

ADVENT SUNDAY

✠ CALL TO WORSHIP

Faithful one, whose word is life:
come with saving power to free our praise,
inspire our prayer and shape our lives
for the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

HYMN *Hills of the North rejoice* (StF 169)

- 1 Hills of the north, rejoice,
river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice ;
valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love,
he brings salvation from above.
- 2 Isles of the southern seas,
sing to the listening earth ;
carry on every breeze
hope of a world's new birth :
in Christ shall all be made anew ;
his word is sure, his promise true.
- 3 Lands of the east, arise !
He is your brightest morn ;
greet him with joyous eyes,
let praise his path adorn :
your seers have longed to know their Lord ;
to you he comes, the final Word.
- 4 Shores of the utmost west,
lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest
in whom the dawn has come :
he brings a never-ending light,
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.
- 5 Shout, as you journey on ;
songs be in every mouth !
Lo, from the north they come,
from east and west and south:
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.



'Hills of the North, rejoice'

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✠ PRAISE

Advent God, we worship you: the God who comes.

All: **Advent God, we worship you: the God who comes.**

You are not remote from the world you have made,
but each day you come to us, blessing us with your presence.

You came in creation itself, as your Spirit moved over the waters of chaos.

You came in Jesus Christ, made flesh in our world of weakness and need.

You came in power to raise him from death, a mighty promise for all creation.

All: **Advent God, we worship you: the God who comes.**

Each day you come, by your Spirit,
gently and powerfully working in the lives of men and women.

All: Advent God, we worship you: the God who comes.

At the end of time you will come,
in power and righteousness, in mercy and redeeming love.

All: Advent God, we worship you: the God who comes.

Grant us the grace to welcome your coming.

Inflame our love to yearn for your presence.

Enlarge our vision to recognize your coming day by day.

All: Advent God, we worship you: the God who comes.

✠ CONFESSIO

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

All: To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;

teach me your paths

you are the God of my salvation;

for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love remember me.

Good and upright is the LORD;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He teaches the humble his ways.

The almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins,
time for amendment of life, and the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

✠ SONG *Be Still and Know that I am God* (StF 18)

1 Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

2 I am the Lord who saves and heals.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

3 In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

'Be still and know that I am God'

Based on Psalm 46:10-11

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✠ ADORATION

Lord God, we adore you

All: Lord God, we adore you

because you have come to us in the past:

you have spoken to us in the law of Israel

you have challenged us in the words of the prophets,

you have shown us in Jesus what you are really like.

All: Lord God, we adore you
because you still come to us now:
you come to us through other people
in their love and concern for us,
you come to us through those who need our help,
you come to us now, even as we worship you.

All: Lord God, we adore you
because you will come to us at the end:
you will be with us at the hour of death,
you will reign supreme when all institutions fail,
you will still be our God when our history has run its course.

All: Lord God, we adore you
We welcome you, the God who comes.
Come to us now in the power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

SONG *My Jesus, My Saviour* (StF 363)

My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord there is none 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.*

'My Jesus, my Saviour,'
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✠ READING Luke 21:25-36

'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

Then he told them a parable: *'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

✠ REFLECTION

When was the last time you had to wait?(!)

Waiting is often a very passive experience. For instance; you may have had to wait for a bus or a train. Once you're at the stop or the station there's nothing much you can do except wait. You may have had the experience of waking up much earlier than you had intended or wanted and couldn't get back to sleep. There's not much you can do but wait for morning. That's passive waiting – I'm sure you can think of other examples.

But there is another kind of waiting:

Waiting for the birth of a baby is something that parents are fully involved in; they're active in their waiting. At the moment I'm sure we're all waiting for Christmas. Many of you will be very involved in that waiting with lists of things to do, to buy, to plan. That's active waiting.

Advent is a time for waiting. It's active waiting; it's a time of preparation. It is not simply a time to prepare for a celebration – the biggest birthday party anyone ever gets – it is that, but it's not just that. Advent is a time of active waiting and preparation to celebrate Jesus' birth, the coming of God among his people, and his presence among us now. But it is also the time when we recall that we are always waiting for his return – preparing, being ready. That waiting for his return is also active waiting.

It is not waiting like waiting for a bus that may be timetabled even if it may not come on time; it is not waiting like waiting for Christmas which is always 25 December; it is a little like waiting for the birth of a baby – you have to be ready but you don't know exactly when it will be, though even then you have a due date, but as the time approaches you begin to know the signs.

Jesus describes it a little like that. He talked about recognising the signs just as you recognise the signs of the approach of summer by the fig trees (and other trees) coming into leaf. So there are signs of his coming.

But the key part of Jesus' advice about how we engage in this waiting is to 'be alert'. Be alert.

I always think of the bumper sticker that I have on my trombone case: Be Alert: your country needs lerts. Be alert.

We've reached the 'yes but how?' moment haven't we? You're screaming at the screen. Yes, I know I have to watch; Yes, I know I have to be alert; Yes, I know I have to be ready – **but how?** What is it I'm looking for?

