

Sunday 29th November 2020

1st in Advent, you are invited to have a single candle to light during the service

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
though separate let us worship together in God.

ADVENT

Amidst the clamour of a census
Divine movements were afoot.
'Veni', you said, and all
Eternity cascaded to earth in one moment.
Now we await you again
Trembling with excitement, anticipation
and apprehension.

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Suggested Hymn Come thou long expected Jesus
Watch [here](#)

Prayer

Loving God we gather together to wait in anticipation and expectation. In our waiting we praise you and give you thanks for your many gifts to us. We praise you for creation in all its variety and wonder, and for that moment in time when life as we know it became a reality and time in space was born. We praise you for the creation of life, and in particular for the birth of a boy in a stable whose presence was to change the path of history for millions. We thank you for the part that life has meant to our own journey and that because of Jesus we meet together now, seeking to follow the example of Jesus and play our part in changing the path of the world. We come together to anticipate the moment we celebrate the birth of Jesus and to share our expectation that in you we will always find hope. In our waiting we share together the words of prayer that have been the pattern for all Christians through history,
Our father

Advent Candle (You are invited to light a single candle at the appropriate moment)

Read Isaiah 11: 1-5

Like a branch that sprouts from a stump, someone from David's family will someday be king.
The Spirit of the LORD will be with him to give him understanding, wisdom, and insight.
He will be powerful, and he will know and honour the LORD.
His greatest joy will be to obey the LORD.
This king won't judge by appearances or listen to rumours.
The poor and the needy will be treated with fairness and with justice.
His word will be law everywhere in the land, and criminals will be put to death.
Honesty and fairness will be his royal robes.

Throughout the Bible we hear of prophets foretelling the path of God's people.
Throughout history wise people have foretold new ideas and directions.
Throughout this year scientists have sought to guide the decisionmakers to limit the effect of the pandemic.

Prayer

We pray for those who seek to guide and those who seek to lead. May their thoughts be wise and insightful and their action just and fair. May we seek to understand and trust, and act responsibly.

Light Candle

We light this candle for the prophets and the powerful of the world, and for the hope of God's promise to humanity.

Sing (*tune St Bees, listen [here](#)*)

In the darkness comes a light,
light of hope for all to see.

Hold the light within your heart
pray for all humanity.

Intro

Have you ever bought a gift for someone and because you know it is something that they really want found it difficult to wait to present the gift? Or have you received a gift with a label that says do not open until, and found it really hard to wait? Waiting is not something we are particularly good at. The world we live in does little to help, instant credit, mobile phones, e-mails are all about here and now and are the opposite of the stories of saving for the things you really want and waiting eagerly for a reply to a letter. Waiting can often trigger a whole cacophony of emotions - frustration, anticipation, indignation, irritation, intrigue, or a mixture of some or all.

So perhaps it is little surprise that we do not do Advent very well; but Advent enhances our experience of not just Christmas but the season and the month of December.

David Adam in his Advent course 'Looking and Longing', comments that

- Advent means to come but also to arrive – *it is our journey as well as our expectation*
- Advent is a celebration of relationship
- Advent celebrates the eternal coming of God into our lives and the world – *the building of our relationship with God*
- Without Advent Christmas is reduced
- Advent is a time to sense the stories and build relationships within your own experience

The big picture, the story of humanity and our relationship with God, is woven into the stories of scripture and we find hints of waiting within that framework.

Reading

Isaiah 40:1-11

Reflection

Israel was waiting for release from exile (at least most of them were, some were quite happy in their new surroundings). Israel was also waiting for the Messiah, the one who would overcome their enemies and lead the people to freedom. The coming of the Messiah would also herald the end times when the world would be transformed.

Reading

Mark 1:1-8

Reflection

In Mark we read of John the Baptist echoing the words of Isaiah as he prepares the way for Jesus (or at least for a figure many read as Jesus, although most Jews have never accepted Jesus as the Messiah and are still waiting). How you view the end times largely depends on what you believe. The Jewish people are quite secure in their understanding that they will be OK, God has promised that. Many Christians believe that they will be OK because they have ticked the boxes, indeed for many ticking the boxes is what life is all about. Other Christians view the end times quite differently and see the purpose of life to make a difference now, as the Kingdom has come partly through Jesus.

Reading

2 Peter 3:8-15a

reflection

The author of 2 Peter has something to say about the end times, don't be impatient. God will bring about the transformation of both earth and heaven in his time. We can only imagine the sort of talk that brought about the letter, perhaps the community the author was writing to was largely Jewish

Christians and they were beginning to wonder when Jesus would return and Judgement Day happen – the author says God is not slow but patient, God wants as many as possible to reach maturity of Spirit before that time. While we wait we are urged to strive for peace and to be without spot or blemish, to become more like Jesus, more Christ-like and our waiting is the time to start or continue our spiritual journey.

