

Morning Praise @ Home 10th December 2023

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
cf Psalm 51

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Readings

Psalm 27

Matthew 25: 1 – 13

Reflection

“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”- **Psalm 27:14 NRSV.**

Advent calendars and Advent candles are used by millions of people across the country every December. The anticipation of opening a cardboard door-a-day, the patience involved in folding over the edges of your candle so the wax doesn't drip down the numbers below, and the suspense of the lead up to Christmas all reflect the most valuable theological qualities of Advent as Christians wait in anticipation, patience, and suspense to give thanks for the birth of a baby.

There are many Hebrew words used throughout the Bible to express the process of waiting: qavah, meaning 'to wait'; yachal, which refers to hopeful expectant waiting; chakah, a drawn-out desperate wait; and chuwl, meaning to wait anxiously.

Advent, which comes from the Latin Adventus (meaning 'to come or arise') takes place from the last Sunday of November until Christmas Eve. These weeks represent our expectant waiting for Christ's birth and, subsequently, his second coming in the unknown future. The idea of having to wait for good things to come is a recurring theme throughout scripture, as is the idea of waiting for bad things to pass; however, in this age of next-day-delivery and speedy Google searches the theology of waiting becomes even more valuable during the weeks of Advent.

Ten Bridesmaids Waiting

In the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (Matthew 25), the women wait expectantly for the delayed groom to arrive at an unknown hour of the night. Half the women bring extra oil to fuel their lamps, while the other half bring none. By the time the groom has arrived all their lamps have died out. With not enough to go around, the unprepared bridesmaids are forced to leave their wedding duties in order to buy more oil. For many scholars the bridegroom represents Christ, and he ends the parable by warning these bridesmaids to “keep awake... for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Matthew 25:13).

This parable recognises some degree of division in humanity which is represented by the bridesmaids, some wise and some foolish, who wait together for Christ's arrival. “It is quite evident that wisdom lies in careful preparation” because waiting is centred around trust. Firstly, trust in the arrival of the thing or person being waited for, in this case the groom, but also trust that those waiting will fulfil their duties and be ready when they are needed most. “Waiting is not a throwaway time”, but one of intentionality and preparation for the moments that have not yet arrived and cannot be predicted. The coming of Christ is one of these moments for which we must prepare through the celebration of Advent.

So, what should we do while we wait for Christ?

Substitutes in sport and understudies in the theatre do not wait aimlessly or unproductively until they are needed. Instead, they live in anticipation, patience, and suspense, continuing to train and prepare, all the while waiting for an unconfirmed moment. However, in Matthew's parable, the value of everyday living is given great importance too. "We must never seek to calculate that which we simply do not know", such as the arrival time of the groom or the longevity of an oil-lit flame (1). Thereby, when the bridesmaids become drowsy and fall asleep waiting (Matthew 25:5), this emphasises to the reader "that waiting involves the ordinary things of living" and that sleep is "an ordinary activity of life" that need not be pushed aside. Jesus warns the foolish bridesmaids to "stay awake" only as a reminder of the importance of remaining attentive even when at rest (Matthew 25:13). For the spirit to grow and mature, we need to live mundanely but intentionally; knowing that our lives should not be stunted by waiting but celebrated as purposeful. Advent is a wonderful way to remind us of the importance of intentional and patient waiting in both remembrance of Christ's birth and expectation of his return "at an unexpected hour" (Matthew 24:44).

As poet W.H. Auden writes in his poem Heavy Date: "For when love is waiting logic will not do". While the love of God is ever-present, we must wait to feel the effects of Christ's return and trust that everything will be ok in the end, which doesn't always feel possible or logical but is an important thought to familiarise yourself with this Advent.

Waiting is trusting, and trusting is relinquishing some degree of control in good faith that God will not make us wait forever. **Amen**

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of intercession

Lord we come to you now to ask for your involvement in our lives and in the affairs of the world.

We cry out to you in the midst of the pain and trauma of violence and fear which prevails in the Holy Land. Be with those who need you in these days of suffering; we pray for people of all faiths - Jews, Muslims and Christians and for all people of the land.

We pray that this crisis will end now, without further loss of life.

We pray for the injured, the suffering and for those who mourn their loved ones.

We pray for all people who have been displaced, those who have lost their homes and have nowhere safe to go.

We pray for all those in danger at this moment.

We pray for refugees across the world who are travelling many thousands of miles, often paying criminal gangs to help them cross borders, often at great risk. We pray for the families involved, for the desperation the parents must feel as they take children on dangerous journeys. We pray for those who have little shelter this winter as they wait, people in limbo, with little protection or support. As your son was born in a stable as there was no room at the Inn, we think now of all those sheltering under canvas or cardboard as they flee persecution, violence, or famine.

We pray for the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai. We ask that the leaders of nations and their representatives will work constructively to agree solutions to the climate issues and that they will all look beyond their own domestic issues.

We pray that the interests of the poorer countries (potentially those that might suffer most from the effects of global warming) will be represented fully; not just the political muscle of the rich.

As in The Lord's prayer, we pray for Your Kingdom come – we pray for social justice, for compassion. We worry about the anger we see in our politics, the language of confrontation, not understanding. We pray that we might care for one another, loving one another as commanded, as neighbours, as countries.

Lord we ask for comfort to all those who are feeling lonely as we approach Christmas. For those elderly who feel isolated, for those in broken relationships, for those who feel they just don't fit in.

Help us to reach out in friendship and to look out for our neighbours.

We remember any we know who are in need of your healing. Be with them Lord, remind them that they are not alone and help us to do what we can to help and support them.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**