

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of November 2025

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Sunday 2nd November 2025 – 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.

May you find it to be a time of blessing.

Call to Worship:

Lord Almighty, the One who calls us, challenges and changes us,
we come to worship, to read Scripture,
to sing hymns of faith and glory
and to offer prayers for ourselves and for others.
We come to learn, to understand and to celebrate You at work in all
creation. **Amen.**

Hymn: All My Days (StF 343)

All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
Give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
For in my helplessness You heard my cry,
And waves of mercy pour down on my life.

I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
All my days, that never fails;
Of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
Of death defeated and life without end.

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
You're the Way, the Truth, the Life.
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,
You're the Risen One, heaven's Champion
And You reign, You reign over all.*

I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
Yearn to dwell where the glory never fades;
Where countless worshippers will share one song,
And cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!

Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor...

Stuart Townend (b. 1963 c. 1998 Thankyou Music)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Living, loving God, we take this time, away from the relentless pace of life: To turn to You in worship. As we pause for a moment, help us to turn away from the everyday stresses, frustrations and endless to-do lists. Help us to be present with You, and to take this time to sit in Your presence Lord, and just breathe, just be.

We all have our roles to play, as parents, children, friends, neighbours, colleagues, leaders or companions, but in this moment, we are simply Your children, loved for who we are, just as we are. May each of us gathering here today feel that, and know something of what it means, simply to be loved.

In this moment, we find peace and strength, we find the comfort and love we need, in exactly the way we need it. Your love meets us where we are, calls our name and speaks a language we understand.

Lord, in this moment:

Hold us, accept us, inspire us, guide us, fill us up, renew us, challenge us and strengthen us. May we be set free by Your grace – this and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Lord God, when we are troubled by our failings and mistakes, our consciences are troubled and we fret and worry.

Forgive us for failing to see You at work.

Thank You that You are there to hear us as we admit our mistakes and failings,

our weaknesses and regrets,
to dry our tears and lighten our burdens;
O God, You hear me and forgive me.

Our God and Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
have heard our confession,
and answered our needs for forgiveness.
So, we may go in peace. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen

Reading: Luke chapter 19 vs. 1-10 NSRV

Introduction:

After last week's fictional tax-collector, here is a real one in Zacchaeus, Jericho's chief tax-collector. Managing the collection of this prosperous city's taxes would give him ample opportunity to line his own pockets at the expense of others – hence his unpopularity. The little man plots Jesus' route through the city and finds a tree that provides a good view of its visitor, while keeping himself safe from the feisty crowd. But it is Jesus who finds this lost son of Abraham (vv.9-10). He spots him in the tree and even knows his name; such is the strength of His reputation.

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' "

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Hymn: And Can It Be (StF 345)

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?

In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above –
so free, so infinite His grace –
emptied Himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free:
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night:
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the internal throne
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Reading: 2Thessalonians chapter 1 vs. 1-4, 11 - 12 NRSV

Introduction:

The letter begins with a typical greeting. The apostle [Paul] identifies his co-authors and partners in the gospel and locates his audience - not simply in their home city but in the very life of God. 'Grace' and 'peace' are favourite Pauline terms – the first a summary of the loving generosity of God, and the second of God's desire for harmony and reconciliation in creation. Both flow from the gospel that reveals 'God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ', mentioned twice in the opening verses. There is much to be thankful for in Churches whose faith and love are flourishing in the face of (unspecified) opposition and suffering. Not only does Paul give

thanks to God, he also shares his pride in the Thessalonians' faithfulness with other churches (v.4). Their example is good reason for celebrating the love of God at work through the gospel (see 2:16).

Such a positive opening puts the letter's audience in a good frame of mind, so that they can receive the challenges that are the main reason for writing. For now, Paul's prayer reminds them of their high calling to maintain their loyalty to God in the face of all that would undermine it (vv.11-12). This is not something they do in their own strength: notice the prayer's dependence on God's power and grace, which more than match the Thessalonians' resolve and faith.

¹ Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

² Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. ⁴ Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

¹¹ With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfil every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. ¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection:

When you were a child, I wonder if you learned this popular song at Sunday school or school about Zacchaeus?

Now Zacchaeus was a very little man, and a very little man was he.
He climbed up to the sycamore tree for the Saviour he wanted to see,
For the Saviour he wanted to see.

Now when the Saviour passed that way He looked into the tree and said:
"Now Zacchaeus you come down for I'm coming to your house for tea,
For I'm coming to your house for tea."

I wonder what picture of Zacchaeus that conjures up in your mind? We're told he was not very tall – perhaps he was at the back of the crowd and

couldn't see. Perhaps the crowd was determined to push him to the back because he didn't deserve to see. Perhaps the tree was really a smokescreen where he could hide from events and watch them unfold. Perhaps he felt he didn't deserve to be there. Perhaps curiosity got the better of him. We just don't know, but Luke is quite specific that Zacchaeus found a vantage point by climbing the sycamore tree. Should that make us feel sorry for him - almost missing out on such an important occasion?

Well - what do we know about Zaccheus? Although a Jew, he worked for the Roman government collecting their taxes, most notably a “chief” tax collector, responsible for a group of other collectors. His income came from adding a percentage to the monies due to Caesar to keep for himself plus a percentage from those serving under him. He was a very rich man, but a man who was hated and despised - no wonder he wanted to keep out of sight!

Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem was nearing its end as, with His disciples, they cross the Jordan and enter Jericho - a place of deep social division where the issue of salvation for the rich was a big issue that Jesus was keen to address. It brought to a climax Jesus' willingness to mix with “tax collectors and sinners” in order to bring them His message of salvation. This was definitely a “no go” for the Pharisees and unpopular with the people. Jericho was an affluent settlement, recently elaborately expanded by Herod. Its warm winter climate made it a popular place for leading citizens of Jerusalem to have a second home.

A large luxuriant fruiting tree was a good place to hide for someone who felt safer out of the public eye. Did Jesus see him climb the tree? Doubtful, due to the large crowds. Yet, he caught Jesus' eye - and even more incredibly Jesus calls him by name and invites Himself to tea at his home. For Jesus to do this was even a more blatant, social outrage than His acceptance of Levi's hospitality in Luke chapter 5 vs. 29 – 30 and also a slight on the more prominent worthy citizens who would have welcomed Him. For Jesus, this wasn't about social niceties, He recognised in this powerful but despised man someone who was “lost” needing to be “found”. His encounter with Jesus evoked a remarkable change in Zacchaeus. He expressed a fundamental change of heart and a

determination to avoid unjust exploitation of the poor in the future. His immediate response was to pay back with interest that which was unjustly taken.

