

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of November 2026

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Sunday 1st November 2026 – 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

ALL SAINTS DAY

This service was compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.

May you find it to be a time of blessing.

AS WE COME BEFORE GOD IN WORSHIP, LET US HEAR THESE WORDS:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. [1 John chapter 1 vs. 1 & 2 from today's lectionary readings] **Amen.**

Today, we remember the multitude of generations of believers who have gone before us, thinking especially of those who have inspired and encouraged us on our Christian journey.

Call to Worship:

Holy God, You have called witnesses from every nation and revealed Your glory in their lives.

Bless us with the same faith and love that, following their example, we may be sustained by their fellowship and rejoice in their triumph; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn: Angel Voices Ever Singing (StF 39)

Angel voices ever singing
round Thy throne of light,
angel-harps for ever ringing,
rest not day nor night;
thousands only live to bless Thee
and confess Thee
Lord of might.

Thou who art beyond the farthest
mortal eye can scan,
can it be that Thou regardest
sinful woman, man?
Can we know that Thou art near us,
and wilt hear us?
yea, we can.

Lord, we know that Thou rejoices
o'er each work of Thine;
Thou didst ears and hands and voices
For Thy praise design;
maker's art and music's measure
for Thy pleasure
all combine.

In Thy house, great God, we offer
of Thine own to Thee;
and for Thine acceptance proffer
all unworthily
hearts and minds and hands and voices
in our choicest
psalmody.

Honour, glory, might, and merit
Thine shall ever be,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
blesséd Trinity.
Of the best that Thou hast given
earth and heaven
render Thee.

Francis Pott (1832 – 1909)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Almighty God, we come together as those You have called into fellowship, to be
Your people and to share the rich inheritance of your Saints.

We come to worship You, not alone, but as part of the worldwide family of the
Church, united with our brothers and sisters in Christ across countries and
continents, centuries and generations, bound together by the same Lord and the
same faith.

We come as part of the great company of Your people in heaven and on earth,
following in the footsteps of past generations, picking up the torch from those
who have run the race before us and who have kept the faith, heirs of your age-
old promises.

We come as those called to build for the future, conscious of successive
generations that will follow us, and mindful of our responsibility to pass on to
them the message we have received, to offer them inspiration and
encouragement through the example of our commitment.

We come then united with all Your people of past, present and future, of here, there and everywhere, all those who call upon Your name and offer You their praise and worship.

In us and through us, Lord, build your Kingdom. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Almighty God, Your love for us is so great.

And, yet, our love for You and the world falls short of what it could be.

Here in this moment, we long to do better; we have longed for this many times before, but we have failed.

Forgive us, we pray, for our wrongs and our carelessness.

Help us, afresh, to be the people you want us to be.

Thank You that You assure us that we are loved and forgiven people. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the modern form of 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.

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**

The link between our readings today:

Two connecting themes emerge from these readings. This is the first Sunday in Kingdom season and, while Revelation provides a snapshot of life in the Kingdom, Matthew sets out the attitudes found in Kingdom living, with 1 John demonstrating what makes the people of God different.

Reading: Revelation chapter 7 vs. 9 – 17 'THE GREAT MULTITUDE' NIV

Introduction:

John has a vision of a heavenly place that shows many people worshipping God. There are people from every nation, tribe, people group and language, and they worship day and night.

⁹ After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?"

¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." ¹⁵ And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Hymn: For All The Saints (StF 745)

For all the Saints who from their labour's rest,
who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed:
Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou in the darkness still their one true light:
Alleluia, alleluia!

O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
fight as the Saints who nobly fought of old,
and win, with them, the victor's crown of gold!
Alleluia, alleluia!

O blessed communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine:
Alleluia, alleluia!

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,

steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong:
Alleluia, alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;
sweet is the calm of paradise the blest:
Alleluia, alleluia!

But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day:
The Saints triumphant rise in bright array;
the King of Glory passes on His way!
Alleluia, alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:
Alleluia, alleluia!

William Walsham How (1823 – 1867)

Reading: Matthew chapter 5 vs. 9 – 17 ‘THE BEATITUDES’ NIV

Introduction:

Matthew's Gospel is thought to have been written from a Jewish perspective and for a Jewish audience, drawing heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures. Some Jews shifted their faith toward a renewed focus on the Torah, the early part of the story of God's people, shaped by and through Moses. Meanwhile, the Jews who followed Jesus saw Him as not only the long-awaited Messiah but the 'new Moses' bringing a 'new law' to help them return to living as the people of God. Today's reading demonstrates this with Jesus delivering his 10 statements while up a mountain, just as Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

¹ Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, ² and He began to teach them saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

I couldn't get it at first.

What blessing can there be in persecution,
in facing hatred and hostility for the sake of Christ?

OK, so they slandered the prophets before us,
hurling all kinds of insults against them,
but that doesn't make it good, does it,
let alone to be desired.

Surely there must be easier ways to secure heaven's rewards,
a less costly and demanding path?

What about those other things He mentioned,
like hungering and thirsting after righteousness?
Won't one of them do instead?

OK, I'm not as meek and merciful as I should be,
as poor in spirit or pure in heart,
but I'm working on it,
and will get there in the end.

But can any of those stand alone,
in splendid isolation from the rest?
There's the rub.

I want to say yes,
but His words said no,
everything He said and taught
speaking of distinctive commitment,
a way of life different from the world's,
challenging its norms and undermining the status quo.

In other words, true faith will ruffle feathers,
get under people's skin,
and that spells trouble,
for they won't like it –
won't like it at all,
and they'll silence us if they can,
just as they tried with Him.

It's easier to keep your head down
to conform with the crowd and not to ask awkward questions,

but from this one, at least, there's no running away.
I can stay in my comfort zone and leave others in theirs,
or I can stay true to Christ.
Sadly I can't do both.

