

BASINGSTOKE AND READING

CIRCUIT SERVICE RESOURCE

This week we are thinking about what it means to be prepared for the coming of Jesus

We Gather in God's Presence:

Words of welcome and Notices - steward

Welcome to this time of worship, whether you are worshipping alone or sharing this time with others. May you know God's presence through the prayers, hymns, readings and the sermon.

Introduction

Jesus tells his disciples that only the Father knows when the Son of Man will come to gather his people. Therefore, they must 'keep awake' and 'be ready', because he is coming at 'an unexpected hour'. This week is the first Sunday in Advent, so we are thinking about what it means to be prepared, and especially for the coming of Jesus.

Call to Worship:

Some words from Isaiah 2:1-4

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.
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.
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.

A gathering prayer:

Based on Romans 13:11-12

As we begin our journey through Advent,
we are reminded that:

It is time for us to wake up from sleep!

Lord, help us to be ready.

It is time for us to put on the armour of light.

Lord, help us to be ready.

We want to be people of daylight and not darkness.

Lord, help us to be ready. Amen

We sing our opening Hymn: **StF 264** - Make way, make way, for Christ the King, words by Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aICQ7fb0hEA>

<p>Make Way, Make Way, For Christ The King In Splendour Arrives. Fling Wide The Gates And Welcome Him Into Your Lives.</p> <p><i>Make Way! (Make Way!) Make Way! (Make Way!) For The King Of Kings! (For The King Of Kings!) Make Way! (Make Way!) Make Way! (Make Way!) And Let His Kingdom In!</i></p> <p>He Comes The Broken Hearts To Heal, The Prisoners To Free. The Deaf Shall Hear, The Lame Shall Dance, The Blind Shall See.</p>	<p>And Those Who Mourn With Heavy Hearts, Who Weep And Sigh; With Laughter, Joy And Royal Crown He'll Beautify.</p> <p>We Call You Now To Worship Him As Lord Of All. To Have No Other Gods But Him: Their Thrones Must Fall!</p>
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A Prayer of Approach:

{this or some other prayer could be used while lighting the advent candle}

Living God, as we light the first Advent candle,
and the first flicker of your coming is kindled in our hearts,
may the flame of our desire for justice and peace
burn brightly within us,
releasing in our lives, our churches, and our world,
the transforming power of your Holy Spirit.
For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ,
our Hope and Light of the world. **Amen**

A Prayer of Adoration:

We praise you, living God,
for these days of Advent,
for the opportunity they offer to reflect on Scripture,
and to prayerfully prepare our hearts and minds
for your coming afresh into our lives.
As we set out on our Advent journey,
may we find a stillness that is your presence with us,
leading us on to Bethlehem,
where our spirits can soar towards the light of your eternal love,
revealed in your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour.

A Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Advent God,
when our preparation for the coming of your Son
is shallow, and we do not invest our whole being
in prayerful preparation for your coming afresh
into our lives:

**Forgive us, we pray
and help us to be alert
to the signs of your coming
in our lives and in the world.**

Pause for silent personal reflection

God of all creation,
who came to us in Jesus Christ:
though the nights are long —
the sun still rises;
though the mornings are dark —
the birds still sing;
though the world is not ready —
your Son still comes;
though we do not listen or prepare
or deserve your grace —
you still love and forgive and renew us
through the same Jesus Christ your Son,
our Saviour. **Amen**

We Listen to God's Word:

A Reflective Illustration:

In Advent we await Jesus our light.

A teacher introduced a sentence to his students and asked them what they thought of it. The sentence was "**Wait for the light.**" Some thought it was beautiful, others thought it was a good spiritual maxim or motto to live by. Finally, the teacher told the students where he read it: on the corner of an intersection that flashed the warning: "**wait for the light.**"

Do we habitually make important decisions without first praying to **Jesus the Light**?

Let us now hear our Epistle and Gospel readings:

- **Epistle Reading:** Romans 13:11-14
- **Gospel Reading:** Matthew 24:36-44

We sing our second hymn: StF 169 / H&P 81 - Come thou long expected Jesus, words by Charles Wesley (1707-1788) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEE0uWnDGs>

<p>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.</p> <p>Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art; dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.</p>	<p>Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.</p> <p>By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone; by Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.</p>
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Homily/Sermon:

This week's readings have quite a lot in them and they are not the easiest of readings. But we have to be willing to fully engage with these difficult passages of scripture, in order to allow them to speak to us so we can properly apply them to both our individual and collective journeys through Advent and our continual learning and walking in God's ways.

I depend on the alarm on my phone to wake me up at 06:00 am every morning. However, I am never quite prepared for the alarm to ring. Often times, I would just let the alarm ring out until I am ready to get up. When it gets too overbearing, often, I would hit the snooze button or reset the alarm giving myself another half hour's sleep. And depending on the day of the week, I could reset the alarm two or three times before actually deciding that it is time to wake up. Sleep may be sweet, but if you are not careful you will end up rushing to get ready for the day.

The story is told of a man named John, who never gets up when his alarm clock rings. He likes a good sleep. Every morning the rush is on: no time to have a proper breakfast, no time to tidy up. One day, on his way to work he bumped into a lady because he was rushing so much he did not notice her. Another day he knocked over a bin because he did not even see it. Another day when he got to the train station the train had just gone. "You are just two seconds late, said the man on the platform. John responded, 'Now I will be late for school — it would not matter so much if I were not the headmaster!'

