

CIRCUIT SERVICE. December 4th prepared by Mrs June Hardcastle

We join together in our buildings, on zoom and wherever we are to read or hear the words of this service. Though we are many, we are one body in Christ. One family.

We begin with the Advent Liturgy which has been prepared for all the churches in our Circuit.

Introduction and invocation

On this second Sunday of Advent, we relight the candle of waiting and expectation, and light the second Advent candle, as a sign of the **hope** we have in Christ.

Lord, we need your hope in our world.

The lighting of the candles

As the second candle is lit, a reader says:

There's the root of our ancestor Jesse, breaking through the earth and growing tree tall,
tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope! (*Romans 15: 12, The Message*)

For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe. (*1 Timothy 4: 10*)

Response

StF 168 – EITHER sing verses 1 & 2

1 Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come, Lord Jesus, come, to this world of ours.	2 Lord, we need you now ; Lord, we need you now ; Lord, we need you now in this world of ours. Francesca Leftley (<i>b. 1955</i>)
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OR:

Leader Come Lord Jesus, we need your hope
Response ***Come Lord Jesus, to this world of ours***

“Hope is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us. From this vision derives the strength to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves.” (*Kairos Palestine*)

“Hope is believing in spite of the evidence, and then watching the evidence change.” (*Jim Wallis*)

Prayer

Living, loving, growing God,
help us to grasp your reality
and to see hope being born in hard places,
and where people have lost heart. Amen. (*Jan Sutch Pickard*)

<p>1 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>2 Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art, dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.</p>	<p>3 Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king, born to reign in us for ever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.</p> <p>4 By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone ; by thine all-sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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PRAYER

Gracious God, in and through Jesus we have been delivered from the dominion of darkness and a place made for us in your kingdom. To express our praise, to find the vocabulary to voice our astonished thanks, is beyond the reach of our words but not beyond the reach of our hearts as we come before you in awe and wonder. We lift up our very selves as we once more hear revealed the mystery of your loving purpose for us – how that when we were far off, you met us in your Son to bring us home. In these weeks of Advent we ponder once more the fulfilment of the prophetic promises, astounded at the preparation for that great coming from the time of Abraham, amazed that it was all for us, that Jesus came for us. We celebrate the great names of the old antiphons by which he is known

Sapientia O Wisdom, who came forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner.

Adonai O Lord and leader of Israel, who appeared to Moses in a burning bush and gave him the Law on Sinai.

Radix Jesse O root of Jesse, you stand as a signal for the nations.

Clavis David O key of David and sceptre of Israel, what you open no one else can close again; what you close no one can open. You come to lead the captive from prison; to free those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Oriens O Rising Sun, who is the splendour of eternal light and the sun of justice.

Rex Gentium O King whom all the people's desire, who is cornerstone which makes all one.

Emmanuel God with us

What a glad sound – the Saviour comes. When dark nights come and the deep engulfs us you give us the courage and the strength to hang on until the morning light. When we look in the mirror and see error and failure etched on our faces, you reflect back to us ourselves as your own, and we see also the dignity and the beauty in which you clothe us as your children. When we are perplexed and confused and what lies ahead is unknown, you stand ahead of us and assure us that we can trust an unknown future to a known God. When we are gripped by our fears, you hold our hands so that we can walk through the shadowy places into the holy ground of your peace which passes understanding. When we long to be free of the things which chain us to past hurts, your strong love breaks the chains, and sadness and bitterness are given up to Jesus on the cross who can bear all things for us. What a glad sound – the Saviour comes.

Gracious God, in this time of worship may each one of us have a fresh anointing of your Holy Spirit, hearing you speak to us and to know that we are in the presence of a living, present, Immanuel, God. Amen.

To prepare ourselves to hear the Scriptures, we sing

Hymn God has spoken StF 157 H&P 64

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

<p>1 God has spoken — by his prophets, spoken his unchanging word ; each from age to age proclaiming God, the one, the righteous Lord. 'Mid the world's despair and turmoil one firm anchor holding fast : God eternal reigns forever, God the first, and God the last.</p> <p>2 God has spoken — by Christ Jesus, Christ, the everlasting Son, brightness of the Father's glory, with the Father ever one ; spoken by the Word incarnate, God from God, ere time was born ; Light from Light, to earth descending, Christ, revealing God to all.</p>	<p>3 God is speaking — by the Spirit, speaking to our hearts again, in the age-long word expounding God's own message, now as then. Through the rise and fall of nations one sure faith is standing fast ; God still speaks, the Word unchanging, God the first, and God the last.</p> <p>George Wallace Briggs (1875–1959)</p>
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BIBLE READINGS

Parts of the lectionary Old Testament and Gospel and replacing the lectionary Epistle with a reading from Ephesians.