This story is a reminder again that all people can be encompassed by the accepting, saving love of God. It is never too late to change. Whatever circumstances have led us to be less than the person God calls us to be can be turned around as it was for Zacchaeus. The story invites us to think again about wealth, its dangers and its proper use, as we think about all peoples sharing in God's riches and blessings. Yes, Zaccheus was treated with suspicion and Jesus certainly added fuel to the Pharisees' attitude towards Him, but to seek and save the lost was the reason He came. It reminds us of John Wesley's words that 'all can be saved'.

Paul reminds us that grace and peace were not gifts reserved for a faithful few, but flowed from the love expressed in the Thessalonian Church, which is embedded in prayer and thanksgiving. Paul reminds us too that love and faith are not static. He encouraged the Church to pray continually that they may increase. This was to be a characteristic of the Church. The result of this growth was that other Churches could be encouraged – look, see how it works.

I wonder if today's readings have raised any questions for you as they have for me?

For the Church to become the body that Jesus intended, which glorifies God, what do we need to do to reach those who are outside the encompassing love of Jesus? Those who feel marginalised like Zaccheus, needing to metaphorically 'climb the tree' in the hope of remaining unseen while 'dipping a toe' in the water?

How do we express our faith to those on the 'outside' and show God to be the foundation of love and acceptance as the Thessalonians did? What can we do to encourage a fairer sharing of God's blessings to all?

We will always have far more questions than answers, but like the Thessalonian Christians, let us too centre our lives on prayer and thanksgiving and allow Him to show us the part we have to play in growing the Kingdom in the here and now. **Amen.**

Hymn: O God You Search Me (StF 728)

O God, You search me and You know me.
All my thoughts lie open to Your gaze.
When I walk or lie down You are before me:
ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising,
You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting You besiege me:
in every moment of life or death, You are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
You have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future, too.

Although Your Spirit is upon me,
still I search for shelter from Your light,
on earth there is nowhere I can escape You:
Even the darkness is radiant in Your sight.

For You created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise You,
Safe in Your hands, all creation is made new.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957) Based on Psalm 139

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Living, loving God, thank You that at the beginning of time, You breathed life into creation.

We marvel that from then until now, You have continued to live among us, rejoicing and celebrating all that You have made.

We pray that today we might notice You in creation around us, taking time to see life flourish, and worship You as our Creator God.

Generous God, there are too many ways in which we ignore how our lives limit Your creation.

For when our quick and easy choices have a lasting impact, when we consider ourselves over the needs of the others, and for when we have made bad choices – we are sorry.

May we be inspired and empowered by Your love for creation, to put life before ease, and commit to change.

Loving God, we know that changes to our climate and environment are not just a future possibility, but a present reality for so many, we hold before you those who live on the frontlines of the climate crisis, whose lives and livelihoods have been flooded by sea level rise, crops spoilt by drought, families worn down by illness. May our concern lead us towards action, knowing that You call us to better living which enables all Your people to thrive.

Transformational God, we are agents of Your change and have been called to work alongside You in the journey of renewal. Help us not to take this calling lightly, but to speak up, using our voices to be part of transformation which helps us to see that now is the time for new life within our communities and Churches, and that we can usher in your Kingdom in our lives today and draw others to You through our prayers and our actions.

Healing God, we pray for those whose lives have been touched by loss, illness, disability, abuse or fear for the future. Bless us with open hearts to care, open ears to listen and open minds not to judge or dismiss situations which seem simple to us. May our lives express the love of Jesus in every opportunity and in every time and place.

We hold all these prayers before You, God who created at the beginning of time, and continues to breathe life in us today. Empower and embolden us to be courageous, to welcome Jesus to the core of our being, that we might live to Your praise and glory . **Amen**

Hymn: Thanks For Friends Who Keep On Loving (StF 619) (Tune: 'ODE TO JOY' StF 8)

Thanks for friends who keep on loving,
finding ways to help us grow,
celebrating our achievements,
sharing in our pain and woe.

God is glimpsed where love is faithful:
mirrored here in time and space.

Thanks to God for friends who love us:

Christ revealed in every face.

Other people help to shape us
when they take the time to share
words of wisdom, honest actions
through our journey in God's care.
In our faithful, honest learning
we discover things unknown.
Thanks to God for friends who teach us:
seeking talent yet ungrown.

When we find our friendships challenged
through mistakes and different views,
we discover deeper living
as the love of God renews.
For in Christ we see forgiveness;
know a strength still to embrace.
Thanks to God for friends who keep us:
making real the gift of grace.

Praise to God for this great gifting
of relationship and friend
imaging divine relating;
found in heaven with no end.
Bless us Maker, Word and Spirit
as companions on the way.
Thanks to God for friends who help us
to fulfil our lives each day.

Gary Hopkins (b. 1984)

Blessing:

Grace to you from God our Father.
Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ.
Go with everything you have been given by God.
Go with everything He will help you to be.
Go in peace. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'

Sunday 9th November 2025 – Remembrance Sunday

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton



Opening Words: *(if used for an LA a different voice could read each verse)*

At the 11th hour, on the 11th day, in the 11th month,
the busy traffic will cease,
and the noisy clamour of the world will be silent
for two short minutes.

At the 11th hour, on the 11th day, in the 11th month,
cash registers will not ring,
and important and urgent tasks will be put on hold
for two short minutes.

At the 11th hour, on the 11th day, in the 11th month,
thoughts will turn to long ago,
and for some it will seem like only yesterday.

But two short minutes can never be enough
to acknowledge the sacrifice,
to fill up the emptiness,
to comfort the pain and the grief,
to teach this warring world there is a much better way.

At the 11th hour, on the 11th day, in the 11th month,
the traffic will not cease,
the cash registers will continue to ring,
work will carry on as usual,
and thoughts will be of this day's battles, bullets and bombs.

And in two short minutes
victories will be secured or lost.
For this world has not yet learned its lesson:
it has chosen to refuse to understand
and has been unwilling to embrace
and take on board the road to peace,
the method of love, the better way.