Hymn: Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God (StF 254)

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you;
Allelu-, alleluia:

*Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia, alleluia.*

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;
Allelu-, alleluia:

We shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, alleluia:

Karen Lafferty (b. 1948)

Reflection: 'A BLESSED PEOPLE'

The Book of Revelation is a powerful and beautiful book written to answer one question: the people of the early Church were suffering persecution and many became martyrs. Their hope was in the second coming of Christ, and they constantly asked the question: 'How long will it be before the victory is final and complete?' John seeks to give them an answer in a clear, simple way as he shares with them a vision he experiences whilst imprisoned on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea where he was banished by the Roman authorities on account of his proclamation of God's word and his uncompromising witness to the risen Christ.

For Christians, all of life is lived on this simple promise: that 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb' [v.10]. God's people celebrate the life which is to come - as if it has already happened, and on All Saints Day, for the faithful, it already has. So - to try and make this a little clearer:

During the summer, we celebrated the Paralympic Games. Over 800 special athletes joined together to celebrate in games especially designed for them. They paraded round the track, flags and banners held high. Despite their disabilities they were filled with excitement for what was to come. As they took

their places, everyone's eyes were on the right hand corner of the arena for the entry of the Olympic torch. A young teenage boy named Joel entered the stadium and ran around the track with the torch held high. The farther he went, the faster he ran as everybody began to catch the excitement as he ran to the finish line and the platform. They stood and began to applaud, then to yell and cheer as he mounted the steps to the Olympic flame, jumping up and down, he thrust the torch in the air as high as it would go. As the spectacle unfolded, one word came to mind – VICTORY - they had already won it before the games had begun. Before the game started, before the first race was run, before any of them grew too weak to finish, before anyone finished last, victory had already been won. Victory was in the air, it was on their faces, it was in their voices, it was in their hearts. 800 special athletes stood and cheered Joel. Why? Because regardless of the outcome of the games, they had already won. That is the spirit of the Book of Revelation. It is the spirit of Christian life. For all of us, before the games of life ever began, we had already won the victory, just as all those who have gone before us to claim the crown Christ has won. That is the promise of Revelation and it's important for us to trust and remember as we run the race of life, when we make mistakes, take wrong turnings, when life doesn't work out as we'd hoped, we are not defeated regardless of the outcome or the course of human events. The one victory that really matters has already been. When the world stands before us and shouts hate, God whispers love. When the world shouts doubt, God whispers faith. When the world shouts defeat, God whispers victory. When we pass through times of darkness, despair or defeat Jesus leads us in the way of light, hope and victory and that is our inheritance as followers of Christ. There are no endings - only new beginnings.

In our reading from Matthew, Jesus lists a pattern of blessings to offer spiritual guidance for practical living. It's a passage we've perhaps read many times and one I struggle with because of the use of the word 'blessed' - Other versions translate it as 'happy'. Jesus would have spoken these words in Aramaic. This translation would have been used until the 6th century when all the bibles were burned and confiscated as part of a programme to wipe out Christianity. However, it is still possible to go back and trace the words attributed to Jesus. This gives them a completely different meaning to the term Jesus uses: BE – ATTITUDES, positive principles or mindsets that guide behaviour and thinking, promote personal growth, resilience and meaningful relationships. Jesus used them as a series of blessings as He taught His disciples and followers in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is offering a set of positive principles to encourage our spiritual growth. The word Jesus used is Touveyhoun - another interpretation which gives this passage a whole new meaning, and one that I find of great

encouragement. They throw a new light and understanding on what Jesus meant. Let's have a look and see the difference:

You who have a 'maskerii' [home] in 'Ruhka' [the active forces from God], yours is a 'malkoota d'shemaya' [heavenly estate]. Historically interpreted as: Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

You who 'abili' [who love truth and profess your errors and the errors of your society] you shall be in 'nitbeyoon' [free of mental stress]. Historically interpreted as: Blessed are those mourning their wrongs, they will be comforted.

You who have 'mekikh' [humility – the mental quality of perceiving and co-operating with the good desires of others] you shall 'nartouri' [gain the earth]. Historically interpreted as: 'Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth.

You who hunger for 'kenoota' [the mind structure underlying attitude, judgement and behaviour described as just or fair behaviour between people] you shall attain it. Historically interpreted as: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they shall be filled.

You who have 'rakhima' [pure love, encompassing judgement and behaviour] you will therefore receive 'rakhima' [pure love]. Historically interpreted as: Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy.

You who have 'dadcean' [a completely purified mind] you will 'mikhazoo' [comprehend] 'Alaha' [the invisible source of creation]. Historically interpreted as: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God.

You who 'abdey' [through service, word], effectively produce 'shlama' [the peace and understanding in accordance with God's will]. Historically interpreted as: blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the children of God. Every negative turns to a positive.

Jesus tells us about the Kingdom of God of which John writes in Revelation. But more than that – He shows us how to live as part of it - in the here and now.

Amen.

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Sovereign God, reminded of the wider fellowship that we share in Christ, the great company of Your people in heaven and on earth to which we are privileged to belong, so now we pray for those who seek, in turn, to follow you today.

We pray for those for whom commitment is costly - those who face hostility, discrimination, repression and persecution for the cause of the gospel. Give them strength and courage, so that they may keep the faith.

We pray for those who are finding the journey of discipleship difficult - troubled by doubts, plagued by temptation, or simply slipping back into old ways. Give them support and reassurance, so that they may walk with new confidence.

We pray for those expressing their faith in action - individuals through personal acts of kindness, and agencies like Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund and Shelter, together with so many others, working, often against the odds, to give expression to the love of Christ. Give them love and compassion, so that they may make Christ real for others.

We pray for all seeking to communicate their faith – ministers, evangelists, missionaries, chaplains, but also ordinary, everyday believers like us - each telling in their own way what Jesus means to them. Give them wisdom and inspiration, so that they may speak Your word with power.

