

## Worship at Home 6 December 2020

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, provided by Mary Armstrong

### Intro poem<sup>1</sup>

Come back, Lord Jesus, and do not be slow.  
Refine, renew, restore. We hope, we yearn.  
When is this coming? Why can we not know  
how long we have to wait for your return?  
Come back, Lord Jesus, and do not be slow!

Or, help us in the lingering to learn  
your saving way that savours love, and so  
refine, renew, restore. We hope, we yearn.  
Come back, Lord Jesus, and do not be slow:  
refine, renew, restore. We hope, we yearn.

### Advent candle lighting<sup>1</sup> – [click to join in](#)

We light the second candle, for the second coming of Christ.  
He will return, ending pain and fear, restoring the world to life.  
Jesus, we trust in your return. **O come, O come Emmanuel.**  
Help us live with patient hope, **O come, O come Emmanuel**

### Hymn: Singing the Faith 173<sup>2</sup> – *Into the darkness of this world* [click to join in](#)

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| 1. Into the darkness of this world,<br>into the shadows of the night ;<br>into this loveless place you came,<br>lightened our burdens, eased our pain,<br>and made these hearts your home.<br>Into the darkness once again —<br>O come, Lord Jesus, come.<br><i>Come with your love to make us whole,<br/>come with your light to lead us on,<br/>driving the darkness far from our souls :<br/>O come, Lord Jesus, come.</i> | 2. Into the longing of our souls,<br>into these heavy hearts of stone,<br>shine on us now your piercing light,<br>order our lives and souls aright,<br>by grace and love unknown,<br>until in you our hearts unite —<br>O come, Lord Jesus, come.<br><i>Come with your love to make us whole,<br/>come with your light to lead us on,<br/>driving the darkness far from our souls :<br/>O come, Lord Jesus, come.</i> |
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3. O Holy Child, Emmanuel,  
hope of the ages, God with us,  
visit again this broken place,  
till all the earth declares your 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.*

## **A prayer of praise**

Lord God, you have comforted your people,  
making paths where there seemed no path.

You have lifted up valleys, relieved droughts, and made high places low.

You have gathered your people in the eternal place of love.

You speak to our hearts, and you forgive us for our wandering ways.

Your light and love, your faithfulness and work are true, ever true, always lasting.

We praise you, for the goodness you are, and the pathways you make before us. Amen

## **Old Testament reading: Malachi Chapter 3: 1-4** <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, <sup>4</sup> and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

## **Epistle reading: 2 Peter Chapter 3: 8-15** <sup>3</sup>

<sup>8</sup> But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. <sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. <sup>13</sup> But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. <sup>15</sup> Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him.

## **A prayer of confession – Rhythms of Grace** <sup>1</sup>

Jesus, Prince of Peace, **teach us to walk in your rhythms of grace.**

Holy God, forgive our impatience with everyday life.

We rush around, irritated at delays, frustrated with things and people which do not move at the pace we would like.

Jesus, Prince of Peace, **teach us to walk in your rhythms of grace.**

Holy God, forgive our impatience with answers to prayer.

Sometimes we treat you like a vending machine,  
or assume to know your will and your best for us.

Help us to trust your timing and your kindness.

Jesus, Prince of Peace, **teach us to walk in your rhythms of grace.**

Holy God, forgive our impatience with your coming again.  
You are not slow, you are patient,  
and you long for all to come to you willingly.  
May we live in holy anticipation of your return.  
Jesus, Prince of Peace, **teach us to walk in your rhythms of grace.**

Thank you that you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.  
You are patient with our mistakes and forgive our sins.  
We receive your peace afresh today.  
Jesus, Prince of Peace, **teach us to walk in your rhythms of grace. Amen**

**Hymn: Singing the Faith 185** <sup>4</sup>-Sing we the King who is coming to reign [click to join in](#)

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| <p>1. Sing we the King who is coming to reign;<br/>glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!<br/>Life and salvation his empire shall bring,<br/>joy to the nations when Jesus is King<br/><i>Come let us sing: praise to our King,<br/>Jesus our King, Jesus our King:<br/>this is our song, who to Jesus belong:<br/>glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.</i></p> <p>2. All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;<br/>freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;<br/>justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;<br/>wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:<br/><i>Come let us sing: praise to our King,</i></p> | <p>3. Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;<br/>doubt shall not darken his witness within;<br/>hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;<br/>love is victorious when Jesus is King:<br/><i>Come let us sing: praise to our King,<br/>Jesus our King, Jesus our King:<br/>this is our song, who to Jesus belong:<br/>glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.</i></p> <p>4. Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;<br/>hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day<br/>when this new song your creation shall sing;<br/>Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King:<br/><i>Come let us sing: praise to our King,</i></p> |
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### Reflection <sup>1</sup>

Expectation and anticipation are themes often associated with Advent. However, Peter emphasises patience. As Christmas approaches, how patient are you when it comes to waiting? Will you, for example, have a sneaky look at the presents under the tree? Or can you really resist putting on the Christmas carols' CD before December?

Last week we talked about Jesus' second coming - the Bible's promise that Jesus will return and bring the fullness of his Kingdom on earth. If we are honest, many of us can struggle with that idea. You might have heard some teaching about this which was confusing or scary. There are some believers who seem obsessed with the idea of Jesus' return. Also, some of us might be put off by what might seem to be more extreme interpretations, and perhaps do our best to ignore the idea of the second coming altogether. It has been 2000 years since Jesus returned to heaven, so it is understandable if people give up hope that God will ever return and put the earth right.

If you feel like that, you are not alone. Many of the first Christians lived with an eager expectation that Jesus would return in their lifetime, but after just a few years some of them began to lose hope. We can see this in Peter's second letter: 'Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' which he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. (2 Peter 3: 3-4)

Does this sound familiar to you? You might have heard this often before, or even wondered about it yourself. After all, isn't 2000 years a long time to wait for the return of Jesus?

