord when he comes find us watching and waiting. **Amen.**

Sources: This week's Reflection on the readings was prepared by the Reverend Jane Williams with liturgy adapted from Common Worship: Times and Seasons, copyright@The Archbishop's Council 2006 and New Patterns for Worship, copyright@The Archbishop's Council 2008 2nd Edition, 2008.