

Call to Worship – Lighting the Advent Candle of Hope

Today we light the candle of hope.

As the flame begins to burn on this first candle of Advent, we are reminded how far we've come.

From our ancestors of the faith

who walked in the wilderness for 40 years,

to the year that we have all just experienced together.

Hope does not come from instant gratification.

Instead, it comes from a longing inside of us that knows things can be different.

And yet, this year we have learned how

to wait and hope at the same time.

As we light the candle of hope,

we acknowledge a longing inside of all of us.

We acknowledge the tension between waiting and hoping.

We acknowledge the stubborn hope that holds us

in one with each other as we begin our journey together through Advent.

Prayer: Holy God, we thank you for the gift of hope that we find in Christ Jesus. Remind us of your presence as we live another week of hoping and longing. Amen.

Bible Readings

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 (NRSVA)

Mark 13:24-37 (GNT)

Hymn: 304 O little town of Bethlehem (Verses

<https://youtu.be/QAU5Xg-o-eM>

Prayer of Approach and the Lord's Prayer

Here we are, Lord,

seekers of your Word, searchers for your truth,

your followers, your beloved children in need of direction.

We come ready to listen, to hear, to follow our master's voice.

Here we are, Lord,

awaiting once again the celebration of your arrival,
aware of your presence, aware of your call to follow
hoping against hope for your peace.

How we thank you that we can be safe in the knowledge of who
you are, sure of the promises you make, certain of your
faithfulness.

So we come this Advent morning, to edge a little closer, to
glimpse a little better, to marvel a little more, at the moment when
your truth will burst again into the world to declare your purposes.

We come to admit that so many times we have got it wrong.
We have not understood the way you call us to live...
or we have not wanted to.

We come to admit that we twist and turn to find ways of dodging
the costly and risky life to which you call us.

How we praise you that with you there is forgiveness and a new
beginning. We put our trust in your grace, love and compassion.

Hold us, heal us and help us to come a little closer and to know a
little more about what it means to be your people, your beloved
children, chosen and cherished even in our brokenness.

So here we are, Lord.

Ready to tread the Advent path once again.

Take us from here and lead us to the place where earth meets
heaven and we are embraced by your love and the promise of life
everlasting. Hear us as we pray together in the words you taught
us: 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 debts as we
forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver
us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the
glory for ever Amen.

Reflection

In the name of the Father...

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This opening of Paul's letter to those in the church at Corinth is a pretty standard one for those times but as we read it today and think of that prayer for peace it speaks to us in many ways in these uncertain and troubled times, for many of us have not felt much peace this past year. As we start our new Christian year today we are very aware of the need for peace, shalom, and all that means for it means far more than just a peace between warring factions. This blessing was a prayer for peace – within oneself, within one's household, family and in the wider community and world. This blessing of shalom, peace, is important for us today as we have had to cope with the fear and anxiety we have had this past year.

As we light our candle of hope this year, there is a sense of hope in these current circumstances of pandemic and lockdown. With the promise of a vaccine early next year there is light and hope at the end of the tunnel and we can continue to pray for the vaccine to be successful and for peace and healing

As Christians at the beginning of our annual advent journey we look forward in hope to a more cosmic event – not just the celebration once again of the birth of Jesus but even further forwards to the time of Christ's return in glory.

I was speaking with somebody the other day who was telling me about her sister-in-law who is expecting a baby and all the joy and expectation that surrounds that event.

That image of a pregnant woman sums up this time of year in the Christian calendar. That whole idea of waiting – waiting for something special to happen – waiting for a happy event – waiting for the birth of a child – imagining what Mary felt - pregnant and carrying the hope of the world - waiting to celebrate once again the birth of Jesus – waiting now for Christ to come again.

This time of year – Advent - is a time of waiting, not simply a time of waiting for the birth of Christ, for that event has already taken

place nor is it really a time of waiting for the end of the world, something that many people claim is imminent. Today's readings tell us that Advent is a time of waiting for the fulfilment of the reign of God – for Christ to come in all his glory and for his reign to encompass the whole of creation in love and peace and joy.