Peter's first response to this question is quite brilliant: 'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient...' (2 Peter 3:9) Knowing that God is patient and prepared to wait should challenge the hurriedness of our modern lives. Do you feel like you rush from one thing to the next? Are you always looking for the fastest check-out queue at the supermarket? Do you get annoyed when your computer seems to take an age to download something, or your child dawdles over putting on their shoes? Maybe we need to learn that what might feel like slowness to us can, at the same time, be a lesson in godly patience.

Beyond this, Peter tells us that God has a vital reason why he is holding back his return: 'He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.' (2 Peter 3:9) Peter knew that the return of Jesus would come with judgement over the earth. Jesus' cross and resurrection mean that when we believe in him, we have no fear of judgement. But, entering God's Kingdom does require us to believe in him and come in repentance. For this reason, God is patiently holding back the return of Christ, so that everyone on earth has the chance to respond to his gift of forgiveness and restoration. Peter describes God's judgement like this: 'But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.' (2 Peter 3:10)

For various reasons this passage has been misunderstood to mean that God is going to destroy the earth. This has fed the mistaken idea that the Christian hope consists only of a spiritual heaven. But that idea ignores the wider biblical picture which Peter is drawing on, the promise of Isaiah of a new heaven and new earth (65:17, 66:22). Peter expresses it like this: 'in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth' (2 Peter 3:13).

This is the same new heaven and new earth which John sees in Revelation chapter 21 verses 1-2. The important question is - what kind of 'new' are these writers describing? There is a Greek word *neo* which means 'new' in the sense that it didn't exist before. But this isn't the word used in these passages. Peter and Revelation both use the word *kainos*, which means having a new quality about it - being 'renewed' or 'remade'. It's the same word which describes our transformation as Christians in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17 - you are a new (*kainos*) creation. The old sinful, broken life has gone, the renewed holy, restored life has come. God is not planning to put the earth in the bin and start again, he is planning to refine it, remake it and renew it. The Bible often speaks of God's judgement as a cleansing fire which burns off impurities: 'But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.' (Malachi 3:2-3, also Zechariah 13:9, 1 Peter 1:7)

God's judgement is a fire that will refine the earth until only pure gold is left. So the picture Peter is painting here is of God's final judgement burning up all that is unjust, impure and ungodly, and laying bare the earth until the old 'order' of things has been destroyed and the original intention of God has been restored. In Revelation, the City of God comes down from heaven to earth, 'the old order of things has passed away' and God promises to be with us on this restored planet forever. When you are waiting for something, knowing what you are waiting for changes how you wait. A child waiting for a Christmas present has a different attitude to a child waiting for the dentist. You wait for your wedding day in a quite different way to waiting for your car MOT.

We are not waiting for an eternity sitting on clouds, or an endless church service, or an infinite sermon. We are waiting for the restoration of heaven and earth, with every good thing made new and abundant life for all. Knowing what God will do when Jesus returns ought to change how we live today. Peter writes: 'Since everything [of the old order of things] will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming... So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.' (2 Peter 3:11-12 and 14, comment added)

Since this is our ultimate goal, Peter says, here is how we should live. We should live in ways which please God, which imitate Jesus, which work for the good of his creation, which build community and society, and which seek justice and fairness. We should communicate the Kingdom of God in how we speak and live and so not only proclaim it, but even somehow 'speed its coming'. Amen

### **Prayers of intercession <sup>1</sup>**

Gracious God, **Speak peace to us today.**

Lord, you have been favourable to your people in your grace pardoning us for the times we have neglected you, ourselves and one another.

In your endless love for us you have promised to speak peace over us, that we might turn to you in our hearts and seek to be faithful.

Gracious God, **Speak peace to us today.**

In your Kingdom, steadfast love and faithfulness will meet.

Righteousness and peace will come together.

As you seek to set all things right, might we seek to fix our eyes on this vision of your Kingdom, trusting in your promise that you will give all people what is good.

Gracious God, **Speak peace to us today.**

Father God, sometimes we struggle to see your vision for the world.

In the midst of change and challenge, and the further uncertainty which this pandemic brings it can be hard to see where you are working for our good.

During this advent season, might we come together as a community to support one another to catch glimpses of your kingdom, that our faith and trust in you might grow in abundance.

Gracious God, **Speak peace to us today.**

Father God, we pray for those for whom the waiting is too hard.

For so many, poverty, debt and hardship have made this year unbearable.

For those families unsupported by our social care system.

For those whose mental health makes it hard to see your goodness.

For those who need a reminder of your steadfast love and faithfulness.

May your righteousness go before them, making a path for their steps so they will not stumble.

Gracious God, **Speak peace to us today.**

Lord, may we hear your voice of peace,

and know that in your kingdom is abundance of life for all. **Amen**

Let us say **The Lord's Prayer** together

**Hymn: Singing the Faith 177** <sup>5</sup> – *Lo, he comes with clouds descending* [click to join in](#)

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

**A sending prayer - Remade, Renewed, Restored** <sup>1</sup>

In Christ we are a new creation **remade, renewed, restored.**

Jesus you will come again, perfecting all of creation: **remade, renewed, restored.**

Help us live in the light of your coming, lives of grace and peace: **remaking, renewing, restoring.**

Send us out, to bless the earth and bless all people: **remaking, renewing, restoring.**

### **Blessing**

We go from this moment, into a week of many moments,

hoping for an encounter with your grace, with your Spirit.

Come amongst us, Advent God. **Amen**

**Song** <sup>1</sup> *One day for the Lord*, based on 2 Peter by Sam Hargreaves [Click to listen](#)

### **Acknowledgements**

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