And folk may be forgiven for believing
the sacrifice was all for nothing,
the emptiness inside has been ignored,
the pain has been passed over as unimportant,
for our world is still at war with itself.

At the 11th hour, on the 11th day, in the 11th month,
what can we do,
where can we go,
to whom, in our disappointment, might we turn?

To God whose other name is Love,
and whose gospel is a gospel that speaks of peace.

To the One who enters into our deepest grieving,
and offers us refuge,
and is our strength,
and gives life meaning.

Hymn: It is God who holds the nations (StF 705)

It is God who holds the nations in the hollow of his hand ;
it is God whose light is shining in the darkness of the land ;
it is God who builds the City on the Rock and not on sand :
may the living God be praised !

It is God whose purpose summons us to use the present hour ;
who recalls us to our senses when a nation's life turns sour ;
in the discipline of freedom we shall know God's saving power :
may the living God be praised !

When a thankful nation, looking back, has cause to celebrate
those who win our admiration by their service to the state ;
when self-giving is a measure of the greatness of the great :
may the living God be praised !

God reminds us every sunrise that the world is ours on lease :
for the sake of life tomorrow may our love for it increase ;
may all races live together, share its riches, be at peace :
may the living God be praised !

Reading: Isaiah 2: 2 - 4

In the last days, the mountain of the LORD's house
will be the highest of all—
the most important place on earth.

It will be raised above the other hills,
and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.

People from many nations will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of Jacob's God.

There he will teach us his ways,
and we will walk in his paths."

For the LORD's teaching will go out from Zion;
his word will go out from Jerusalem.

The LORD will mediate between nations
and will settle international disputes.

They will hammer their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will no longer fight against nation,
nor train for war anymore.

Prayer:

We come before you at this solemn time, O God,
aware of the costliness of human history.

In the face of hostility between nations and neighbours,
you came to us in Jesus Christ,
offering us the gift of peace, calling us to be peacemakers.

In this time of worship,
renew in us the hope that will turn our swords into ploughshares,
and by the power of the Holy Spirit,
lead the world you love away from the study of war
to the promise of peace with justice for all your peoples. Amen

Reflection:

"This is without doubt the saddest story I have ever heard."

That's the first line of Ford Madox Ford's novel *The Good Soldier* published just as the Great War, the First World War, began. It captures the dying of an era, the end of innocence. You read it knowing, as the protagonists of the time did not, that the lights were going out all over Europe. Words that were later mirrored in the lyrics of a song made famous by Vera Lynn – 'When the lights go on again all over the world.'

I have heard it said that the war that was declared in the summer of 1914 did not truly come to an end until 1989. But, with both hindsight and present day experience, I think we might say that in many ways it has still to come to an end. The red horseman of the Apocalypse with his bloodied sword who takes away peace rides this earth yet. Wilfred Owen called it "the pity of war".

Today we mark Remembrance Sunday and on Tuesday, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, we will remember Armistice Day. It is one of the last truly national rituals left to us. Whoever you are, you are aware of poppies and war memorials, of the Royal Albert Hall, the Cenotaph and the Chelsea Pensioners. You are drawn into the ceremonies that symbolise the remembrance, the gratitude and the care of a nation. I believe that every society, every people, needs a day such as this but not just to remember – for a day such as this is about reflecting and thinking as well.

It's been said that we will have to work harder in the future to keep alive the collective memory of what it is like when nations go to war, when civilisations are nearly destroyed, and so many have their futures taken away from them or carry their physical and emotional injuries with them for the rest of their lives. But in the last few years we've actually seen attendances at Remembrance Day ceremonies grow. Perhaps that's because the landscape of war remains only too well known to us. Our world is as precarious today as it has ever been, maybe even more so, and the images we see on our TV screens and in the papers just confirm this. The unfinished business of war still casts a long shadow and its victims, like the poor, are always with us.

Some say that what we are doing today is glorifying war and perhaps if all we were to do today is engage in a show of military power and strength they might have a point. But, today isn't about military glorification – it's about Remembrance and remembering pulses at the centre of Christian

faith, drawing on its roots within the Jewish tradition, and its practice in every human community across generations and cultures. The Bible carries memories of events that are foundational to our trust in God, as well as wisdom from earlier generations of faithful people. Stories that we continue to remember and to learn from. Symbols that we recognise and words that we recite – all rooted in remembrance of God's presence and actions and love. Holy Communion calls us to remember Jesus Christ, his grace and his mercy. Remembrance beats at the heart of Christian worship, connecting each generation with the communion of saints through the power of the Holy Spirit. And we too will be remembered, even after we're gone.

The connection we feel with those who have gone before us enlivens our acts of remembrance, evoking our gratitude for the lasting benefits of their service. Their best examples of courage, compassion, justice and generosity continue to inspire us. Yet there are also past examples of which we are not proud, things we hope we will never repeat, things we must learn from. For us, George Santayana's famous quotation remains a touchstone:

'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

A rabbi was asked whether a garment that had been symbolically torn in grief could be sewn up and used again. Yes, he replied, "but you mustn't disguise the tear. The scar must always show." In other words, we should always carry our collective and individual memories around with us. Because once we forget, we lose sight of what it is we seek to change, what we hope to prevent happening again.

We mark Remembrance Sunday in the hope that we will remember the costliness of war, not only the wars of the twentieth century which engulfed so much of the world, but also the smaller yet deadly conflicts of this century. For it seems there are lessons as yet unlearned while violent conflicts take repeated tolls on human communities and the very fabric of God's creation.

In this moment, whether we are gathered with others or sitting alone, we remember lessons from past and current conflicts, we don't celebrate victories – which have often proved short-lived – but rather we honour lives lost, we pray for those who still pay the costs of conflict, and we seek

God's wisdom in following paths of justice and cooperation which can lead to peace for all the creatures and communities of God's abiding love.

Hymn: We stand for brave and selfless friends Tune: St Columba

We stand for brave and selfless friends,
who sacrificed today.

In our remembering, Lord give faith,
and teach us how to pray.

We stand for all who die for us
- and have no more to give:
those we have never met or known,
those we should not outlive.

We stand and honour lives laid down –
futures that conflict stole –
and sing of one who died to end
the warring in our souls.

