

St John's Church, Kingston Park

Sunday Worship, 28th November 2021

(If you are worshipping with others, words for all to say together are in **bold type**.)

Welcome to worship with St John's this morning. Today is the first Sunday of Advent. In the church's calendar, which guides us through all the main events and celebrations of the Christian faith, Advent Sunday is the beginning of a new year, and Advent is a time when we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus at Christmas – but we also remember that he has promised to come again.

The prophet Isaiah wrote: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" Isaiah 52:7 (NIV)

Prayer

Lord, we come to worship you and to hear your good news. We come to praise you, because you are our God, and you reign over everything. Open our hearts and minds to hear your message of hope, of peace and of salvation. Amen.

Our first song takes up those words from Isaiah, and reminds us that our God reigns.

Song: Our God reigns

(This can be found on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n82_H4yabC4_)

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of Him
Who brings good news, good news
Proclaiming peace, announcing news of
happiness
Our God reigns, our God reigns

Our God reigns, our God reigns
Our God reigns, our God reigns

You watchmen lift your voices joyfully as one
Shout for your King, your King
See eye to eye the Lord restoring Zion
Your God reigns, your God reigns!

Waste places of Jerusalem break forth with joy
We are redeemed, redeemed
The Lord has saved and comforted His people
Your God reigns, your God reigns!

Ends of the earth, see the salvation of your God
Jesus is Lord, is Lord
Before the nations He has bared His holy arm
Your God reigns, your God reigns!

(Leonard E Smith)

Lighting Advent Candles

The Advent candles remind us of those who looked forward to the coming of Christ, the Saviour, and help us to look forward to celebrating his birth. We light one candle the first week, two the second, and so on. If you're worshipping at home, you could light a candle with us now, if you would like to.

We light this candle to remind us of God's people throughout the ages.

**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 and give us hope. Amen.**

Collect for today

Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns,
turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness,
that we may be ready to meet you
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Bible Readings

Jeremiah 33:14-16 (NIV)

¹⁴ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfil the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

¹⁵ “In those days and at that time
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.

¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it will be called:
The LORD Our Righteous Saviour.”

Luke 21:25-36 (NIV)

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.’

Reflection

Advent is one of my favourite times in the church year. I love the sense of expectancy that it brings – and I love the Advent music, too, the hymns and songs we sing that look forward to the coming of Jesus.

Advent encourages us to prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, and to see it as part of God’s bigger story, of God’s plan for human history and for bringing us back to himself. It shows us that the birth of Jesus isn’t the beginning of the story, as we think about those who looked forward to his coming. But it also reminds us that the baby in the manger isn’t the end of the story. Jesus Christ, who was God become man, Jesus, the baby who was born in Bethlehem, Jesus, who grew to be a man, who worked as a carpenter, who taught about the kingdom of God, who died for us and rose from the dead, and returned to his Father in heaven – that Jesus is coming back. And when he does, he will make an end to injustice, to war, to the exploitation of the poor by the rich, to the trampling of small nations by larger ones, to our destroying of the planet that was entrusted to us – he will make everything new. So Advent is a time to remember and to prepare – not just for the celebration of Christmas, of his first coming, but also for his second coming. And that’s why we have two pieces of Scripture as our readings today that are in some ways quite different – but also have some similarities, especially if you look at where they come from, and what’s just gone before.

The first reading is from Jeremiah 33. At this point, Jerusalem is under siege, and poor Jeremiah has been imprisoned for saying what God has told him to say. He’s given God’s warning that the city will

fall, and the people will go into exile, but also God's promise, that God will eventually bring them back and restore the life of the nation. And then he says the words of our reading: the promise of 'a righteous Branch from David's line', a descendant of David who would do what was just and right. It's a promise of restoration, and a promise of the Messiah whom God would send - but they'll have to wait for God's promises to be fulfilled.

And then in our reading from Luke, Jesus has just been warning his disciples of troubles to come. They're to stand firm when they're persecuted, he says, but when they see foreign armies coming to besiege the city, they should escape at once, because judgement is coming on Jerusalem, and foreign nations will dominate it until their time is up. That actually happened about forty years later, when the Romans conquered Jerusalem in 70 AD, and destroyed the Temple. But then we get onto today's reading. Bible scholars have various different views about what exactly this is about, but most think Jesus is talking about his return, his second coming, which will happen at a time that we don't yet know.

Jesus warns them that there will be more troubles – signs in the sun, moon and stars, some really terrifying events. What exactly these will be isn't clear: this sort of language was used to describe great world events as well as literal events among the stars. Jesus says people will be terrified. And then, in verse 27: "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." This is a reference to the book of Daniel, where Daniel sees, in a vision, 'one like a Son of Man' – a human being – who approaches the throne of God, coming 'with the clouds of heaven', and is given power and authority and everlasting kingship. (Daniel 7:13-14) So Jesus is suggesting that his kingship will be clear and indisputable, given with the authority of God. And his followers aren't to be distracted by all the fearful events that he predicts. On the contrary, they should stand tall because these are signs that their redemption is drawing near – that God is going to fulfil his promises and their suffering will be over as Christ reigns over everything. But that's in the future. They, and we, will have to wait.

So how are we to wait?