Sovereign God, we pray for Christians everywhere striving to live out their faith today, with all its pressures, challenges and demands that confront them. Give them guidance and encouragement, so that they may grow in grace. Grant them humility to learn more of You each day and the ability to share their experience simply and effectively with others, making Christ known through word and deed.

Amen.

Hymn: I Will Sing The Wondrous Story (StF 323)

I will sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
how He left the realms of glory
for the cross on Calvary:

*Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
sing it with His Saints in glory,
gathered by the crystal sea.*

I was lost; but Jesus found me,
found the sheep that went astray,
raised me up, and gently led me
back into the narrow way:

Faint was I, and fears possessed me,
bruised was I from many a fall,
hope was gone, and shame distressed me;
but His love has pardoned all:

Days of darkness still come o'er me;
sorrow's paths I often tread;
but the Saviour still is with me,
by His hand I'm safely lead:

He will keep me till the river
rolls its waters at my feet;
then He'll bear me safely over,
where the loved ones I shall meet:

Francis Harold Rowley (1854 – 1952)

Blessing:

Creator God, You send us out to create signs of hope.
Jesus, our Saviour, You send us out to show love and compassion.
Holy Spirit, You send us out to bring peace and justice for all.
Through the grace and love You shower on us may we bring You glory wherever
we are this week. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'.

Sunday 8th November 2026 – Remembrance Sunday

This service was compiled by Rev'd Teddy Siwila

Minister:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today we remember those who gave their lives in the two World Wars and later
conflicts: members of the Armed Forces, civilians, bereaved families, and all
whose lives were changed by war.
We also remember those who bear the wounds of conflict today and all who long
for peace.
We remember not to glorify war, but to honour sacrifice, give thanks and renew
our commitment to peace.
Whether in church, at home or in a care setting, we are united in God's presence.
Let us worship the God of love, whose peace is offered to all.

Opening Hymn: For The Healing Of The Nations, (StF 696)

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action

help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan (1929–2009) Words: © 1968, Stainer & Bell Ltd,

Opening Prayer and Call to Worship

Minister:

Let us pray.

God of mercy and peace, we come before you with thankful and solemn hearts.
We remember those who gave their lives, those who returned wounded, and
those who still carry the sorrow of war.

Comfort all who grieve. Strengthen those who feel lonely or afraid. Help us never
to take peace for granted.

May our worship honour the past and renew our hope for a world at peace.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Prince of Peace.

All: Amen.

Minister: We remember those who sacrificed their lives.

All: We will remember them.

Minister: We remember those who suffer through war today.

All: Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Bible Readings:

Micah 4:3–4 – Nations will turn their weapons into tools for peace, and people will live without fear.

John 15:12–13 – Jesus calls us to love one another, even to the point of giving our lives for others.

Hymn: I, The Lord Of Sea And Sky (Here I Am, Lord) (StF 663)

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them,
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them,
Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord? ...

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord? ...

Daniel L Schutte (b. 1947)

The Act of Remembrance

Minister:

We remember all who died in war and conflict, those known to us and those whose names are unknown.

We remember those who served, civilians who suffered, families who waited, homes left empty, and lives forever changed.

We honour their sacrifice and pray that their memory will lead us to work for peace.

The Exhortation:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,

We will remember them.

All: We will remember them.

The Kohima Epitaph:

When you go home, tell them of us and say,

For your tomorrow, we gave our today.

Silence – two minutes.

The Last Post and Reveille may be included if appropriate.

Short reflection: Remembering with love and hope

Dear friends, some of us remember loved ones who served in war: a parent, sibling, spouse or friend who never returned. Others carry childhood memories shaped by fear, loss or uncertainty.

For some, these memories remain close; for others, they belong to an earlier generation.

Yet remembrance is not only about the past. It asks what God calls us to do today.

Micah promises a day when nations will turn weapons into tools for growing food and people will live without fear.

This is God's vision of peace.

Jesus teaches that the greatest love is self-giving. We see it in those who sacrificed their lives, cared for the wounded and served their neighbours.

We see it today when Christians visit those who live alone, neighbours show kindness, friends listen to the grieving, and people choose forgiveness over hatred.

As we grow older, our opportunities to serve may change. We may travel less, join fewer activities or spend more time at home. Yet we are never too old, frail or housebound to pray, love or bring peace to another person.

A telephone call, a word of encouragement, a prayer for a troubled family, or a welcome to someone who feels forgotten can be an act of peace.

Today we remember those who gave their tomorrow for our today. We honour them by using the days God gives us to love one another.

May the Lord comfort those who grieve, give hope to those who are afraid, and make us peacemakers wherever we are.

Amen.

Hymn: Beauty For Brokenness (StF 693)

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord in Your suffering world this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset, Your Kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
work for all people, trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.

*God of the poor, friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray,
melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, His Cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,
plundered and poisoned - our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
make us content with the things that we need.

Refrain

Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
until Your justice burns brightly again;
until the nations learn of Your ways,
seek Your salvation and bring You their praise.

Refrain

Prayers of Intercession

Minister:

Let us pray.

God of peace, we pray for nations torn by war. Protect children, comfort families, and give wisdom to all who seek an end to violence.

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

We pray for veterans, former service personnel and all who bear the wounds of conflict. Grant them healing, companionship and understanding.

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

We remember the bereaved, the lonely, and all whose memories bring sorrow. May they know your loving presence.

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

We pray for our churches and communities. Help us care for one another, especially those who are housebound, frail or unable to worship with us.

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

May our homes, churches and world become places of kindness, reconciliation and peace.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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.

All: Amen.

Closing Hymn: Make Me A Channel Of Your Peace (StF707)

Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;

where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;

and where there's doubt, true faith in you:

*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
where there is darkness, only light;
and where there's sadness, ever joy:
Refrain

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving unto all that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Sebastian Temple (1928–1997)

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

Minister:

God of love, as this service ends, keep those we have remembered in our hearts.
Comfort the grieving, strengthen the weary, accompany the lonely, and give
hope to all who long for peace.