We stand to gain a greater prize
than any war can claim,
if we can hear the Saviour's voice
as he calls out our name.

We stand to pledge our lives to you,
to pray and work for peace
'til, when you wipe all tears away,
all hate and warfare cease.

'Once crimson poppies bloomed'

Once crimson poppies bloomed
out in a foreign field,
each memory reminds
where brutal death was sealed.
The crimson petals flutter down,
still hatred forms a thorny crown.

For in this present time
we wait in vain for peace,

each generation cries,
each longing for release,
while war still plagues the human race
and families seek a hiding place.

How long will human life
suffer for human greed?
How long must race or pride,
wealth, nationhood or creed
be reasons justifying death
to suffocate a nation's breath?

For everyone who dies
we share a quiet grief,
the pain of loss remains,
time rarely brings relief,
and so we will remember them
and heaven sound a loud amen.

Hymn: O God, our help in ages past (StF 132)

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home.

Under the shadow of thy throne
thy saints have dwelt secure ;
sufficient is thine arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
with all their cares and fears,
are carried downward by the flood,
and lost in following years.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away ;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guard while life shall last,
and our eternal home.

ACT OF REMEMBRANCE:

They shall not grow 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 **WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

Silence

When you go home, tell them of us and say
'For your tomorrow, we gave our today.'

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
as we are reminded of the names in our war memorials,
we realise how quickly and easily we forget.
We forget who people were and what they did,
we forget the contributions they made
and what they meant to their families.
We confess that sometimes we forget you
and what you have done for us.
Forgive us for those times,
and help us to see you in the lives of those we love,
Those we remember,
and in the beauty of the world around us.

Forgive our past doings
so that we may truly praise you for all
you have done for us.
We ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace. Luke 1: 78 -79

Hymn: Lord, for the years (StF 470)

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care ;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world ; when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain ;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves ; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne ;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Closing words:

Gracious God, as we leave this space Give us wisdom, that we may work
for peace.

Give us courage, that we may strive for justice.

Give us strength, that we may tear down the walls that divide us.

Give us compassion, that we may care for those in need.

And may we always remember that...

Good is stronger than evil

Love is stronger than hate

Light is stronger than darkness

Life is stronger than death

And victory is ours, through him who loves us.

Words for reflection on Tuesday 11th November (Armistice Day)

This fragile, passing beauty,

this autumn, red and gold,

a season's recollection:

love never will grow cold.

The seasons change and fracture,

the leaves of green turn brown,

as life seems tinged with sadness,

as petals flutter down.

This time of our remembrance

that reaches back to pain,

the chill of recollection

can open wounds again;

But this we must remember

that human war and hate

are matters of our choosing

and not some random fate.

God let this time of grieving,

of memory and regret,

enable reparation,

in case we just forget.

Fill human hearts with courage,

frame human words with grace,

that love might flow among us,

make Earth a sacred place.

Sunday 16th November 2025 – 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

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

Call to Worship:

Father, as we come before You now,
draw us closer,
lead us deeper,
challenge us more
and equip us to live for You now,
wherever You send us. **Amen.**

Hymn: Praise to the Lord (StF 88)

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is Thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,
Praise Him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee;
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
Who with His love doth befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
Fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
Then to thy need, He like a mother doth speed,
Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

Praise to the Lord, who when darkness of sin is abounding,
Who, when the godless do triumph, all virtues confounding,
Sheddeth His light, chaseth the horrors of night,
Saints with His mercy surrounding.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him!
Let the amen sound from His people again:
Gladly for aye we adore Him.

Joachim Neander (1650 – 1680)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Infinite God, we give thanks and praise that we can glimpse You in the beauty of a flower or quiet sanctuary of the Church, or in the beauty and sparkle of a dewy morning or when frost glistens on grass and hedgerows.

Thank You that we can be transported in our minds by Your Holy Spirit to see beyond this moment and this place, to see Your purpose and meaning, to know You desire only good for us. Thank You that we can see You in the midst of our confusion and anguish, when Your Spirit lights the way and calms our fears. Thank You that we can know You in rest and in busyness, in work and play, in solitude and community. Thank You for helping us to know how we should live now, to the glory of Your great name. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Almighty God, You never fail us, hear our prayers, our confession and our sorrow for all our mistakes. Thank You that we are blessed with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen

Reading: Psalm 98 NSRV

Introduction:

The Psalm celebrates the coming of God's salvation in the Exodus from Egypt or an unnamed military victory (v.2). Its praises focus on the liberation of God's people Israel and extends to the whole world (v.4), and even to all creation (vv.8-9). Notice how the end of the Psalm links past and future salvation: the God who has come in mercy and faithfulness (v.3) is the God who will come to judge the earth and its peoples with equity (vv.9-10). Justice is the watchword for all God's dealings with His world, especially in His coming in Christ.

¹Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

² The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

³ He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

⁴ Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music;

⁵ make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing,

⁶ with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn - shout for joy before the Lord, the King.

⁷ Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands,

⁹ let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Reflection 1:

The Church Council of Bethlehem Community Church gathered for its meeting - a responsibility they took seriously. A beautiful Church, it provided every facility imaginable with hospitality for all. This year, they were hosting the Bishop's Winter Retreat. Everyone was looking forward to the Bishop leading Sunday's worship - but the council was facing a potential embarrassing dilemma in the person called Mae Ella. You see, Bethlehem Church was known for its classic high Church liturgy. The preaching style was intellectual, the organist and choirmaster both taught music at a private college. The sixty voice choir was made-up of professional musicians. Mae's first visit had been at Easter, when following the choir's perfect presentation of Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus' Mae had stood up and cried: "Praise the Lord!". Imagine the congregation's shock!

Mae continued worshipping there and brought her whole family and they soon became involved in Junior Church, social concern and women's work. Mae served dinners, took food to the homeless and helped in the Church office. Everyone came to know and like her. She was a truly lovely Christian. The difficulty was that during every service, she couldn't suppress at least one "Amen", or "Hallelujah", or "Praise the Lord". Many tried, directly or indirectly, gently or not-so-gently to express how these

outbursts disturbed the rest of the congregation. Mae would blush and apologise - but she just couldn't control her joy.