This reign of God dawned for us with the birth of Christ, we look forward to the feast of Christmas and celebrate its importance because it looks back to this beginning but it also points us forward to another time. We reflect on the end of the old world and welcome in a new world of grace. The reign of God constantly unfolds before us, so we are always looking for signs of its further appearance—hoping for a time of reconciliation and genuine peace, a time of mutual respect and cooperation. Advent is the time of waiting for this new world to appear.

When will the revelation of Jesus Christ appear; when will this new world arrive? When will the Day of the Lord dawn? We do not know for sure, so we must wait with patient expectation; we must wait in joyful hope that it will come soon. And what should we do while we wait? In the Gospel story the servants do not wait idly. They assume responsibility for the work of the household. Today we are responsible for the natural world in which we live, for the society of which we are a part and for the work of the church....and we're also responsible for being an example in keeping to all the guidelines and restrictions we are having to follow. As overwhelming as this may seem, Paul reminds us that we have all the gifts and talents that we need to live faithfully in this world: "You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Pregnant with expectation, we are admonished to prepare for the day of fulfillment. We wait for that day in partnership with others who wait. This means that in our waiting we are vigilant for justice, compassionate toward those who lament and, yes, forgiving of those who wrong us.

This time of waiting is a time of preparation, a time to reflect, a time to renew our relationship with God, a time to turn once again to him, a time to re-dedicate ourselves to God.

We live between the time of Christ's first coming and the time of final fulfillment, an in-between time of ambiguity and hope and we are also living in very uncertain times at the moment. Through it all we believe that we have a future worth waiting for, worth working toward. Relying on God's promises to us, we firmly believe that God's Kingdom of peace and love and healing will come in all its fullness and glory. Amen

Hymn: 277 Hark the glad sound!

<https://youtu.be/cWa9Raw9Kes>

Prayers for Others

Loving God, we thank you for this glad time of year, this season of Advent, of waiting and expectation, we thank you for this season which reminds us of so much. and which reveals so wonderfully the extent of your love.

This is a time for looking back, a time for remembering the birth of your son, light into our darkness; a time for looking forward and anticipating his coming again, his glory filling the whole of creation as he returns to establish his Kingdom and rule in your name; but above all this is a time for the present moment, for examining our lives, searching our hearts, exploring your word, and renewing our faith; a time for recognising more fully that Jesus is with us each moment of every day, now and always.

Loving God, we thank you for the hope you have given us in Christ the meaning and purpose, joy and fulfillment you bring us through him. Hear now our prayer for those who find it hard to hope, those for whom life is hard:

We think of those in the Developing Countries of our world – the hungry and undernourished, homeless and refugees, sick and suffering – human beings just as we are, who are also struggling through this time of pandemic but with so much less than we have.

We think of those who are caught up in war – and the aftermath of war - overwhelmed by fear and hatred, their homes and livelihoods destroyed, each day lived under the threat of violence especially we remember today: those in Yemen and Syria

Loving God, at this time of supposedly goodwill among all, we pray for an end to division and discord, hatred and hostility; death and destruction.

We pray for all those whose lives have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic and for all those who grieve their loved ones lost.

We pray for your comfort and solace and your healing presence, we pray for vaccines and cures and express our deep gratitude to all the carers, Drs, nurses and researchers all who seek to help others at this time.

Loving God, in this season of families and happiness and celebration we remember those who have little to celebrate.

We remember the bereaved and the many unemployed, the redundant and the rejected, the sick and the dying.

We remember the lonely and anxious, those who fear going out and those who fear within.

Lord we bring before you now in the silence all those whom we know personally who are in need of prayer today.

SILENCE

Loving God

help us as we remember your coming, as we serve you now, and as we look forward to your coming again – to anticipate your Kingdom through the service we offer and the lives we live.

Teach us to work for that day when your kingly rule will be established, your justice prevail, and the earth be filled with the knowledge of you. Loving God hear our prayers Amen.