Whether we go out or remain at home, help us share your love through prayer,
words and actions.

May the peace of Christ be with us, the love of God surrounds us, and the Holy
Spirit guide us.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remain with
us always.

All: Amen.

Minister: Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

All: In the name of Christ. Amen.

Sunday 15th November 2026 – 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Richard Parkes

Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.

May you find it to be a time of blessing.

A Call To Worship:

His name is Almighty and he is Lord

His name is Creator and he makes all things new.

His name is sustainer and he holds us in the palm of his hand.
His name is the Saviour and he died in our place.
His name is Forgiveness and he can be trusted to heal and to bless.
His name is Holy and he is the one we worship.
He is worthy to receive all we have and all we are.
Now and forevermore. Amen

Hymn: Lord of the Boundless Curves of Space (StF 111). This hymn takes seriously modern scientific insights, and combine them with a deep faith in God the creator. ord of the boundless curves of space,
and time's deep mystery;
to your creative might we trace
all nature's energy.

Your mind conceived the galaxy,
each atom's secret planned;
and every age of history
your purpose, Lord, has spanned.

Your Spirit gave the living cell
its hidden vital force;
the instincts which all life impel
derive from you, their source.

You gave a growing consciousness,
first sown when time began
with all our longing to progress,
discover, shape and plan.

In Christ the living power of grace
to liberate and lead
lights up the future of our race
with mercy's crowning deed.

Lead us, whom love has made and sought,
to find, when planets fall,
That Omega of life and thought
where Christ is all in all.

Albert Frederic Bayley (1901-1984) and Brian Wren (b1936)

A Prayer of Praise:

God of purity and promise,
for your living legacy of creation, in all its beauty,

in all its diversity, in all its colour,

we worship you.

Lord Jesus, for your living legacy of hope, for your life,
your sacrifice, your courage and resurrection,

we worship you.

Holy Spirit, for your living legacy of power,
of promise, of presence,

we worship you.

Blessed Trinity,
as your people in this place, in this moment,

we worship you. Amen.

A Prayer of Confession.

What strange people we are! We are very selective in our praise of your creation. We praise you for purple heathered mountains, for autumn colours and gentle rain. We praise you for the animals we like.

But where are our words of praise when the afternoon is cold and damp and the rain is just a weak drizzle? When the golden leaves turn to a grey much on the pavements? All is your creation - the earwigs and the slimy slugs. And even wasps. All have their part and their place, and we should celebrate them all.

Forgive us, for we have lost our sense of place within your creation. We think we are the masters of creation, but we do not understand your gift to us. Forgive us, for we look to find what we can take, and have forgotten that we must give back. Forgive us, for we have restricted our faith to our inner life only. We try to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength but we forget to love our neighbour as ourselves. And we forget to ask, who our neighbour is. Forgive us, and reclothe us in our rightful mind. Amen.

Hymn: All Creatures Of Our God And King (StF 99)

All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing,
alleluia, alleluia !

O burning sun with golden beam,
and silver moon with softer gleam :

*O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia !*

O rushing wind that is so strong,
and clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, alleluia !

O rising morn, in praise rejoice ;
and lights of evening, find a voice :

O flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for your Lord to hear,
sing 'Praise him, alleluia !'
O fire, so masterful and bright,
giving to all both warmth and light :

Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfolds rich blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia !
The flowers and fruits that bloom and grow,
let them his glory also show :

And all who are of tender heart
forgiving others, take your part,
sing, 'Praise him, alleluia !'
All who long pain and sorrow bear,
praise God, and on him cast your care :

And now, most kind and gentle death,
waiting to hush our fading breath,
O praise him, alleluia !
You homeward lead the child of God,
and Christ the Lord the way has trod :

Let all things their creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness ;
O praise him, alleluia !
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One :

St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)

Translated by William Henry Draper (1855-1933)

In the last sheet I prepared, I said that we would be looking at the Apostles creed over the next few months (with occasional breaks for Advent and Easter). So here it is again:

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic and apostolic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Today, I want to concentrate on God the creator. The readings will reflect that.

Reading: Psalm 8

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

² Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals^a that you care for them?

⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God,^b
and crowned them with glory and honour.

⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,

⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹ O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Reading: Genesis 2:7-9

...then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Reading: Job 38:1-7 (Job has suffered a great deal, both physically and spiritually. His suffering is unjust, and he demands an audience with God. This is the start of God's reply to Job's complaints)

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

² 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

³ Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

⁴ 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵ Who determined its measurements — surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶ On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone

⁷ when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Reading: Colossians 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God

was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Hymn: There is a book that all may read,

Which heavenly truth imparts;
And all the lore its scholars need,
And all the lore its scholars need,
Pure eyes and Christian hearts.

The works of God above, below,
Within us, and around,
Are pages in that book, to show
How God himself is found.

The glorious sky, embracing all,
Is like the Maker's love,
Wherewith encompassed, great and small,
In peace and order move.

The dew of heaven is like thy grace,
It steals in silence down;
But where it falls, the favored place
By richest fruits is known.

Thou who has given me eyes to see,
And love for what is fair,
Give me a heart to find out thee,
And read thee everywhere.

John Keble (1792-1866)

To Ponder:

God is the creator, because God is love. Though, how we have related to creation has changed over the centuries. Practically, if you were a medieval peasant (as I suspect most of our ancestors were), creation was really just your village and maybe a couple of villages round about. Your nearest city might be, say, Lichfield – but you'd never go there. The earth was at the centre of creation. Your place in the world was well known and understood. You knew your place. Nicolai Copernicus proved that the earth was not the centre of the universe, the sun was. The earth goes round the sun, and not the other way round! Galileo knew this, but the church was reluctant to accept this as it meant humanity was not at the heart of things.