It was time for the Winter Retreat which was always held after the beginning of the New Year when the Church was elaborately decorated for Christmas. Mae was one of the hardest working volunteers that weekend and on Sunday morning she sat on her hands and bit her lip in an attempt to keep still and quiet. She struggled at the choir's stirring contribution, but when a guest speaker rose to read the Psalm, the words touched her soul, and before she knew it, she clapped her hands and shouted "Oh, Praise the Lord!". As she realised, she stopped abruptly, and clasped her hands over her mouth. She sank back in the pew in horror at what she had done.

Imagine her surprise as the Bishop stood up in the pulpit and beamed a warm smile in her direction. "Thank you so much for that testimony to the glory of God", the Bishop said directly to Mae. As the crimson colour faded from her cheeks, she listened in awe. The Bishop preached an inspiring sermon on the importance of praise in worship. As he ended he smiled at Mae and asked: "Will you all say 'Amen'? Mae didn't need to be asked twice!

Many of the Psalms are an expression of praise to God. They 'sing a new song', but I wonder how much focus we place on them, read them, and let them inspire us? They were an attempt to express wonder and praise to an awesome God and encouragement to others to do the same. I wonder if today's Psalm spoke to you? Could you have ended it with a resounding "**Amen**"?

Hymn: Speak O Lord (StF 161)

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
to receive the food of Your holy word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes, for Your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of Your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us,
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with Your glory.

Keith Getty (b. 1974) & Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

As we come to read our New Testament reading, we need to hold in our minds that Paul wrote this to address a specific situation in the Thessalonian Church at that time and not as general advice or guidance.

Reading: 2Thessalonians chapter 3 vs. 6 – 13 NRSV

Introduction:

One of the consequences of the rumour that the day of the Lord has already returned (2 Thessalonians 2:2) is that some of Christ's followers are breaking with the Church's orderly life by opting to live 'in idleness', [v.6] which suggests that these believers see working for a living as a mundane distraction from more glorious, heavenly experiences of salvation that Jesus has returned. Surely, they would say, there are enough wealthy people in the Church to support those who use all their time to witness to the arrival of God's salvation! An unruly way of life disrupts the Church's orderly living by showing undue interest in other people's business. Either way, the rumour unsettles the Church's well-being.

⁶ Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. ⁹ This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

¹¹ For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

Reflection 2:

I still remember, as a young girl, being part of a young, emerging fellowship which needed to create a new, bigger, more substantial place for worship as the existing one was too small. It was an exciting time. By day, everyone went about their normal lives but in the evenings and at weekends, all manner of people came together to work towards this new venture. Everyone was involved - even us children. There was so much to do. Ladies baked cakes and met in sewing circles all year round. Every month, a different group from within the fellowship organised a fund raising event with the proceeds used to purchase goods to sell at their stall at the Christmas fair. This was a week-long event beginning on Monday when the stalls were laid out and over the week the transformation took place until the fair began on Thursday evening. Friday was re-stocking day ready for opening again on Saturday. Everyone worked together - and the results were amazing. All the while the Church's life of worship, fellowship, prayer and Bible study took place as usual. Festivals were celebrated along with special events. Food hampers were distributed to the elderly and anyone in need and people visited in their homes. Life, of course, was very different then, but what always stands out for me was the way in which everybody used their time, talents and gifts to ensure the aim of a new home for worship was built.

Sadly, this was not the case in the newly emerging Thessalonian fellowship to whom Paul was writing around A.D. 52.

After a very enthusiastic, energetic start, divisions had started to spread among the believers. Some believed the second coming had happened and Jesus had returned and so they felt there was no longer the need to work. Complacency had set in. Life was good. Time to sit back and enjoy their labours. Even as the great Apostle, Paul continued his daily work as a tent maker. Paul needed to re-dress this situation. He urged them to never tire of doing what was right and to continue in virtuous living, working hard to ensure that the fellowship could continue its mission of caring for those less fortunate, taking care of the destitute, ensuring the bereaved were taken care of. He encouraged them to continue in their daily work and not be tempted into idleness. The work of every Church needs to be constantly resourced.

So there was no place for disorderly or irresponsible attitudes. This negativity was badly affecting the Thessalonian community and threatened to harm it and deflect from the Christian ethics Paul and his co-worker, Timothy, had focused on. While Paul and Timothy were religious teachers they did not expect the community to support them. Paul insists they worked day and night so that they did not become a burden to the brothers and sisters in Christ. Christians don't just teach what it means to follow Jesus, they show by their words and actions what it means to follow Him, modelling a lifestyle that sought to bless. For Paul, it meant more than just daily work. He is basically saying: 'Don't get tired of doing what is right. Don't tire of doing good. Never stop lifting up those around you when you see them falling. Do whatever good you can, whenever you can, wherever you can, in whatever ways you can - even if you don't have to.' Words that John Wesley echoed. That's what Jesus' followers do; not to save ourselves or even help God to save us, but so that we may bring glory to God and bless our neighbours.

That is the importance of everyone worshipping and working together. Thessalonica played a crucial role in the formation and expansion of early Christianity. Paul's method was through pastoral guidance - teaching on prayer, generosity, the pursuit of holiness, an enduring faith and a

community-orientated lifestyle. This is the circle of Christian love. Love to which we are called.

I shall always be thankful that I was part of that emerging, growing Christian fellowship, as I am thankful that even now, Jesus can still use me in His growing Christian family.

But what about you? What is your Christian story and experience? Perhaps you could spend a little time this week thinking about your roots and how they shaped your life and are continuing to shape it now. Hopefully, you, like me, can say with Mae Ella in our Psalm reflection: “Oh, Praise the Lord!” **Amen.**

Hymn: Let love be real [Tune: Londonderry Air] (StF 615)

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
that being free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go.

*As God loves us, so let us love each other:
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free:
That helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness;
give me your love in spite of all you know.

*As God loves us, so let us love each other:
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hand through dreams and disappointments;
give me your trust when all my failings show.

*As God loves us, so let us love each other:
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Michael Forster (b. 1946)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Lord, we look forward to that day when all the earth will see Your glory and celebrate Christ as King. We long for the time when there will be no more crying, heartache and pain. We yearn for You to bring in Your new Kingdom on earth, but until that day we must live in the in-between times which we do not always find a comfortable place to be.