You might say we are waiting for a re-birth into true self, the discovery of God. The waiting and the journey are important. One of the great experiences of human waiting is pregnancy –yet no-one who is pregnant wants the waiting cut short and the baby to arrive early. Pregnant waiting involves the slow growth of a new life, it appears passive externally and yet inwardly all manner of things are changing. Waiting is not merely the passing of time between conception and birth but has a deep transformative value of its own. Waiting is not ‘doing nothing’ although Spiritual waiting can involve a lot of stillness or quiet reflection.

Sue Monk Kidd in her book ‘When the heart waits’ writes about this and tells of her experience of visiting an abbey for a retreat and struggling with stillness. As she walked back to lunch, she saw a young monk sat perfectly still, a picture of waiting. Later she asked him about it saying that she was struggling with waiting and that she could not get to grips with doing nothing. His reply was profound – that’s the problem you’ve bought into the cultural myth that when you are waiting you are doing nothing. Placing his hand on her shoulders and looking her in the eyes he said *‘when you are waiting you are not doing nothing; you are doing the most important thing there is. You are allowing your soul to grow up. If you can’t be still and wait you cannot become what God created you to be’*.

The life cycle of the caterpillar involves waiting as it is transformed into that which it was meant to be. When a caterpillar weaves its cocoon it is held in place by a cremaster, the cremaster is an anchor point, a still point. T S Elliot writes about the still point in his poem Burnt Norton,

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.

Making a cocoon and the transformation that goes on inside it involves weaving an environment of prayer, but not the sort of prayer we usually think of. It is not about talking or doing or even thinking, it is about posture. It is turning yourself upside down so everything is emptied out and God can flow in.

Hildegard of Bingen put it this way,

God hugs you.

You are encircled by the arms of the mystery of God

This advent why not recognise the waiting? Our circumstances are such that we have all had to learn patience and how to wait, so take time to be still and begin your journey letting your soul grow so you become your God given self.

Waiting

Wonderful God,
Amidst the bustle of life
Instil in us patience.
Take our moments and make them
Incarnate, a living experience of hope;
Nativity in our flesh;
Growing God in our being. *Heather Whyte 08*

Take a moment to listen to Enya's beautifully haunting version of O come, O come Emmanuel
Watch [here](#)

Prayers

Loving God, we feel a bit like the Israelites, exiled from our buildings, exiled from everything we are used to and surviving in a world that feels foreign. We are frustrated, irritated and sometimes indignant but you are with us and you invite us to explore patience and love as we wait to move on. When the Israelites returned, they found a new world, things had changed, and we suspect it will be the same for us. May we open to the changes that we find and keen to explore new ways.
In the waiting there is hope.

Loving God may we wait patiently growing love in our lives.

Loving God, as we move into Advent may we be ready, like John, to share the message of the coming of Jesus and all that his message means for the world. It is a message of hope in adversity, of strength in the face of oppression, of oneness in the journey of life. It is a message filled with the passion of justice and the dream of the kingdom. As we spend time reflecting on all that Jesus means to us may we be inspired to find new ways of sharing your love with those around us in our communities. May our eyes be open to need, our hearts responsive and our hands willing to reach out and help in creative ways, sharing all that we have with those who have need.
In the waiting there is hope.

Loving God may we wait patiently growing love in our lives.

Loving God, we are not always patient, we find being still a challenge and yet it is in stillness and patience that discover the depth of our connection with you and with each other. When those around us are anxious, frustrated and irritated may we speak the calm of your love in a way that is accessible and encouraging. When those around do not seem to understand the need for patience may we demonstrate the responsibility of love and speak words of calm.
In the waiting there is hope.

Loving God may we wait patiently growing love in our lives.

Eternal God, beyond time and space, in you we find the stillpoint that can transform our lives, may we recognise those moments and learn the dance of waiting, recognising your presence with us through the relationships we build and the love we share.

We sit in silence for a moment in anticipation of our journey through advent and offer you our friends and family and all those we know who are facing challenges, especially those alone, ill or grieving and those afraid of the future.

In the waiting there is hope.

Loving God may we wait patiently growing love in our lives.

In Jesus name, Amen

Our offering to God.

As we continue to worship apart but together, we pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church through our continued offering and by exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know your blessing on all we do. Amen

Hymn (Tune St Columba Listen [here](#))

We wait on God with open hearts
and long to feel God's touch;
to hear God's words within our souls,
such moments mean so much.

Yet still the world turns endless on
and life distracts our gaze,
impatience fills our waking time,
our moments turn to days.

O Lord of life we long to stop
and sit for just a while
within the picture of your place,
your kingdom makes us smile.

Instil in us your heart's desire
that we may truly be
at one with you, at one with self,
the person you can see.

Within your picture here on earth,
our waiting not in vain,
we stand with those gone long before
and sense we are the same.

A people waiting for a time
when love will reign supreme,
when fear and fight are put to flight,
your kingdom not a dream.

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Blessing

May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.