We've moved on since then. The sun isn't at the centre of the universe; it is a smallish star on the outer edge of a medium sized galaxy. There are billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars. The universe is far bigger than our imagination can cope with. Voyager 1 launched in 1977, almost 50 years ago. It is now about one light-day away from earth (in other words, it takes radio signals, which travel at the speed of light, one day to reach earth). The nearest star is four and a half light years away. It would take Voyager 1 over 80,000 years to get there 9if it was going in that direction, which it isn't). That's our nearest star. Of billions. 'What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?'

My first response is wonder at the sheer beauty and variety of it all. And the immensity. When Voyager 1 had been travelling for about 25 years, Carl Sagan, the man in charge of Voyager 1, turned the probe around and took this photograph of our Solar System from deep space. It shows the sun and planet earth barely visible from the space probe. The Sun isn't in this version of the picture, called the pale blue dot.

There is no planet B.



Earth is in this picture, believe it or not. It is the tiny white dot in the narrow purplish band on the right of the picture. No, it's not a mark on your screen, it's planet earth. Our home.

So, wonder is a proper response when we look at creation. Carl Sagan, a broad-minded atheist, was moved to wonder. But, for Christians, wonder leads to praise.

Another photograph.



This is called 'earthrise'. It was taken by Bill Anders, an astronaut on Apollo 8, on Christmas eve 1968. He said, "We set out to explore the moon and instead discovered the Earth." It had a major effect on the environmental movement, which is the next point I want to make.

I believe that part of our responsibility as Christians is to care for the planet.

I am glad that many churches, including some on this Circuit, have joined the Eco Church movement. You can find out more about it from this link:

<https://arocha.org.uk/>

Being 'green' can involve some initial expense. I have solar panels on my home, but they were not cheap – I was lucky to be in a position to afford the initial outlay. But trying to be environmentally friendly should be hard wired into our discipleship. There are various websites that can help us to live in a greener way. But, do it joyfully!

In Colossians, Paul has a vision of the Word being involved in creation, and holding all things together. Yet we have a sense of things falling apart. So let's go back to the first point. This is a creation, not just a 'thing'. It was created out of love, sustained by the Word. Let us celebrate it and live gently. To the glory of God. Amen.

Hymn: God In His Love For Us Lent Us This Planet (StF 727)

God in his love for us lent us this planet,
gave it a purpose in time and in space:
small as a spark from the fire of creation,
cradle of life and the home of our race.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,
life that sustains us in body and mind:
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,
riches undreamed-of to fathom and find.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have need of,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
Ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
good Lord deliver us, world without end!

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Prayers for the church, the world and people.

Gracious, creating God, we pray that humanity may rediscover a sense of wonder at the intricacy and beauty of your creation. May we rediscover a sense of balance that we may only take out what we can replace. May we rediscover a sense that this is your gift.

May the love of Christ **bring healing and hope**

We pray for world leaders, that they may have the courage and wisdom to work for the good of all people, and to work with creation rather than seek to exploit it.

May the love of Christ **bring healing and hope**

We pray for our churches. In a world where many people worry about the future, may we speak words of hope, words that bring people to the Word made human. May we live faithfully and joyfully.

May the love of Christ **bring healing and hope**

We pray for ourselves, and our families and friends. We bring them to you.

Spend a few moments in quiet, as you bring those you love to the Lord of love.

May the love of Christ **bring healing and hope**

Almighty God,

you sent your Son Jesus Christ

to be the light of the world.

Free us from all that darkens and ensnares us,

And bring us to eternal light and joy;

Through the power of him

Who is alive and reigns with you,

In the unity of the Holy Spirit,

One God, now and forever. **Amen**

In the name of our Lord and Saviour we pray:

Contemporary

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.

A Modern Worship Song, Focusing On Creation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJy2Pk5ewSI>

Lord of all creation
Of water, earth and sky,
The heavens are Your tabernacle;
Glory to the Lord on high.

God of wonders beyond our galaxy,
You are holy, holy!
The universe declares Your majesty;
You are holy, holy!
Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of heaven and earth.

Early in the morning,
I will celebrate the light.
When I stumble in the darkness,
I will call Your name by night.

God of wonders beyond our galaxy,
You are holy, holy!
The universe declares Your majesty;
You are holy, holy!
Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of heaven and earth.

Hallelujah to the Lord of heaven and earth
Hallelujah to the Lord of heaven and earth
Hallelujah to the Lord of heaven and earth

God of wonders beyond our galaxy,
You are holy, holy!
Precious Lord reveal Your heart to me;
Father holy, holy!
God of wonders beyond our galaxy,
You are holy, holy!
The universe declares Your majesty;
You are holy, holy!
Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of heaven and earth.
Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of heaven and earth.

Blessing:

God has glorified his name. He has glorified it and he will glorify it again.
He will glorify his name in us as he has already in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Sunday 22nd November 2026 – Sunday Before Advent

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call To Worship:

Lord, we come to praise you, to bring our lives as an offering. We bow down in worship, giving you everything we have. Help us to learn from your wisdom and power today. **Amen.**

Hymn: Crown Him with many crowns (verses 1,3,5) (StF 347)

Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless king
through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save;
his glories now we sing
who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of years,
the potentate of time,
creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.

Opening Prayers:

Faithful King above all kings, **we worship and adore you.**

Christ the King, **we worship and adore you.**

Servant King, **we worship and adore you.**

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, **we worship and adore you.**

Servant King, forgive us, we pray, for those times: when we failed to feed those hungry for food or hungry for companionship; when we failed to quench the thirst of those needing water or knowledge; when we ignored the needs of those we don't know; when we left people naked for clothing or shelter; when we flinched from helping the sick in body, mind or soul; when we failed to help people to turn their lives around. Servant King, forgive us, we pray, and let us be a servant to those who need to be served. **Amen.**

Hymn: From heaven you came 'The Servant King (verses 1&4) (StF 272)

From heaven You came, helpless Babe
Entered our world, Your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live

*This is our God, the Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King*

So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone Him;
Each other's needs to prefer
For it is Christ we're serving

Ezekiel 34:11-16 & 20-24 - New International Version:

¹¹ “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

²⁰ “Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, ²² I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will

judge between one sheep and another. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.