Isaiah 11 verses 1-5

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—

³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;

⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

⁵Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Ephesians 2 verses 14-22

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Matthew 3 verses 1-6

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"

⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

SERMON

https://drive.google.com/file/d/12qJ6zv6jJYgTUmGU7wtfmsBMiwDxzbQN/view?usp=share_link

Researching family history has become an absorbing hobby for many people. When Nigel first retired he carried on from the work his parents had done on his side of the family and then did mine. It is not only a hobby – on the TV we have seen and continue to see many programs where famous people are looking into the distant past of their family tree, uncovering some things may have been best left unknown and bring forth tears and some things which delight them. Advances in science have meant that our blood and hair and saliva and bodily cells can be tested. Through those tests and our DNA much can be discovered about who we are related to, what we have inherited from them. Sadly some of these things are inherited medical conditions which can be life shortening or life limiting -if that affects you or your loved ones, I give my sincere condolences for any struggle that is causing. I have struggled with an inherited condition which hasn't shortened my life but has in the past made it difficult and today gives me a great deal of anxiety when I am speaking in public. This condition can't be discovered using DNA but is easily seen through family history. My paternal great great grandfather had a stammer as did two his sons, as did my grandfather and one of his brothers and did I for many many years until extensive speech therapy helped me to gain reasonable fluency. Most days okay sometimes not so good though! I was always concerned my children or grandchildren would be likewise challenged and in due course our youngest grandson, now 8, was slow to gain language and then has had to have much speech therapy for a condition akin to stammering which has caused great communication problems for him at school.

Sometimes what we rejoice in, like good skin (my daughters and I are proud of that!) or what we struggle with like Nigel's short arms and short legs can be easily traced to our genetic code.

We see in Scripture that lineage was the foundation of the proud self image of God's people. Look to Abraham your Father was the cry of Isaiah (chapter 51) Why? Because out of him, in Genesis 12, God made His people. In Matthew chapter 1 and in Luke chapter 3 we see laid out the family history which led to Jesus. Through looking at our family history, looking into our genetic code, we see there is more to what makes us who we are than what we have attempted to make of ourselves.

I chose to swap out the set New Testament Romans reading for one in Ephesians chapter 2. The Jewish converts in the early church were much concerned with the Gentile converts not having that inheritance. So they attempted to 'put this right' by making the Gentiles one of them: be circumcised, follow our food laws, be a Jewish insider in order to qualify to be part of the family. However, the Ephesians writer gets to the heart of it: *He has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one family breaking down the wall that used to separate us. And he has brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were*

very far away from him, and to us Jews who were near. Now all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, may come to God the Father with the Holy Spirit's help because of what Christ has done for us.

One of my theological college friends was even in her 20s very much still caught up with her parents having never married. In many places in the 1940s and 1950s when she was growing up this was not acceptable and she was stigmatised with an 'illegitimate' label. A sense of not belonging in 'proper society' followed her into her adult life.

Where we come from, where we belong, is at the heart of family history, our DNA. It is also true of our inheritance as those who call themselves by the name of Christian but DIFFERENT. Different because we are using a different family tree to define who we are. We are inheritors of whose family line goes from Abraham to Jesse and David, through to Jesus Himself whose Father is our Father, whose disciples are our family. And it doesn't matter what label our history or our circumstances put on us.. as St Paul says in Galatians 3

In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the covenant promises.

I do feel a bit awkward that I have left out John the Baptist who is the focus of the New Testament Lectionary Gospel reading today. I think, if he is listening from the Communion of Saints, he will forgive me. His mission was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. I hope my message will prepare you during this Advent for the Christmas coming: the message that whoever you are, wherever you have been, whatever your ancestors bequeathed to you through your DNA, whatever label you give yourself (me, recovering stammerer) or are given by others, none of that matters: all that matters is, from the epistle reading:

Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.