Lord, even You predicted that this world would be a place torn apart by war. As we remember all those who have lost their lives in conflicts we come humbly to You acknowledging our part in discord, disharmony, disagreement and discouragement and ask for Your forgiveness. We pray for the places currently in conflict in our world. We pray for our Armed Forces as they seek to keep the peace in very challenging circumstances. We pause to remember all who have fallen while fighting for their country.

Lord, we remember countries suffering as the result of natural disasters; for the effects of flooding, cyclones and fires and the destruction left in their wake. We pray for those who are displaced because of the changing climate and have nowhere to call home.

Lord, we know that no-one is immune to pain and troubles. We pray now for all those we know who are suffering from pain, sickness, fear, anxiety, sorrow or any other trouble, especially remembering.....

We seek Your comfort for them and for ourselves, knowing that You are a God of compassion and endless love. We also remember that you are a God of victory who promised that You had overcome the world. So we ask You to give us good memories, to help us focus on the times in our lives when You brought us peace in our distress, answers to hard questions, solace in our pain. We know that Your perfect love can drive out our fear so we ask You to give us the courage to seek out that love when we are struggling, Lord. We thank You for Your faithfulness throughout our lives. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on You.

Lord, we pray for those who are persecuted for their faith or who live in nations where it is dangerous to own a Bible or meet to pray. Give them courage, Lord, and help them know Your loving hand upon them. Help us as Church to find a way to support and encourage those who suffer for being Your followers.

Lord, we pray for governments and all who serve, asking that You will give them wisdom and integrity. We pray for Christians who hold high office and continue to ask Your blessing on our King as he seeks to live in a way that honours You.

We pray for all who work to relieve suffering and walk alongside victims of trauma and abuse. We pray for the refugees who, even now, will be arriving wet and cold and disorientated on our shores.

Lord, we offer the week ahead to You and ask that You will walk before us into it. Teach us how to hold firmly onto Your guiding hand so that we are not swayed by the ways of the world. Enable us to grow in grace and love this week, bringing Your peace into every difficult situation we may face at home, at school, at work or wherever we find ourselves.

Lord, help us to stand firm in Your love and faithfulness and follow You with determination knowing that You are always beside us, loving and guiding us. Help us to take heart and stand firm and walk closely with You. Amen.

Hymn: Your Hand I God has guided (StF 692)

Your hand, O God, has guided
Your flock, from age to age:
the wondrous tale is written,
full clear, on every page:
our forebears owned Your goodness,
and we their deeds record;
and both of this bear witness:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Your heralds brought glad tidings
to greatest, as to least;
They summoned all to hasten
and share the great King's feast;

Their gospel of redemption,
sin pardoned, right restored,
was all in this enfolded:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Your mercy will not fail us,
nor leave your work undone;
With Your right hand to help us,
The victory shall be won;
and then, by all creation,
Your name shall be adored,
and this shall be their anthem
one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Edward Hayes Plumptre (1821 – 1981)

Blessing:

Send us out to be Your eyes and ears in the world today.

Send us out to be Your hands and feet, using our gifts in whatever way we are enabled.

Send us out to work for the glory of Your Kingdom.

Send us out to live and love for You always. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'

Sunday 23rd November 2025 – Sunday Before Advent

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom.

Call to Worship:

Come and enter the refuge of God's presence. Breathe out a long, slow breath of relief. Come and enter into the still centre God offers us in the midst of a turning world.

Hymn: Be Still for the Presence of the Lord (StF 20)

Be still for the presence of the Lord,
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now,
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord,
The Holy One is here.

Be still for the glory of the Lord,
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire,
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord,
Is shining all around.

Be still for the power of the Lord,
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place.

David J Evans (b.1957)

Opening Prayer:

We believe you are our God, who cares for the world on which we walk and live and breathe. You hold humanity in your hands and love and care for each one of us beyond measure. Before you we stand in awe and amazement and bewilderment. You are the Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, of all that we can see and hear and feel and sense. You are the giver of Jesus Christ your only Son, who gave his life for us and who rose and lives within us. You are the Holy Spirit, who breathes life and meaning and purpose into our very beings. To you Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all praise this day, and forever more. **Amen.**

Hymn: Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken (StF 748)

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God.

He whose Word cannot be broken
formed thee for His own abode.

On the Rock of Ages founded,
what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

See, the streams of living waters,
springing from eternal love,
well supply thy sons and daughters
and all fear of want remove.

Who can faint while such a river
ever flows their thirst to assuage?
Grace, which like the Lord, the Giver,
never fails from age to age.

Savior, if of Zion's city
I through grace a member am,
let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in Thy name.
Fading are the worldling's pleasures,
all his boasted pomp and show;

solid joys and lasting treasures
none but Zion's children know

John Newton (1725-1807)

Psalm 46:

¹ God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

² So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. ³ Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!

⁴ A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High. ⁵ God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it. ⁶ The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble! God's voice thunders, and the earth melts! ⁷ The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress. ⁸ Come, see the glorious works of the Lord: See how he brings destruction upon the world. ⁹ He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honoured by every nation. I will be honoured throughout the world." ¹¹ The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.

Sermon:

We are rarely mindful of sharing Christ's kingdom with others and, when we do find ourselves thinking about it, we still give primary position to our wants and demote the needs of other beings to second rate. Some of us are good at caring for the other, non-human beings who share our planet. Perhaps we provide spring nesting boxes, winter hedgehog boxes, piles of leaves for worms to plug their burrows, logs to provide homes for bugs. These are the refuges of the non-human. God created this earth; he does not deny love and care to any part of it. We have just got used to assuming God offers it to us alone.

At this time of the year, some of us are busy putting our gardens to bed – trimming back trees and shrubs, sweeping up leaves. But perhaps in our pursuit of 'tidiness' we are depriving some other creature of a winter refuge.

Likewise, every time we turn the ignition key of our cars we may not think of islands in the Pacific lost because of climate change. But, if we're not conscious of the environmental impact of some of our actions, we may be

depriving someone else of a habitat and refuge. Christ is their King too. When we buy a ready-made sandwich in plastic packaging, do we think of an ocean full of single-use plastic and the creatures who have lost their homes as a result?