Reflection:

The time of the judges comes to an end when God responds to Israel's demand to be like other nations and have a king.

After a disastrous first king (Saul), the former shepherd-boy David becomes king and leads the nation in keeping the covenant with God. His reign is ever after remembered as being Israel's heyday. David's son, Solomon, also has a successful reign, during which he builds the Temple in Jerusalem, which becomes the place where God dwells with God's people, the focus for worship. After Solomon, however, the nation cannot agree on a new king, and so divides into two. The northern kingdom moves further and further from covenant living and is eventually taken over by Assyria. The southern kingdom does a little better, repeating the cycle of 'fall away – repent – restore'. But by Ezekiel's time it, too, is heading for disaster by way of the fall of Jerusalem and the nation's exile into Babylon.

Ezekiel is a priest-prophet at this time. His early chapters declare the inevitability of the coming exile because the nation will not turn back to God; the later chapters (from which this reading comes) take place in Babylon after the nation has fallen and focus on the hope of a coming restoration. In this chapter, God is portrayed as the true shepherd of Israel who will rescue the people of God (the 'sheep') from the false shepherds, will care for them as a good shepherd cares for his flock, will provide them with a new 'David' – someone from the line of David who will be the next true shepherd-king – and will restore the covenant with them. The shepherd-king's power is used to seek and rescue, to protect and provide, to bring healing and justice, to lead them in keeping the covenant.

How are you keeping to the covenant you made with the shepherd -King in our covenant Service?

Hymn: The Lord's my Shepherd (StF 481)

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,*

*For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Intercessions:

Dear Lord, we plead for your world. Your heart must break at what you see today; lands ravaged by war, torn apart by evil actions. We pray against dark intentions and hardened hearts.

We pray for governments the world over. Many speak promises yet their actions are corrupted by the lust for power and greed. We pray for stability within our own government and the fulfilment of promises made. May all in parliament look to serve the people and not their own importance.

We pray for all who are suffering; the lonely, the sick, the abused. We pray for the NHS, for community nursing and for all those whose health is deteriorating as a result of lengthy waiting lists. We pray for those suffering mental health issues who are struggling to find help due to lack of resources. Help those in turmoil to find their way to you. Bring into their lives people who will walk with them in the dark times and accompany them to greener pastures.

Dear Lord, king of glory, pour out your loving mercy and grace we pray. Amen.

Hymn: Hear the call of the Kingdom (StF 407)

Hear the call of the kingdom, lift your eyes to the King,
Let His song rise within you as a fragrant offering,
Of how God, rich in mercy, came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the Kingdom to be children of light,
With the mercy of heaven, the humility of Christ.
Walking justly before Him, loving all that is right
That the life of Christ may shine through Him.

*King of Heaven, we will answer the call,
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,*

*Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name.*

Hear the call of the Kingdom to reach out to the lost,
With the Father's compassion in the wonder of the cross,
Bringing peace and forgiveness, and a hope yet to come;
Let the nations put their trust in Him.

Blessing:

Christ the King: where we have power, help us to use it wisely; where we see power imbalances, show us how to help; where people have little or no power, strengthen them. Remind us always that you are the King, but the King who leads as a shepherd. Help us to follow you, our one true shepherd, in caring for the world around us. **Amen.**

Sunday 29th November 2026 – 1st Sunday of Advent

This service was compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

‘Be prepared,’ says the Boy Scouts’ motto, and that, in a nutshell, is also the message at the heart of Advent. But be prepared for what? Despite what the hustle and bustle associated with this time of year may tell us, these few weeks are not just about getting ready for Christmas - writing cards, buying presents, stocking up with food, hanging decorations. Rather, they’re about ensuring we're ready to meet Jesus should He come again, to honour Him in our hearts and serve Him with our lives, to hear His call and glimpse His presence in the world around us. Whoever we are, none of us are as ready as we like to think. Advent offers us the opportunity to take stock, to reflect, and to respond.

Call to Worship:

God of our waiting, when all around us is busy
and forever changing, You call us to stop.
Help us to watch and wait with You as we prepare for the birth
of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn: There's a Light Upon the Mountain (StF 188)

There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring,
when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King;
weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed so long;
but His triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air;
and the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer;
for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit is the travail of His own.

He is breaking down the barriers, He is casting up the way;
He is calling for His angels to build up the gates of day:
but His angels here are human, not the shining hosts above;
for the drum-beats of His army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark! We hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell;
tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our King, Immanuel:
Zion, go now forth to meet Him; and, my soul, be swift to bring
all your finest and your noblest for the triumph of our King!

Henry Burton (1840 – 1930)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Sovereign God, give us a proper sense of awe before You,
of reverence, respect and humility.

Remind us that You are the beginning and end of all,
the Creator of the ends of the earth and giver of life and meaning.

Help us to remember that You took on flesh, coming among us in Christ and
identifying Yourself with humankind,

and that You did so not to condemn and punish but to express the immensity of
Your love.

Gratefully, we celebrate Your grace, through which we worship and serve You,
assured of Your unfailing goodness and mercy.

Speak again in this Advent season of Your redeeming love,
Your desire to forgive, restore and renew.

Speak of the unfolding of Your purpose through the Law and prophets,
gloriously fulfilled in the birth of your Son
and His living, dying and resurrection.

Speak of His coming again to establish Your Kingdom,
to rule on earth and in heaven,
and to raise us to newness of life lived forever with You.

Prepare our hearts to listen, to learn, to reflect, to respond,
and so may this time draw us closer to You,
by Christ's grace deepening our faith and strengthening our commitment.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Almighty God, we hesitate, and we miss opportunities.

