

3rd December, 2023

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe,

light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go.

Refrain

O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.

Refrain

O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode.

Refrain

O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light.

Refrain

O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace.

Refrain



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read 1 Corinthians 1.3-9 and Mark 13.24-37. Jesus will Return

When we gave chocolate advent calendars to our Grandchildren, they started to open them. They would have eaten all the chocolates immediately. Surely Christmas is now – to them everything is now!

Why isn't it Christmas now? And yet it is Christmas now, in the shops, and in many homes. It's just not Christmas *day* yet.

In Jesus' prophecy we see it's now, but also it's not yet – Jesus has come, but he's not come in glory yet. The kingdom is here and now, and we have the decorations and celebrations, but it's not yet Jesus' return.

We are to watch. Jesus tells us to be on our guard (Mark 13:9, 23, & 33), to watch (vs. 5, 35, & 37), and to be alert (v. 33) because the time 'is near, right at the door.' (v.29).

This story starts in v.1 of Mark 13. Jesus is leaving the temple. 'Look', say his disciples, 'what massive stones, what a magnificent building.' Yet, Jesus says, 'Not a stone will be left.' And continues to speak of his coming.

The disciples were looking at the building; by far and away the largest building they would ever have seen. Consider the magnificence of Winchester cathedral, though this is now surrounded by other large buildings, imagine it in the first centuries of its life with just timber framed houses cluttered around it – it would have appeared vast in comparison.

The temple was such a confidence boost for the Jewish people, a source of great national pride, a symbol of their supreme, almighty God and his care for them as a special people. It was dependable, immovable, eternal, secure, and an inspiration – all is well, and will be well.

What are we looking at today? What in our communities or personally inspires pride and sense of security in us today? Our church building, our finances, possessions, our houses (our 'Englishman's castles'), our relationships, our health, or just being alive.

But, nothing is secure in this world! Even stars and planets will be shaken and fall.

Much fell in COVID. It wasn't God-given as such, but as C S Lewis says: *'We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God*

whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.'

The boat of our security was tipped over, but we've scrambled back in, instead of climbing onto God. We're attempting to rebuild our false hopes, longing for security whilst rejecting God's offer. At the end of Revelation 9, after a long list of the suffering which affects the earth, as caused by sin, it says, in its dramatic and poetic language ... Read Revelation 9:20-21.

The world is broken – and wants to be healed. Again in Revelation we have the saints of God, representing all of God's people who have and do suffer and struggle with the mess of this world, crying out: 'How long, Sovereign Lord ...'. One day it will end – one day it will be enough! Read 2 Peter 3:3-10.

Jesus says we should learn from the fig tree. None of us notice fig trees anymore. But we do notice the decorations in the shops. We know Christmas is near. And we notice the signs on the earth and Jesus' return is getting nearer. We missed Jesus first time, and many continue to ignore him even Christmas, or if remembering him now, then ignoring him for the rest of the year.

So what are we to do? Read 2 Peter 3:11-15.

We are to watch, and be ready. To look to Jesus and be secure in Jesus. Don't be shaken by the events of the world, or be secure in the insecure. Look out for Jesus. A elderly friend of mine belonged to a Christian group who would greet each other each morning with the words, 'Do you think he'll come today?'

We are to be ready at all times of day and night, and for every day, by living holy, godly, spotless, and blameless lives. That is, to live at peace with Jesus – ensuring he will find room in your heart! And by staying close to Jesus, we are told in 1 Corinthians 1⁸ *He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

First Sunday of Advent: *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.*

The Lord's Prayer: *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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Christmas Party for Chatters, Bowlers and Coffee & Questioners: Wed. Dec 20th at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Jan 24th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Carol Services: 5pm and 7pm December 17th.
- Christmas Day Celebration at 9.30am
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.