Even when it gets really practical, I think metaphor can help. You're watching for light amid the darkness. It is a dark time of year so a good time to think in these terms. We live in dark times: Conflict between nations and within nations; conflict between communities and neighbours and families and within communities and families; Breakdown in relationships at all levels; Famine and deprivation, poverty and oppression, hunger and disease; Interest only in personal advantage; the evaporation of concern for others; an obsession only with emptiness or vacuous trivia sometimes giving a quick fix but no long-term satisfaction; People held in slavery and forced labour, exploited for their desperation for work, for money, for their family, for their bodies ... people living in hopeless despair amid death and destruction; Some darkness caused by natural events and disasters which may or may not be increasing because of human action over many years; Some darkness caused directly by human action – what we could call human inhumanity.

We watch for the coming of Jesus as a watchman looks for the morning. A watchman looking for morning looks in the right direction (east) and keeps looking, straining for the first signs of light from below the horizon. Or, back with Jesus' metaphor, you look at the barren twigs of the fig tree watching for the first signs of the buds that will form leaves. That helps us, back with the light in the darkness metaphor, with what we're alert for the first signs of?

We look for the first signs of dawn; we look for the first glimmers of light above the horizon; we look for light breaking into the darkness: People recovering for illness, People rebuilding their lives; The healing of relationships; reconciliation between people and families and communities and nations; Peace talks and peace treaties; People treated with dignity and compassion; Relief arriving in disaster zones and people being fed and clothed and sheltered; Swords being turned into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, weapons being dismantled and human energy and economic activity going into relief and measures that lead to life and health and peace; Glimpses of joy on the faces of children receiving gifts and love when they have been used only to abuse and being taken advantage of. Forgiveness and rehabilitation instead of revenge. Grace and mercy rather than vindictive hatred.

Look for light, long for the coming of morning, keep watching because the light is coming, but don't wait passively as if asleep: be alert.

The next step is to celebrate the light when you see it and be part of the spread of the light and of the good news of the light. When you see that light you know that the day is near; you see the Son of Man coming in glory; as people of light you stand before him as he 'comes in the cloud'; the Kingdom of God is near.

Walk as people of light, support and be involved in the activities of light.

Watch as the watchman for the morning and be determined to walk in light, demonstrating light, bringing light in the dark places.

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Come let us walk in the light of the Lord. **Amen**

✠ **HYMN *Longing for light*** (StF 706)

1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.
*Christ, be our light !
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light !
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.
Christ, be our light !

3 Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.
Christ, be our light !

4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.
Christ, be our light

5 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.
Christ, be our light !

'Longing for light'

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✠ **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Lord, may we be watchful, ready and alert for your coming.
We come to you in prayers knowing that you come to meet us.
Lord, prepare us for your coming – in the church.
Clean out the unnecessary clutter of our church life,
the piles of dead habits,
the cupboards full of prejudice,
the cobwebs of compromise
and the sad rotas of forgotten dreams.
Open our church to the free flow of your refreshing Spirit.
Give us a new vision and hope.
We want to belong to you – to know your presence.

- Silence -

Lord, prepare us for your coming – in the world.
Come, drive away despair and cynicism from our public life;
revive our dreams of justice;
restore our passion for what is good, right and true.
Establish your just and gentle rule
where peace has been powerless
and violent people have had their day.
Set a flame to the fuse of justice

where arrogant people have defied the moral order year after year.

Guard well the new springtime of hope

where peace has come like a gift,

wrapped in reconciliation and gladness.

- Silence -

Lord, prepare us for your coming – in our community.

In the problems of our locality

help us never to forget the supremacy of love.

May love motivate our care for our neighbourhoods.

May love heal the social ills which drag us into despair.

May love inspire our citizenship to rise beyond mediocrity.

We name in our minds any problems in our own locality of which we are aware

- Silence -

We pray that love, gracious and practical, will find a way.

Lord prepare us for your coming – in those in need.

Give us eyes to search the face of the stranger

and there to see the face of the saviour.

Give us sensitivity to hear the doubt and hesitation,

and there, with that person, to share the confusion and futility.

There are those we know who are ill now,

struggling today to handle the pain.

We pray for them; we pray that you will come to us in them;

We pray that you will come to them in us

- Silence -

We draw our prayers together in the prayer for the coming of the Kingdom as Jesus taught us: *The Lord's Prayer*

**All: 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.**

✠ **HYMN** ***Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending*** (StF 177)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Lo, he comes with clouds descending,
once for favoured sinners slain ;
thousand thousand saints attending
swell the triumph of his train :
Alleluia !
God appears on earth to reign. | 3 Those dear tokens of his passion
still his dazzling body bears ;
cause of endless exultation
to his ransomed worshippers :
with what rapture
gaze we on those glorious scars. |
| 2 Every eye shall now behold him
robed in glorious majesty ;
we who set at nought and sold him,
pierced and nailed him to the tree,
deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see. | 4 Sing, amen, let all adore thee,
high on thine eternal throne ;
Saviour, take the power and glory,
claim the kingdom for thine own :
come, Lord Jesus !
Everlasting God, come down ! |

'Lo, he comes with clouds descending'

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✠ PRAYER, BLESSING & ENDING

O Lord our God,

make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord;
that, when he shall appear, he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service
and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

May God the Father, judge all-merciful, make us worthy of a place in his kingdom.

May God the Son, coming among us in power, reveal in our midst the promise of his glory.

May God the Holy Spirit make us steadfast in faith, joyful in hope and constant in love.

and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among us and remain with us and those we
love and all for whom we pray today and always. **Amen**

We go into the world

All: **to walk in God's light,
 to rejoice in God's love
 and to reflect God's glory.**