

10th December, 2023

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe,

light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

O Holy Night!
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of dear Saviour's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error
pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its
worth.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious
morn!

Fall on your knees
Oh hear the angel voices
Oh night divine
Oh night when Christ was born
Oh night divine
Oh night divine

Led by the light of Faith serenely
beaming
With glowing hearts by His cradle we
stand
So led by light of a star sweetly
gleaming

Here come the wise men from Orient
land
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly
manger
In all our trials born to be our friend

Fall on your knees ...

Truly He taught us to love one another
His law is love and His gospel is peace
Chains shall He break for the slave is
our brother
And in His name all oppression shall
cease
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus
raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.

Fall on your knees

The Sermon by Matt Senior

Read 2 Peter 3.8-16 and Mark 1.1-8. Prepare the Way

I was watching a video of a young boy telling his mum what his role in the school nativity would be.

“Guess what I am in the nativity”, he says, “it’s a classic part.”

Mum guesses at Joseph, then a wise man, before giving in and asking who he is playing.

The boy responds, “I’m door holder number 3... I’ll be holding doors for Mary and Joseph.”

Holding doors for Mary and Joseph, and by extension, holding doors for Jesus.

Advent is a season of waiting, for Christmas and for Jesus’ return. We don’t know when Jesus will come again. Until Jesus does return, advent or not, we are left waiting.

Waiting for “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” We’re told that this will happen following nations rising against nation, earthquakes, famines, and days of unequalled distress. It’s no wonder that people have for a very long time suggested that Jesus’ return is imminent, because we’ve all seen these things our entire lives.

In last week’s Mark passage, Jesus said when we see these things happening, the time “is near – right at the door,” but God’s time keeping seems to be completely off. Sometimes I look around, or I watch the news and think, God, what are you waiting for? How long are you going to let this go on?

So today’s first reading from 2 Peter serves as a good reminder for me that God is not like me.

“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years... The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Thank God for that patience, because when Jesus returns we read, “The heavens will disappear with a roar...and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.”

I can see why God would want to bring as many people alongside him as possible before that happens.

Still, waiting for Jesus’ return is hard and we know it could be a really long time.

So in the meantime we prepare the way. We can prepare ourselves and we can help prepare others.

Our 2 Peter passage says, “So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

No small task! Then it continues, “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation.”

I’ve been thinking a lot about God’s patience. I’m not sure I’ve ever fully thought about God being patient with me. Forgiving? - yes. I know that when I mess up God will forgive me. But if God is *patient* with me, it feels different, understanding, loving. He is patient with me, with all of us.

That doesn’t make being found spotless and blameless easy, but it I feel more confident about trying.

We have a great number of tools that we can avail ourselves of to live the life that Jesus wants for us; direct access to God through prayer, his written word in the Bible, we can belong to a church which suffers no persecution, we can belong to a small, and a multitude of online materials to help us.

If we can find the discipline to practice our faith in practical, meaningful way, investing in our relationship with our Saviour, it will only bring us closer to God. And when it goes wrong, the good news is that God is patient.

We can also help to prepare the way for others – this is what John the Baptist was doing.

Rather than going to where the people are, John appears in the wilderness. And, “The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.” In the wilderness – a place of isolation – John was anything other than isolated. Maybe John was such a striking, charismatic figure that people would go to lengths to find him? We’re told that John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and he ate wild honey and locusts. It’s probably not the type of image we’d go with if we were trying to attract people to the church, but it works for John.

I think what John may have been doing was showing that he was not someone to be worshipped. His message was that someone else was coming, someone greater, whose sandals he was “not worthy to stoop down and untie.” By making himself lower, John pointed to Jesus as the one who people were waiting for.

In our lives, we are to point to Jesus, not following the ways of the world - elevating ourselves and striving for ever more comfort - we’re to elevate *his* name and strive for his kingdom to come.

We can pray for those around us and invite them to know the one that is greater than we are. Are we inviting people to share in our carol events, and Christmas services? And are we ready to be welcoming to those who find their way into our building this Christmas?

In our preparation for Jesus’ return we have plenty to be getting on with, but at some point, Jesus will return and all the preparations end.

I'm reminded of the story of Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary (Luke 10). While Jesus is at their home we're told Martha is distracted by all the preparations of hosting. She gets on with the work, while Mary sits at Jesus' feet listening.

Martha can come out of the story as the person who misses the point, but she does something crucial, "[Jesus] came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him."

Martha prepared the way. Jesus arrived and she opened her door to him.

When Jesus returns, we need to be sure we let him in. We need to be door holders, opening our door to Jesus. It is a classic part.

***Second Sunday of Advent:** O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.*

***The Lord's Prayer:** Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

***Blessing** to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).*

***The Notices:** We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.*

- Christmas Party for Chatters, Bowlers and Coffee & Questioners: Wed. Dec 20th at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Jan 24th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Carol Services: 5pm and 7pm December 17th.
- Christmas Day Celebration at 9.30am
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.