



Nov 29th 2020

Welcome & Advent Liturgy

Welcome to worship today, the first Sunday of Advent. Today, in churches and homes across the world, Christians begin the countdown to the celebration of Christ's birth in Bethlehem two thousand years ago – the coming of God into this world in human form. We stand with our sisters and brothers in Christ as we share in our Advent liturgy and light the first of our Advent candles.

Jesus said, 'Keep awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.' **Amen. Come soon, Lord Jesus!**

As I light the first of our Advent candles, you may like to light your Advent candle at home. (*The first candle is lit*)
Jesus is the light of the world.

A light no darkness can ever put out.

We sing together the first verse of our Advent Candle song:

Advent candles tell their story
as we watch and pray,
longing for the Day of Glory,
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness,
changed for gladness on that Day.ⁱ

Jesus, you are light even in the darkest places. Help us to look for light and to trust in you when we feel lonely or lost.

Shine hope into our hearts Amen.

Song

Into the darkness of this world,
Into the shadows of the night;
Into this loveless place you came,
Lightened our burdens, eased our pain,
And made these hearts your home.
Into the darkness once again –
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

*Come with your love
To make us whole,
Come with your light to lead us on,
Driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

Into the longing of our souls,
Into these heavy hearts of stone,
Shine on us now your piercing light,
Order our lives and souls aright,
By grace and love unknown,
Until in you our hearts unite –
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

*Come with your love
To make us whole,
Come with your light to lead us on,
Driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

O Holy Child, Emmanuel,
Hope of the ages, God with us,
Visit again this broken place,
Till all the earth declares you praise
And your great mercies own.
Now let your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.
*Come in your glory,
Take your place,
Jesus, the Name above all names,
We long to see you face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.ⁱⁱ*

Prayers

We offer our prayers of adoration and confession to God. Please join in the words on the screen. Let us pray:
God of all glory, you brought the universe into existence, and raised up witnesses to your greatness and love. We praise and adore you. Grant that by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit we may worship and serve you, and praise your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: 'The first commandment is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Let us confess our sins to God, trusting in his mercy and forgiveness.

Holy and forgiving God, we have sinned against you and each other in thought and word and deed. We have turned from your life-giving word and ignored the message of those you sent. We are unprepared for the coming of your Son. Have mercy upon us and forgive us, that strengthened by your love we may serve you more faithfully; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Silence

'Behold! I am making all things new,' says the Lord. This is Christ's gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven.'
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time 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 the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.ⁱⁱⁱ

Reflection

Rev Tim Perkins: "Come, Lord Jesus!"
The videos can be viewed at www.burleymethodist.org
Alternatively, the written text is provided below

Prayers

For our prayers we are going to use some words from the Methodist Service Book^{iv} interspersed with singing the verses of the Advent hymn "*Come, thou long-expected Jesus.*"^v During the prayers there will be some times of quiet for you to add in your own prayers, or if you are sharing in this service with others in your household or virtually then please use the pauses to share prayers with each other. Let us pray:
In joyful expectation of his coming to reign we pray to our Lord, saying, Come, Lord Jesus.

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free,
From our sins and fears release us,
Let us find our rest in thee.*

Come to your world as King of the nations. In the quiet we pray for the countries and leaders of this world...
Before you rulers will stand in silence. Come, Lord Jesus.

*Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art,
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.*

Come to your Church as Lord and Judge. In the quiet we pray for the church locally, nationally and across the world...
Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing to do your will. Come, Lord Jesus.

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

Come to your people as Saviour and bearer of pain. In the quiet we pray for those we know who the healing touch of God today...
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.

*By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne.*

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 with you for ever. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As Our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who

trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Song

Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
Touched by the madness and lies.

*Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out your Spirit we pray,
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out your Spirit on us today.*

May now your Church rise with power and love,
This glorious gospel proclaim.

In every nation salvation will come
To those who believe in your name.
Help us bring light to this world
That we might speed your return.
Come, Lord Jesus...

Great celebrations on that final day
When out of the heavens you come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrow will end,
And rulers will bow at your throne.
Our great commission complete,
Then face to face we shall meet.
Come, Lord Jesus...^{vi}

Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you and prepare your heart and soul to meet him when he comes in glory; and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be yours, now and always. Amen.
The day of the Lord is surely coming. Be faithful in worship, unwavering in hope, fervent in the work of God's kingdom and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.^{vii}

Reflection: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Rev Tim Perkins

I wonder, how do you feel about Advent? I have always had mixed feelings! I remember growing up in church and this time of year getting increasingly excited about the approach of Christmas but also getting increasingly perplexed or fearful when I listened to the passages from the Bible that are often read during this season. Passages about what we sometimes call "*the end times*" or what Tolkein would call "*The Return of the King*" – the second coming of Jesus.

Advent is a time to prepare. Yes, to prepare for Christmas and to allow Jesus to "*be born in us today!*" as Philip Brooks wrote in his carol "*O little town of Bethlehem.*"^{viii} But also a time to prepare for the second coming of Jesus, that time when God will place all things under Jesus' feet and when "*at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess him, King of glory now!*"^{ix} as another famous hymn puts it.

My Principal at training college used to remind us that the traditional themes for Advent are not "*the people of God, the prophets, John the Baptist and Mary the mother of Jesus.*" Nor are they "*hope, peace, joy and love.*" He used to tell us they are the four last things of "*death, judgement, heaven and hell!*" How does that make you feel? Do we like thinking about such things? Do you ever stop to consider that one day Jesus will return to make all things new? Do you live your life now from that perspective?