Last week, I was really busy and wrapped up in what I was doing for several days, and on Thursday a friend sent me a message that mentioned that a storm was coming. There were yellow and orange wind warnings, threats of power cuts and so on. I could easily have been taken by surprise, but I had time to get my phone charged and a candle ready for if the power went out. Well, Jesus is telling his followers to be alert and watchful, so that they aren't taken by surprise by his return. He warns, "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."

It's interesting, isn't it, that a lifestyle can weigh us down. Just seeking a good time is ultimately an empty way of living, even a burdensome one, and sometimes it's a way of trying to avoid other problems. But Jesus also warns about the 'anxieties of life.' Perhaps he means worrying about day to day needs or about what might happen, things we see around us or fear in our own future. Maybe we have responsibilities that cause us concern – things that can take our time and preoccupy our minds so that other things pass us by, as well as perhaps being a drain on our physical strength and mental health. These things can weigh us down and can hinder us in what we need to do, as if we're carrying a huge load.

We certainly see elsewhere in the gospel that Jesus wants us to trust God rather than worry about the things we need. But here the focus is on being ready for the return of Christ. So Jesus tells his followers to be aware of the signs of the times and to recognise when the things he's told them about are happening, so that they won't be taken by surprise. He tells them '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.' He wants us to be aware of events, but to see them, not with the eyes of fear or the world's perspective, but prayerfully, with an eye to what God is doing, and to what our response should be. He wants us to be ready to meet him when he comes – and within a few days of saying

these things, he died on the cross so that we could be forgiven for all the wrong in our lives, all the things that separate us from him.

These thoughts might for some of us be a little unsettling. But let's remember who it is we're waiting for. The King who came to serve. Jesus who loves us, who died for us, who prays for us in heaven. Not only the Redeemer of his people long ago, but our Redeemer, who went to the cross so that the judgement that we deserve would be on him. The Jesus who said that he would be with us always. So if things are tough, and the world is becoming a scary place, hang in there, and wait, because he will fulfil his promises.

So let's spend some moments thinking about the One that we're waiting for. There's a song by Chris Tomlin and Jesse Reeves, called 'This is our God'. You might like to read the lyrics slowly, reflecting on what they say about God and responding in prayer, or listen to it on YouTube here: : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Fc7_HnvJBY.

A Refuge for the poor
A Shelter from the storm
This is our God
He will wipe away your tears
And return your wasted years
This is our God

*Upon His name
He is mighty, say
This is our God*

A Father to the orphan
A Healer to the broken
This is our God
He brings peace to our madness
And comfort in our sadness
This is our God

*So upon His name
He is mighty, say
This is our God*

This is the One we have waited for
This is the One we have waited for
This is the One we have waited for
Jesus, Lord and Saviour,
This is our God

A Fountain for the thirsty
A Lover for the lonely
This is our God
He brings glory to the humble
And crowns for the faithful
This is our God

*This is the one we have waited for
This is the one we have waited for
This is the one we have waited for
Jesus, Lord and Saviour*

*You are the one we have waited for
You are the one we have waited for
You are the one we have waited for
Jesus, Lord and Saviour
This is our God*

Chris Tomlin & Jesse Reeves

Prayers of Intercession (written by Tim Rogers)

In joyful expectation of Christ's coming, we pray to our Lord saying,

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to your world as King of Kings.

We pray for the nations of the world and their leaders.

As COVID rates rise in many places and variants appear, and also as vaccination roll-outs and other measures to live with the virus increase we pray for decision makers; may concern for all people, as whole people (physical, mental, financial wellbeing), be upper most and not petty politics or nationalism.

We pray for Afghanistan, for relief in the immediate crises but also for the future. And as we pray for Afghanistan, we pray too for other countries and regions where there are disputed governments and people going hungry for that or any reason.

In the face of climate crisis we pray not only for those most affected, like island nations, and not just for governments, but for scientists and activists and all of us.
Before you rulers will stand in silence.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to your Church as Lord.

We pray for the life of your people here, for the events of this Advent and Christmas period, in particular the Sing-a-long Carol concert. We pray for ministers, Adele and Annie and others in leadership and service roles, may we all be working for your Kingdom.

We pray for Christians unable to celebrate your coming because of persecution.

Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing to do your will.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to your people as bringer of joy and bearer of pain.

We pray for people fleeing their homes and for those concerned for them, we particularly pray for those seeking crossing of the Channel. (Although we know there are many times those numbers in other parts of the world, these are geographically close and our capacity even to pray with meaning is limited.)

We pray for those particularly known to us: for the bereaved, for those who are ill or lonely, for those who are tired and weighed down by their service to others –we keep a moment’s quiet as we hold them before God.

Each of us is amongst your people too and so we pray for ourselves; challenge us where we are arrogant and self-reliant; strengthen us where we feel inadequate and above all may we be open to your coming in our lives.

Enfold us all in your love and mercy, wipe away the tears of failure, fear and distress, and set us free to serve you for ever.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to us from heaven with power and great glory,
and lift us up to meet you,
where with all your saints and angels,
we will live for ever.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

(This can be found on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBGx_4PxO3g)

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.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

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)

Closing Prayers

Now to him who is able to keep us from stumbling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory in great joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

May we live in the peace of Christ, and in the light of his coming;
and may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Worship prepared by Julie Horton. Prayers by Tim Rogers.

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