Jesus says to his disciples, '*But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son...*' (Matt 24:36). If we knew exactly when the train was going to arrive, we would not need to be on the platform until a minute or two before. But, unlike waiting for the train for the last couple of minutes before arrival, waiting for Jesus' return requires continuous preparation and alertness. There is no last-minute prep when it comes to Jesus' return, either we are ready or we are not ready.

Paul picks up this theme of alertness. '*Wake up and smell the coffee!*' the saying goes. *Pull yourself together, pay attention and get a grip before it is too late!* Advent has become very commercialised, but many of us who like to go into the shops for a good browse around often do not see quite how much work goes in before opening time. Some stores/supermarkets open from midnight to receive very large vehicles bringing in all that is necessary for the business to be ready for opening time. The shopping day then turns out smoothly for shoppers and browsers because of the hard work put in beforehand. How do we prepare and get ready to share the good news of salvation to those whom God sends our way?

Like Jesus, Paul tells his readers (and us), to 'wake up' from sleep. Sleep and wakefulness oppose each other, and for Paul, the choice is obvious. Paul speaks as a watchman announcing that the dawn is near when every action is visible. As disciples of Jesus, we must avoid anything that we do not want the light of Christ to shine upon and to reveal. Paul's message of wakefulness is urgent — soon there will be enough light to bring to fruition God's plan of salvation for both individuals and the cosmos. And in the light of Christ, God's purposes would be fully restored and the new day dawns.

I quite like Isaiah's picture of the coming 'Day of the Lord', which is also found in Micah 4:1-4. God's mountain will tower over all others, and all the peoples of the world will gather there — this is sometimes known as '*the pilgrimage of the nations*'. Nations will long to attain the marks of the Hebrew qualities of knowing God's wisdom and of walking in God's ways. This holistic, God-centred way of life will be readily available to all nations and the result will be peace among all people.

As nations come to know God and walk in God's ways, Isaiah says they will be ready to submit to God's justice. Isaiah ends this section with a prophecy of peace, where weapons of war are turned into tools for cultivating and caring and stewarding God's creation. Isaiah's vision of nations streaming to the mountain of God is global in its scope — so too is Matthew's picture of the Son of Man initiating a new world order that mends and repair a broken world. In a world scarred by human divides — of walls and fences and exclusions, God calls his people to be signs of the inclusive kingdom of God that both Jesus and Isaiah foretell.

Advent celebrates the coming of Jesus into the world when he was born of the Virgin Mary. But Jesus continues to come to each of us in our everyday encounters — and Jesus promised to come again in His glory. Our alertness to Jesus' coming in the ordinariness of our lives may determine our readiness for His coming in glory. May we be alert to the signs of His coming and may our ears be fully attuned to the chiming of the divine clock. **Amen!**

We Respond to God's Word:

Psalm 122:1-9

(An alternate reading) *A song of ascents. Of David.*

I rejoiced with those who said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord."
**Our feet are standing in your gates,
O Jerusalem.**
Jerusalem is built like a city
that is closely compacted together.
**That is where the tribes go up—
the tribes of the Lord—
to praise the name of the Lord
according to the statute given to Israel.**
There stand the thrones for judgment,
the thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels."
**For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, "Peace be within you."**
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your prosperity.

The offering is received - instrumental music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hraG0LcS2hc>

We Dedicate our Gifts and Lives to God:

God of all hope,
out of your providing
we bring these gifts from our daily living.
Take our gifts and the offering of our lives
and use them for your glory; through Jesus Christ,
the hope and Light of the world. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession:

Roots Magazine (slightly adapted)

We are to wake up and make sure we stay ready
for the coming of Christ into our lives and into the world:

Let us pray to the God of all hope,
who came to us in His Son Jesus Christ,
and by whose love we are saved:

God of all hope,
where things seem to be one big tangle of pain and unhappiness,
intervene with your saving love;
where people are in conflict or locked in a stalemate,
release them from the cycle of war;
where your name is outlawed and your people are forced to hide,
break through their darkness and be God-revealed to them;
where despair takes centre stage and depression and anxiety
sharpen their claws,
fill those situations with unexpected peace and joy.

*I invite you to spend a few moments
offering your own prayers to God,
aloud or in the quietness of your hearts.*

God of all hope,
God-with-us,
God of all time and of every place:
may the earth be filled with the knowledge of you,
and may your light flow over the world like a covering,
bringing protection from the darkness
and from the evil that often frightens and wounds us.
Through Jesus Christ your Son, the Hope and Light of the world. **Amen**

We conclude our prayers by saying together **'The Lord's Prayer'**:

We conclude our time of Worship together:

We sing our closing hymn: **StF 177 / H&P 241** - Lo, he comes with clouds descending,
words by Charles Wesley (1707-1788) -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wcu_zrgX23M

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

God, whoever comes to you,
draw you to his love,
draw you to his light,
draw you to himself;

...and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you, and remain with you always:

David Adams (slightly adapted)

We go into the world carrying Christ our Light and our Hope.
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.