Too often, we neglect the signs of need and want
in the world around us.

So often we chase the wrong dreams,
looking to satisfy our needs without You.

In this Advent season, help us to centre our focus on You,
rejoicing in Your mercy, so that we look only to You.

The Lord God Almighty is indeed a merciful God
and has heard our confession, forgiven our sins
and shows us love and grace.

We are blessed, and we are forgiven. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the modern form of 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.

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**

The link between our readings today:

While the Old Testament focuses on the need to recognise who God is and therefore repent and return to God, the New Testament reading focuses on standing firm until Jesus returns. We have the lessons of history, the signs for which to watch, and the gifts we need to sustain us.

Our task is to keep our attention on these things. Traditionally, Advent anticipates Jesus' return and so these readings provide our annual reminder of this, and of all the resources on which we can draw to support us in that task.

Reading: Isaiah chapter 64 vs. 1 - 9

Introduction:

Sometimes known as the 'fifth Gospel', the book of Isaiah had a huge influence on some of the New Testament writers, who drew on its imagery and promises of restoration.

The book covers different time periods, with the earlier chapters trying to make sense of successive crises as the nation repeatedly breaks the Covenant. The later chapters are set during the Babylonian exile (see last week). They offer comfort to an exiled people and confront those who still have no mind to return to God's Covenant, looking ahead to when God will allow them to return to their homeland, rebuild the Temple and re-establish the Covenant with them. Chapter 63 reminds the people of God of their exodus from Egypt before, from verse 15 and on into today's reading, asking God to act again on their behalf and recognising their need to turn back to God (Isaiah 64:5-7). The final verses (64:8-9) epitomise that recognition: the relationship between God and God's people is one of potter and clay, and 'we are all your people'.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before You!

² As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make Your name known to Your enemies and cause the nations to quake before You!

³ For when You did awesome things that we did not expect, You came down, and the mountains trembled before You.

⁴ Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.

⁵ You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember Your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, You were angry. How then can we be saved?

⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

⁷ No one calls on Your name or strives to lay hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.

⁸ Yet, O Lord You are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand.

⁹ Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look upon us, we pray, for we are all Your people.

Hymn: Great is the Darkness (StF 405)

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.

*Chorus: 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.*

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

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

Gerald Coates (b. 1944) & Noel Richards b. 1955]

Reading: Mark chapter 13 vs. 24 - 37

Introduction:

Jesus tells the disciples to keep alert for the coming of God. He encourages them to read the signs of the times. But no one knows the day or the hour, so they are to keep awake at all times.

At the beginning of Advent, we consider how we can wait and watch well, ready and alert to what God is doing and patient for what is to come.

²⁴ "But in those days, following that distress, " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

²⁶ "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ "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. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰ I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³² "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert. You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his

servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ "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. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' "

Reflection: 'READY OR NOT, HERE I COME'

Today sees the beginning of the season of Advent which leads us through the four weeks to the celebration of Christ's birth. For many people, it's that manic time of gift shopping, card writing, baking, decorating, putting up trees - all for that perfect Christmas that TV adverts promise. But is that really a reality? Increasingly these next weeks leave so many people feeling emotionally, financially and physically bankrupt. For people going through dark times - Christmas brings its own nightmares - so far from what God ever intended. So Advent is a time to just stop and pause and reflect on what God's planning. Our readings remind us that creation is the heart of God and He is still very much involved - not just in the here and now but also in the future, and we need to continue to trust in His promises and be for prepared.

So let's have a look at what Isaiah is reminding us:

The Guinness Book of World Records keeps track of some very unusual events. In 1999, it contained an entry entitled 'the longest time living in a tree'. A man living in Indonesia named Bunkas went up a tree in 1970 and has been there ever since! He lives in a crude treehouse he made from branches and leaves. No one knows why but 29 years later he was still there. Family and friends have repeatedly tried to coax him down to no avail.

Strange, but true - and a reminder of what Isaiah is saying in our reading: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down..." " Isaiah's desperate plea was the result of a great feeling of helplessness (a feeling that so many people are going through today). Two issues were troubling Isaiah - the suffering and sinfulness of God's people - and again the same is true today. On one hand, the Jewish people believed themselves to be a chosen people in a special relationship with God. On the other hand, there were times when God seemed very far away from them. As we look at the world today - many people ask 'why doesn't God do something just straighten out the mess, end war, starvation, oppression?' Isaiah was the most sensitive of all the prophets of Israel, and deeply felt the suffering of his people, but just as troubling was the sinfulness of his people, and it is a matter for heartfelt prayer. More than any other faith, the Jews we're called to be a people who would witness to God's Law - this was their mission. They had believed that from the beginning God created human life to

live in perfect harmony with creation and its Creator, but things were amiss in the very heart of humanity. Human beings were alienated from the environment, their fellow human-beings and their loving God, and that something was humanity's sinful nature. Could you say the same thing about life today. Does anything really change?

Isaiah saw that's Israel would never save itself from the direction into which it was drifting. Their only hope was that God would come down and bring healing to His people. Isaiah knew that only God could remove the flaw of sin from fragile humanity. And in God's timing, that's exactly what He did. God has come down from beyond time and space, down past the galaxies, in an event that surpasses our greatest dreams. God has come down in a little obscure town outside Jerusalem, in a lowly stable. He came as a tiny baby born to a humble couple from a backward village called Nazareth. That which Isaiah prayed for happened. God has come down in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the answer to humanity's suffering and sin, but the world has yet to receive Him. What he offers us is Himself. We want hope. Jesus is hope. We want peace. Jesus is peace. We want love. Jesus is love. The problem is that humanity wants to achieve a world without suffering and sin but does not want to offer open hearts and minds so that He might begin His healing and reconciling work through humanity. There is no other way. Without Him, there is no hope, no peace, no love. Isaiah prayed and his prayer was answered - even to those who chose to dismiss him.