So let's hear a reading from the New Testament now. We will most likely hear it again sometime this month:

John 1

⁶ *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

⁷ *The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.*

⁸ *He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.*

⁹ *That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*

¹¹ *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

¹² *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

¹³ *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

My sisters and brothers, family members in the Body of Christ, let us rest in that.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we confess before you and before one another that we have not always lived the family life that Jesus laid out for us- to love our neighbour as ourselves. In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be; that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.

Jesus said that whoever comes to Him, He will never turn away. In a moment of quiet, thank God for the mercy that is shown to us and rededicate your life to His ways.

HYMN O come, O come Immanuel StF 180 H&P 85

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

<p>1 O come, O come, Immanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear : <i>Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you, O Israel.</i></p> <p>2 O come, O come, O Lord of might who to your tribes, on Sinai's height, in ancient times did give the law in cloud, and majesty, and awe :</p> <p>3 O come, O Rod of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny ; from depths of hell your people save, and give them victory o'er the grave :</p>	<p>4 O come, O Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home ; make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery :</p> <p>5 O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by your advent here ; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight :</p> <p>Latin, 18th century, based on the ancient <i>Advent Antiphons</i> <i>translated by John Mason Neale (1811–1866)</i></p>
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INTERCESSIONS.

Saving God, through the words of Isaiah and John the Baptist, you have proclaimed unfolding future joy and renewed life. Therefore we bring our prayers before you with confidence.

Saving God, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. We pray that by our worship and by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we may likewise make straight paths for others to come to faith. Nourish and tend your church that we may be strong and fit to serve this present age so that like John the Baptist we will confront injustice and wrongdoing. We ask also that you will give us grace so that like John the Baptist we may proclaim your forgiveness for all who seek Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Saving God, you sent John the Baptist to straighten the crooked and level the rocky paths. We ask you to raise up leaders who will promote conditions where all may flourish, defending the poor and the weak, the vulnerable and those easily overlooked. As we are now part way through the 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence , we offer our prayers for those who are affected by its many manifestations. As John the Baptist spoke out against unrighteousness, may we too speak out with one accord in solidarity with those suffer such violence. We pray that those in positions of power and influence will be strengthened in their actions to right those wrongs, prevent future happenings and bring in a secure and life enhancing future for all.

Saving God, you sent John the Baptist out, empowered by your word. We pray that your words of healing and peace will be heard by those who are struggling for survival, those whose lives have collapsed around them, those who have been stripped of their dignity, those who have lost hope.

And now in a moment of quiet any who are on our hearts and minds.....

Saving God, you sent John the Baptist to proclaim your redeeming presence. We remember before you those who we have loved and who have gone before us to that place where countless angels dwell and where there is no more sorrow and no more pain, and who dwell in the heavenly Jerusalem and see you face to

face. Also, may those who at this time are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil but know that you are with them and that they will dwell with you in the heavenly Jerusalem.

We gather all our prayers in the words that Jesus taught us... Our Father, who art in heaven.....

HYMN Lord your church on earth is seeking StF 410 H&P 774

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e77x9gVYW2A>

<p>1 Lord, your Church on earth is seeking your renewal from above ; teach us all the art of speaking with the accent of your love. We would heed your great commission : sending us to every place — preach, baptise, fulfil my mission, serve with love and share my grace.</p> <p>2 Freedom give to those in bondage, lift the burdens caused by sin. Give new hope, new strength and courage, grant release from fears within : light for darkness ; joy for sorrow ; love for hatred ; peace for strife. These and countless blessings follow as the Spirit gives new life.</p>	<p>3 In the streets of every city where the bruised and lonely dwell, let us show the Saviour's pity, let us of his mercy tell. In all lands and with all races let us serve, and seek to bring all the world to render praises, Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.</p> <p>Hugh Sherlock (1905–1998)</p>
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Closing prayer.

May the Breath of the Most High, love pervading and permeating all creation; come to us this Advent. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. May we go forward from this moment to voice His praise unto the world's end until all the earth, people and creatures and oceans and land are full of justice and righteousness, telling of the Glory of God. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Amen (*adapted from C.M. Armitage*).

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.