

# 28<sup>th</sup> November 2021

## 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 set out below.

**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 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

**Read: John 20:24-31**

***God is Proven- a summary of the talk given by Rev. Howard Wright.***

Why are we reading this now? It's Christmas! Well, Christmas means nothing without the resurrection! And this story fits with all times in that it's about human doubt and belief.

We will encounter many people over Christmas expressing joys and frustrations, hopes and dreams. Each of these will have beliefs and doubts and some of these people – family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, travel companions, fellow shoppers, and other chance encounters – will have an openness to conversation about what lies behind the festivities.

In my experience there are more of these conversations the more that I pray for them!!!!

In our story, Thomas struggles to believe. I mean, it's a bit unlikely isn't it. There's no coming back from the dead.

Right through John's Gospel Jesus has been calling people to believe in him. And right through history, Jesus has been calling people to believe in him. Encountering Jesus ultimately requires a decision and for some it's faith – Jesus inspires faith – for others it's doubt, or better named, disbelief and therefore rejection.

Many, like Thomas, and perhaps even ourselves, do not believe in

Jesus the first time they hear of him. Thomas didn't believe his friends when they told him, 'We have seen the Lord'. But Jesus is gracious and deals gently but firmly with him.

Thomas' encounter causes him to recognise Jesus fully. This is the first moment that Jesus is explicitly called and owned as 'Lord and God.' And doubting Thomas gets the honour of saying it – perhaps his name should be fully-believing Thomas.

Thomas meets the transformed and resurrected Jesus – and we and the world need to meet this Jesus. It's through this Jesus that life available. John tells us his Gospel/account of Jesus' life is written that 'you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.'

You need a name when turn up for an appointment at the doctors, the bank, - 'may I ask who you've come to see', and assuming you give the right name, 'you are ushered in.' We are given a name that grants us access to the throne room of heaven, to the Lord and the God, a direct line now, and a face-to-face encounter in the future. Access to life, now and forever.

Thomas, so legend tells us, became responsible for taking the Good News of Jesus to India, enabling many to believe, even at the cost of his own life. Thomas shared the story of Jesus risen from the dead. He could have shared the facts. Jesus really lived – a fact of history. His teaching was unsurpassed, yet he was killed for his claims. He was medically dead as attested by the blood and water that flowed from his side and by the meticulous ruthlessness of the Roman soldiers.

He was placed in a tomb, sealed with a huge rock, and guarded by Roman soldiers. Yet, he bursts out the tomb, convincing hundreds of people that he was physically alive and transformed – many of whom were martyred, killed, for firmly maintaining their testimony of the resurrection.

Now Thomas might have shared these arguments of proof, but I suspect that most of all he told how Jesus had met even him. We are also given the responsibility of sharing this wonderful news, telling how we have met and meet Jesus.

We are invited into God's work, to be like Jesus! And so much so,

that now by the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we can forgive sins – a job only God can do! Re-read the Gospel and notice how Jesus lovingly calls all to believe in him.

Our responsibility is to introduce Jesus, to make room for him – there was no room in the inn, so where else might we make room? As I mentioned earlier there will be opportunities for conversations and invitations over the next few weeks to share, 'we have seen the Lord', inviting people to have their own encounter with Jesus at one of our services or at an Alpha course. Let's make space, make room for Jesus in our lives that we are ready to, as Peter puts it, 'give a reason for the hope we have.' (1 Peter 3:15)

We are invited into life, to share the life of Jesus, our risen Lord and God. And he speaks blessing upon us who will believe and live. Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

Let's walk by faith, believing Jesus, our Lord and God for today, for our futures and for eternity.

**Prayers:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* (Philippians 4:4-6)



- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, for neighbours, for family and friends.
- Pray for the Church.

**Collect: 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 for ever. **Amen.**

**Blessing** to be declared over yourselves, COGS, 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, 9.30am & 7pm and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is available the week after the service.

The 'Mission of the Month' is Beyond the Streets which works to end the exploitation of women ([www.beyondthestreets.org.uk](http://www.beyondthestreets.org.uk)).

**Christmas Tea and Praise** is on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December at 3pm.

A traditional Christmas celebration for our more mature folk with carols and readings followed by a delicious tea and refreshments. Lifts can be arranged for the service.

For more information please contact Debbie (01420-84534) or Gilly (01420-544404).