So that brings us to our reading from Mark.

Do you remember as a child playing 'Hide and Seek'? Do you remember the person who was 'it' closing their eyes and counting up to 100 while the rest went to hide. Then they would say: "Ready or not, here I come." The secret of the game was being prepared to be found and caught.

Let's be honest, a first reading of Mark doesn't paint a pretty picture: no sun, moon, stars, earth shaken, before the Son of Man comes with great power and glory, seeking people who are prepared to be found and caught. But when? Jesus doesn't know, the angels in heaven don't, but God does. So what do we need to do? Keep alert - be prepared.

So are we talking about the same festival? The commercial Christmas - the spirit of peace and goodwill? Well the answer is 'no'. The difference comes from what we are preparing for. The secular world measures this time of preparation by the number of shopping days until December the 25th. The Church measures this time of preparation in terms of the number of days remaining until the time when Jesus will return in glory and power.

I wonder if that changes your personal expectations about celebrating Christmas? There's nothing wrong with the cards, presents, tree, decorations, baking, parties and gifts, and if that's your family tradition, could you perhaps think of an extra gift for your local Foodbank? That would be so appreciated, or maybe you know someone who lives alone - a neighbour or maybe someone in your Church. Could you perhaps offer a card and a small gift to show them they matter and are remembered and most importantly, loved? But the theme of this first Sunday in Advent is to focus our attention on the real meaning of Christmas when we need to celebrate that the birth of Jesus was important to our ancestors because Jesus is coming back again. So let's recapture the sense of eager anticipation – 'when' and 'how' are not important - just our readiness. Let's listen to God calling us to look beyond 'today and tomorrow' to the time when His Kingdom will be known in all its fullness. Even many devoted Christians have seen this as a time of 'doom and gloom' - no wonder it has become lost in our preparations.

Let's keep two things in mind: The early Christians looked forward to the return of Jesus. They were frightened by it – because they expected it to happen in their lifetime. Secondly, those who claim His return will be terrifying are misinterpreting Jesus' words. Jesus was saying that God's final Kingdom will come with such power that the forces of evil will be toppled - something I'm sure we all hope for.

So, what does all this have to do with our daily lives? What we believe and feel about the future determines what we feel and do about the present. It's so easy to feel we are caught up in a treadmill seemingly going nowhere. When we look from the viewpoint of eternity, life is moving us steadily towards God's Kingdom. Remember God measures time differently than we do. What seems to us like an 'eternity' is to God just a 'split second' - more magnificent than we can ever imagine. Regardless of how fearful the 'doom and gloom' of today is, the return of Christ will bring it to a permanent end. Remember: one can never start too early to get ready for something big!

However you prepare in this season of Advent, remember you are held in love by the Christ who heralded the first Christmas. So in hope we continue to pray – 'your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

Hymn: Sing We the King (StF 185)

Sing we the King who is coming to reign,
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation His empire shall bring,
joy to the nations, when Jesus is King:

*Chorus: Come let us sing: praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

All shall be well in His Kingdom of peace;
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
justice and truth from His sceptre shall spring;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
doubt shall not darken His witness within;
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
love is victorious when Jesus is King

Kingdom of Christ, for Your coming we pray;
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
when this new song Your creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King

Charles Silvester Horne (1865–1914)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Lord Jesus Christ,
We remember today so many have looked forward to Your coming,
and to remember also how it became harder to keep faith as the years went by;
how hope started to splatter and dreams began to die
until, finally You came –
the fulfilment of prophecy,
the culmination of God's purpose,
the definitive expression of His love.

Lord of all, the Word made flesh,
bring hope to Your world today.

We remember with gladness how You brought hope throughout Your ministry,
a sense of purpose to those for whom life seemed pointless –
the poor, sick, outcasts and broken hearted –
light shining in the darkness,
joy breaking into their sorrow,
new beginnings in what had seemed like the end.

Lord of all, the Word made flesh,
bring hope to Your world today.

Hear now our prayer for those caught today in the grip of despair –
those for whom the future seems bleak,
optimism seems foolish
and trust seems futile.
Reach out in love, and may light shine into their darkness.

Lord of all, the Word made flesh,
bring hope to your World today.

Hear our prayer for those whose goals in life have not become a reality,
whose dreams have been shattered,
who have grown weary, cynical and disillusioned.
Reach out in love,
and rekindle their faith in the future.

Lord of all, the Word made flesh,
bring hope to Your world today.

Hear our prayer for those who mourn,
who wrestle with illness,
or who watch loved ones suffer.
Reach out in love,
and grant them Your strength and comfort.

Lord of all, the Word made flesh,
bring hope to Your world today.

Hear our prayer for those whose lives are blighted by injustice,
crushed by oppression, poverty, hunger,
and encourage all who work against the odds to build a better world.
Reach out in love,
and grant the assurance of Your coming Kingdom.

Lord of all, the Word made flesh,
bring hope to Your world today.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we remember Your promise to come again in glory,
the culmination of God's purpose,
the ultimate victory of love.
May that conviction bring new faith,
new vision,
and new purpose wherever life seems hopeless.

Lord of all, the Word made flesh,

bring hope to Your world today. **Amen.**

Hymn: Lo, He Comes With Clouds Descending (StF 177)

Lo, He comes with clouds descending,
once for favoured sinners slain;
thousand thousand Saints attending
Swell the triumph of His train:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
God appears on earth to reign.

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, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see.

Those dear tokens of His passion
Still His dazzling body bears;
cause of endless exultation
to His ransomed worshippers:
with what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture
gaze we on those glorious scars.

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, come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
everlasting God, come down!

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Blessing:

As we wait in hope, may we be ready to receive Your peace and love through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as Your Spirit prepares our minds, hearts and souls to get ready for 'something big'. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches' and Neil Fawcett

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