I wonder how you respond to passages of Scripture like this one from Mark chapter 13: verses 24 – 37:

"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, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on 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 rooster 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!’”

In the places where Jesus speaks about the coming in fulness of God’s Kingdom, he often urges us to; “*Stay awake, be alert, keep watch.*” Maybe it was his version of the Government slogans we are all now so used to! A short summary of his manifesto, as it were!

But clearly Jesus didn’t mean that literally. It is not physically possible or desirable to stay awake ad infinitum. Sleep is vital for human wellbeing and as such is an important spiritual practise for which I am deeply thankful. In fact, some in my household would say that I am well-practised, even an expert at it!

No, Jesus is not speaking literally. He wants us to move from the literal to the truthful, for there is great truth in what he says. If we are careful and patient and perceptive, we are able to discern something of the truth of God’s kingdom from the world around us. We are able to “discern the signs of the times.” But we do not do so in order to try and predict when Jesus will return.

The constant refrain of many of our advent liturgies is: “Come, Lord Jesus.” That is our prayer. But is it our hearts desire?

I want to suggest to you today that you try and think about this from a different perspective. Forget for a moment about the second coming of Jesus and let’s think about how God is already present in this world.

In Paul’s magnificent letter to the Colossians and chapter 1, he writes these words: “*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*”

And from Romans 1: “*For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.*”

God’s very Name revealed to Moses at Mt Sinai, “*Yahweh*” – “*I am that I am,*” or “*My being sustains my being*” – all these things tell us that God has always been present and active in this world, or rather I should say, God always is present and active in this world.

Yes, God’s presence was revealed in a very particular way in the birth of Jesus in that stable in Bethlehem and we praise God for it: “Hail, the incarnate Deity! Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel,”^x is how Charles Wesley masterfully expressed it in that greatest of Christmas Carols, “Hark! The herald angels sing”

And yes, God’s presence will one day be fully visible to all creation at it’s consummation. But when we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus,” we are inviting Jesus to reveal his presence to us in every moment of every day, in every context and situation we face, in every flower petal, snow drop, or mountain top. God is constant being. God cannot stop being. God’s being is infused through every atom of creation. As Richard Rohr writes, “Each individual act of creation is a once in eternity choice on God’s part.”^{xi} God chooses to be and therefore, “Christ is always coming; God is always present. It is we who aren’t! Jesus tells us to always be ready, to be awake, to be fully conscious and expectant. It’s the key to all spirituality, because we usually aren’t.”^{xii}

In Revelation 3: 20, Jesus says: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.”

What a gracious and beautiful image of invitation for us to be present with Jesus. But too often we do not hear his knock on the door of our hearts, too often we are unable to perceive his voice or his presence in the world around us. And the reason I think is simply this. We have not learned to live fully in the present moment. The present moment is where God is because God is the present moment. But our hearts and minds are blinded by our anxieties caused by past hurts – we are good at living in the past – or by our fears for what the future will hold – we are expert at that. And our preoccupation with the past and the future – the anxieties and fears they create about who we are and what we are worth, prevent us from being fully present to the God who comes to us in each moment, each face, each voice.

Again, Richard Rohr writes: “*The supreme work of spirituality, which makes presence possible, is keeping the heart space open (which is the result of conscious love), keeping in a ‘right mind’ (which is the work of contemplation or meditation), and keeping the body alive with contentment and without attachment to its past*

woundings (which is often the work of healing). In that state, you are neither resisting nor clinging, and you can experience something genuinely new.”^{xiii}

One of our other hymns says this: “Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here;” Anywhere, everywhere, not just when we gather together in worship. “Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;” are your heart and mind still enough to perceive God’s glory and majesty at work in a myriad of ways all around us every single day? “Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;”^{xiv} each place, every place, sustaining it, transforming it, renewing it.

When we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus.” He replies, “I stand at the door and knock.” But are we aware and alert enough to notice? If you can find ways of expressing God’s love you will experience it more fully. If you can learn to contemplate the majesty and mystery of God in the world around you, your mind will experience more of the peace which passes all understanding, which only Jesus can provide. If you can find healing for your hurts and peace for your fears you will come to live a life of contentment because you will become more aware of the sufficiency of God in every moment.

So “Come, Lord Jesus. Now and everyday. Amen.

ⁱ StF 165, Music by Edwin Monk, Words by Mark Eary, TMCP 2011.

ⁱⁱ StF 173, Words and music by Maggi Dawn, Thankyou Music, 1993.

ⁱⁱⁱ MWB P. 117 – 118, TMCP, 1999.

^{iv} MWB P. 121 – 122, TMCP, 1999.

^v StF 169, Music by John Stainer, Words by Charles Wesley, TMCP, 2011.

^{vi} StF 405, Words and Music by Gerald Coates and Noel Richards, Thankyou Music, 1992.

^{vii} MWB. P. 128, TMCP, 1999.

^{viii} StF 213, Philip Brooks, TMCP, 2011.

^{ix} StF 317, Caroline Maria Noel, TMCP, 2011.

^x StF 202, Charles Wesley, TMCP, 2011

^{xi} Rohr R., *Just This*, CAC Publishing, 2017, P.31.

^{xii} Op. Cit, P. 38.

^{xiii} Op. Cit. p. 33.

^{xiv} StF 20, Words and Music by Daniel J Evans, Thankyou Music, 1986.