How can we *really* show God's love by extending the God-given refuge we know to others? How would we feel if God withdrew from us his promise of refuge? Worshipping Christ as King, we need to acknowledge that we share one world with other human beings and creatures. Let's put the needs of others before our wants, so all might live in shalom in God's kingdom

Hymn: Dear Lord and Father of Mankind (StF 495)

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives Thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;

let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

Intercessions:

Lord Jesus, we bow before you as Christ the King. We exalt you as our Lord. We can do nothing other than come in humility and thankfulness for all that you are and all that you did for us. As you call us to follow you, give us the courage to count the cost and remain faithful to you.

Jesus, we exalt you as Lord and King:

we bow before you and offer you our lives.

Lord, we pray for King Charles. We thank you for his faithful service to our country. We ask that you continue to give him wisdom, strength and humility. We pray also for Keir Starmer and his cabinet. We ask that they, too, will make wise decisions and policies that are designed to prosper those in our country who are facing real difficulty. Give them the courage to make compassionate decisions even if those decisions are costly.

Jesus, we exalt you as Lord and King:

we bow before you and offer you our lives.

Lord Jesus, Christ the King, we pray for the leaders in our world who do not acknowledge you. We pray for all leaders who are leading their people away from you, especially when they are leading them into war. We dare to pray big prayers, asking that these leaders will somehow be challenged by who you are; that they will see the truth and turn to kneel before you. We pray for all those Christians in countries where following you is not safe. We thank you for their courage and silent witness. We ask that you will give them your peace and strength to remain steadfast.

Jesus, we exalt you as Lord and King:

we bow before you and offer you our lives.

Lord Jesus, King of kings, we lift our nation to you. We pray for all those who are really struggling with the cost of living, who are afraid that they may not be able to make ends meet. We pray for all those who are having to make hard choices about eating or heating. We pray for our local services, our food banks, GP surgeries, warm places, citizens' advice bureaux, that they will offer compassionate assistance to all who need it.

Help your Church to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.

Jesus, we exalt you as Lord and King:

we bow before you and offer you our lives.

Lord, we pray that you will be the Compassionate King to all those we know who need your comforting presence at this time. We pray for those we know who are sick... sad... or struggling with their mental health... Be close to them and enfold them in your loving arms, we pray. We remember all who are lonely or housebound; single parents desperate for an adult to talk to; the homeless; or those struggling to care for family members. Lord, give us eyes and ears to see these people in our community and to bring your love to them.

Jesus, we exalt you as Lord and King:

we bow before you and offer you our lives.

Lord Jesus, exalted King, we praise you for all that you did for us. We rejoice that you were willing to exchange your crown of glory for a crown of thorns. We thank you for humbling yourself to become one of us. We will never truly know the cost of your sacrifice, but we bow before you in gratitude. Give us the strength to keep faithful to you.

As we go forward into the coming week, go before us and encourage us to keep close to you. Help us to be true servants of the King, we pray. When we are faced with hard decisions, help us to seek your face before we act. Help us to stop and think whenever we are tempted to behave in ways that do not honour you: when we are tempted to be unkind, to say wrong things, to waste your resources. Give us the courage to stand up for who you are whatever the cost to us. You gave your all for us, so help us to give our all for you.

Jesus, we exalt you as Lord and King:

we bow before you and offer you our lives. Amen.

Hymn: O God of Bethel by whose hand (StF 475)

O God of Bethel, by whose hand
thy people still are fed,
who through this weary pilgrimage
hast all our fathers led;

Our vows, our prayers, we now present
before thy throne of grace;
God of our fathers, be the God
of their succeeding race.

Through each perplexing path of life
our wandering footsteps guide;
give us each day our daily bread,
and raiment fit provide.

O spread thy covering wings around
till all our wanderings cease,
and at our Father's loved abode
our souls arrive in peace.

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), John Logan (1748-1788) and others (alt.)

Closing Prayer:

As we leave this place, help us to carry in our thoughts all who need
refuge and safety from threat, including those fleeing war and dangerous
situations. Let us pray for those suffering because of damaged
environments, and help us to be mindful of how our actions impact
others. Thank you for being our place of refuge,
our king of a turning world.

Sunday 30th November 2025 – 1st Sunday of Advent

This service has been compiled by Rev'd James Pritchard

Opening Prayer:

God as I pause to worship you this day, drawn near remind me of the thoughts and prayers of those meeting in the local churches and our unity in you. Open my heart that not only may I worship you, but that I might be blessed by you, and drawn closer to you. Advent God, draw near I pray in Jesus' name, **Amen**

Hymn: Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes (StF 171)

Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.

He comes the prisoners to release,
in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
your welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring
with your belovèd name.

Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)

A prayer of adoration:

The star has begun to slide towards the stable,
and the universe holds silence,
and your promise slips into our world,
and we hear your coming again.

*Great God,
hold us in this space,
(between now and not yet)
as we long for your arrival.*

The journey has begun,
and a young mother and worried father
move towards an unknown future,
wrapped up in a vulnerable promise.

*Great God,
your love shapes this journey
(between now and not yet)
as we long for your incarnation.*

The time is not quite,
and angels have yet to find voice,
but in this heavy expectation,
we hear the ancient echo of your prophecy.

*Great God,
restless with impatience,
(between now and not yet)
be born in us, soon.*

Reading Isaiah 2 1-5 New International Version - UK

2 This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

² In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

³ Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.'

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.

⁵ Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

A Prayer of Confession:

If you can transform swords into ploughshares, transform also our living, from hurt to healing. **Hear us, O God, in our time of need.**

If you can change spears to pruning-hooks, change also our ways, from selfishness to generosity. **Hear us, O God, in our time of need.**

If you can change darkness to light, change also our world, from shadow to glory. **Hear us, O God, in our time of need.**

Recreating God, take all we are, and with your loving hands refashion us, closer to your likeness: away from what we have become, and nearer to what you long for. And as you work in us, may we work too, sharing the effort, knowing the longing, recognising the need, so that we become transformers in ourselves, and in this world. If you can change death into life, change our lives also, lead us to new life in you. **Hear us, O God, in our time of need.**

God is full of mercy and grace – so let us receive God's forgiveness and live in its power day by day. **Thanks be to God, Amen.**

Hymn: Come, thou long-expected Jesus (StF 169)

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

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

By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Reading: Matthew 24:36-44 New International Version - UK

³⁶ ‘But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

⁴² ‘Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Reading: Romans 13:11-14 New International Version - UK

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time: the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Reflection:

Today marks the beginning of Advent, a season when we prepare for the coming of Jesus as a child - but we are also challenged with the message

of Christ coming again and of how things will change so dramatically! The idea of Jesus' returning is not something in 21st century Britain we think about a great deal, or something that has the sense of urgency that it had for the early Christians. The first Christians lived lives of real expectation, expectation that things would change and change imminently; they believed Jesus would return again and draw all things to himself. The passage in Matthew talks of Jesus' return coming at an unexpected hour and with it comes a challenge to 'be ready' – to 'be prepared' as my old scout leader would have said!

