



**Sunday 29 November 2020, a service for use at home:**

**Haddington West Church, Garvald and Morham**

**1<sup>st</sup> Advent**

**Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ**

**“Awake sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you.” – Eph.5,14**

**Collect:** Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, now in the tie of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN

**Come, Thou long-expected Jesus**

- 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.

Words by Charles Wesley

**Mk.13,24-27**

***‘But in those days, following that distress, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”***

***At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.***

***‘Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: as soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.***

***But about that day or hour no one knows, no even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on your guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.***

***‘Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!”’***

Dear friends

We remember the coming and birth of our Saviour not as something that lies concluded in the past and is remembered occasionally with an appropriate ceremony, but in the light of Christ's return, the second coming, which he taught the church to expect, to wait for and be prepared for. (When he ascended to heaven the angels said to those who were there: *"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* – Acts 1,11)

When God, the eternal One, entered history in human form in Jesus Christ, the result was not an event that became part of the flow of history, something that time would consign to the past, as must happen to all things 'heaven and earth' that shall pass away; but rather, all history was pulled onto that point of entering, was pulled onto Christ (the presence of God!). All history, therefore, is now immediate to him and flows towards its conclusion at his coming and appearing.

This is why our faith is real hope – and we can know that it is -, because it is grounded not in anything that is passing away – "heaven and earth shall pass away"! –, but in him who is coming and whose *words shall never pass away*.

Now the burden of what Jesus teaches the church here is that it must be awake to his coming *to gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens* – that the mode of faith is one of conscious waiting: *Be on guard! Be alert! What I say to you, I say to everyone: "Watch!"*

Do you remember how as children we counted the number of 'sleeps' before Christmas? Or how our parents helped us cope with the wait by saying: 'Only five sleeps to Christmas!?' It was a way of shortening the waiting-time – sleep cuts chunks out of it, when you sleep you don't wait, you don't feel the time that you are not awake to.

I fear the Lord's adversary goes around suggesting very strongly that we adopt the same strategy with regard to the Lord's coming. Because such a strategy is wrong and endangers the benefit of Christ's coming. It is therefore good and helpful that it is impossible for us to "count the sleeps" to Jesus's coming, that the Lord's coming is we know not when!

Sleeping through the waiting-time before Christ's coming is like being given a ticket and then sleep through the performance (the costs of the ticket are therefore, in a real sense, lost!), or like sitting down to an exam and fall immediately to sleep only to wake up when the paper is due, or like having access to a course but missing most it because you sleep through most of it, or like having a cake in the oven which burns up because, not being awake, you miss the alarm when it goes off.

All time is that of Christ's coming – that is what Advent means and reminds us of. Dear friends, Christ calls us to be watchful: not to be asleep to his coming by pleasing ourselves or pleasing the world, by seeking our fill with things that pass away, but be awake to his coming by minding what does not pass away and what assigns us our tasks – his word, in faith and obedience. AMEN

### **This is what our Saviour said**

1 This is what our Saviour said,  
He will return to the earth in power,  
coming on the clouds from heaven,  
all earth shall see Him and bow before Him.  
He is the Alpha and Omega,  
Who is, and who was, and who is to come;

once He was dead and behold He now is living for evermore.

- 2 With a shout and trumpet sound  
He'll fetch His bride for the marriage feast,  
and then we'll see Him face to face,  
joining all heaven in praise and worship.  
Blessing and glory and thanksgiving  
be to the Lamb reigning now and forever;  
honour and power belong to Jesus,  
come quickly Lord, amen!

Words and music by Greg Leavers and Phil Burt

Lord God, we thank you that you have fulfilled your promise made to your people long ago of sending the Saviour through whom all the world should be blessed and be reconciled to you. There is no better, or more wonderful, news than that of Christ's coming, his death for us sinners and his resurrection for our justification. He is our life and the light of the world. Give us grace to believe and trust in your word that he will come again, to judge the living and the dead and gather his elect, and help us not to sleep on our watch but prove the election of your children by anticipating his coming in works of faith and obedience.

- time of prayer / intercession –

***'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen'***

*Look forward in hope to the coming of your Saviour, prepare the way for Christ your Lord; welcome him with love and faith when he comes in glory.*

***And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.***

**AMEN**