Paul in Romans had that strong belief that the end of things was coming and that therefore we Christians should live in a state of readiness. In the words we heard he is really challenging people to turn away from selfishness and instead to 'put on Jesus' – to take on the ways of Jesus. - Take on Jesus' ways who thought of God and others more than he thought of his own self-interest. I wonder how much we really take on of Christ's ways in our lives, or if it is only when it suits us?

Obviously over 2000 years have passed and so rightly the sense of imminence and expectation that Jesus' return brought to early Christians has dwindled away, but I wonder if we have also forgotten the challenge it brings?

As we prepare for Christmas, how prepared and ready are we to meet with God *not only* as child in the manger but as our Lord and Saviour?

Matthew reminds us, no one knows the day when Jesus will return and equally none of us knows what our future holds...I've heard it said that John Wesley told his band of preachers that they should be ready to preach, pray or die at a moment's notice – I'm not saying that we all need to be able to do that but his words are a reminder that we cannot escape the future and we should live in a state of readiness deeply connected to God.

I leave us with some things to consider, how do we orientate our lives, is it to our own desires rather than others? I wonder are we prepared to take on the ways of God, or to 'put on' the Lord Jesus Christ as Paul puts it?

Are we ready and prepared to meet with God and live in God's ways, day by day?

Why not spend a few minutes pondering these questions or what you have noticed from the readings or anything that strikes you? What might God say to you in your waiting?

Poem/Hymn: 'And I will wait now'

The following song was written during Advent 2012 in response to thoughts Dietrich Bonhoeffer included in his book 'God in the Manger'. In it Bonhoeffer writes: "Celebrating Advent means being able to wait,". "Waiting is an art that our impatient age has forgotten." Bonhoeffer himself was a German theologian who found himself in conflict with the Nazi regime. A political prisoner during the Second World War, he was executed just ten days before German forces began to surrender in 1945. The editors of God is in the Manger write: "For Bonhoeffer, waiting - one of the central themes of the Advent experience - was a fact of life during the war: waiting to be released from prison; waiting to be able to spend more than an hour a month in the company of his young fiancée; waiting for the end of the war."

As you reflect feel free to read the following words as a poem or sing it as a hymn, it fits well to the tune 'Bunessan' (Morning has broken)

And I will wait now,
and in the waiting
feel still more closely
your love for me.
For I'll be patient
and I'll be gentle,
touched by your steadfast
humility.

And I will hope now,
and in the hoping
make every action
a gift for you.
For I'll seek justice
and I'll love mercy,

each word I speak an
echo of you.

And I will go now,
and in the going
follow your Christ light
so I will see
how I may find you,
holy and human,
your arms stretched open
waiting for me.

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Prayers of Intercession:

On this Advent Sunday, we come before you God with many different emotions. We come with awareness that Christmas is approaching. For some folk that will be a time of great joy, for others a time of stress and busyness. We come to you knowing that the world is full of tinsel, glitter and mindless music played on a loop, but in the midst of all the preparations, we yearn to see your face. We want to look to the future because you have gone ahead into it for us.

Help us to find you, not in the razzmatazz, but in the quietness of the stable.

Be awake, be ready, be prepared:

our king is coming at an unexpected hour.

At this Advent time, in all that we do, help us to keep our eyes and ears open to see You among us. We pray that we will find you in the face of friend and stranger. That we will worship you in among all the fun and festivities. We pray that we will be your compassionate hands, feet and lips to those around us who are hurting, afraid, homeless, lonely and overwhelmed. O come, O come Emmanuel and make us fit to serve you. Be awake, be ready, be prepared:

our king is coming at an unexpected hour.

Lord, we bring to you all those we know who are making preparations this week: those revising for exams, those preparing for operations or medical procedures, those arranging to travel to new or unfamiliar places, those preparing for a birth... or a death. Lord, please be present, be Emmanuel, to all these people... some known to us, but all known to you. Give

diligence in the working, patience in the waiting, courage in the unfamiliar situations, your presence at the ends and the beginnings. Help everyone to be alert to your presence in every situation they face. And help us all to keep our eyes firmly fixed on you, whatever we are experiencing in the weeks to come.

Be awake, be ready, be prepared:

our king is coming at an unexpected hour.

Lord, Emmanuel, we know we can only be fully prepared for life if we are fully focussed on you. Keep us from distractions, we pray. Help us to find creative ways to learn more about you and deepen our relationship with you even within the old, familiar stories. Help us also to be prepared to step away from the familiar into new things... following where you lead as you challenge us to become closer to you.

Be awake, be ready, be prepared:

our king is coming at an unexpected hour.

Lord, prepare our hearts. Help our eyes to be open to see you. Teach us to be ready for everything you ask of us this week. Give us eyes and ears to see where your kingdom is coming around us and to join you as you work in our world.

Be awake, be ready, be prepared:

our king is coming at an unexpected hour.

*(pause to remember the people places and situation
on your heart this day)*

Lord, come to our hearts, our homes, our world and help us to be ready to find you. **Amen**

You may wish to also pray the Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Sing we the King who is coming to reign; (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:

*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)

Closing Prayer & Blessing:

Almighty God, in the midst of the busyness of Advent and Christmas, may we never forget the wonder of your being.

May we never neglect the love you give us and show us, may we never forget that glimpse of you,
that surprise of who and what you are that first brought us to worship and adore you.

Advent God, bless us with your presence this and every day and by the power of your Holy Spirit dwell in us, blessing us with your peace, In the name of Christ, **Amen.**

Some material drawn from Roots on the web

Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.

If you no longer wish to receive this printed sheet, could you let either your Minister or the Circuit Office (tel: 01782 612648)
e-mail: northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.