

# Advent Sunday: Order of Service

## Introduction

We extend a very warm welcome to you on this the first Sunday of Advent where we will be reflecting on the themes of hoping and waiting. This service is brought to you by the churches of Dunnington, Holtby, Warthill and Stockton on the Forest here in the benefice of Rural East York. My name is Mark Poole and I am privileged to be the curate here serving alongside our Rector, Nick Bird.

Let us pray

We come from scattered lives to meet with God.  
Come, let us recognise his presence with us.

Come O God, come and be with us in our watching and our waiting. We put our trust in you.  
Come O God, come and walk with us as we journey through Advent towards Christmas.  
You alone are the light that shines in our darkness, and we put our trust in you.  
Amen.

## Hymn

Take me, Lord, use my life in the way you wish to do.  
Fill me, Lord, touch my heart till it always thinks of you.  
Take me now, as I am, this is all I can offer.  
Here today I, the clay, will be moulded by my Lord.

Lord, I pray that each day I will listen to your will.  
Many times I have failed but I know you love me still.  
Teach me now, guide me, Lord, keep me close to you always.  
Here today I, the clay, will be moulded by my Lord.

I am weak, fill me now with your strength and set me free.  
Make me whole, fashion me so that you will live in me.  
Hold me now in your hands, form me now with your Spirit.  
Here today I, the clay, will be moulded by my Lord.

## Prayers of Preparation

Let us pray.

O Shepherd of Israel, that led Joseph like a flock,  
gather our thoughts, gather our prayers together.  
Though at different times, though in different places,  
near and far, we are one in you.

Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim,  
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.  
Stir up your mighty strength  
and come to our salvation.

May we find comfort in our worship together,  
we who are hopeful, we who despair,  
we who are frantic, we who are lonely,  
we who rejoice, we who mourn,  
we who are together,  
we who are apart,  
we who wait,  
may all we think and do and say be in service of your kingdom  
and to your glory, O hope of the nations.

A voice cries out in the wilderness,  
'Make straight the way of the Lord.'  
So let us listen, and turn to the Lord in penitence and faith.

Lord Jesus, you came to gather the nations  
into the peace of your kingdom:  
Lord, have mercy.

You come in word and silence  
to strengthen us in holiness:  
Christ, have mercy.

You will come in glory  
with salvation for your people:  
Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God,  
as your kingdom dawns,  
turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness,  
that we may be ever ready to meet you  
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

## Reading

### 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

# Homily - Terry Joyce

Today is the start of the church's New Year. Last time I spoke in one of these services, I referred to the lectionary (that was on All Saints Day, 1st Nov if you didn't catch it). Well, the cycle of the lectionary for the next year starts today – Advent Sunday! So Happy New Year everyone!

I know it's a bit strange saying that on 29th Nov. But it got me thinking – so humour me for a bit and stick with it? Let's just do a bit of New Year today.

You see, I was thinking – what's our Christmas greetings going to be like this year?

Christmas Cards – normal greeting 'Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year' – when we're not too sure what either will be like. 'Merry' sort of implies people, partying and drinking – and it's going to be a bit limited this year. Even 'Happy New Year' has been fine for every year up until now, but it sort of begs for more qualification or even clarification – better New Year?

And Christmas 'Round Robins' – for those who send them with their cards – what will they, what can they say? What a year that was? A year like no other. 2020 - Cancelled – better luck next year!

There's a lot we've lost this year as Coronavirus has reeked its havoc – I think we know what those things are! And there'll be no shortage of reflection as we draw towards the end of the calendar year.

But there's a lot we've learnt too!

- Well perhaps how much we need each other? Especially in the first lockdown – because it was longer – it brought the best out in us in many ways – I know the weather was better, but even so
- Our distancing has revealed our need for company, support, intimacy (hugs & kisses). We've been reminded that we might moan a bit, but actually we're not easily defeated.
- Perhaps we've learnt how much of our liberty we have taken for granted? We've learnt that nothing can be taken for granted. Norms are only norms for as long as they are normal (as opposed to extraordinary), but we have learnt that norms that take ages to build can be knocked apart in a very short time. We are not in control of as much as we thought!

And the Church has learnt a bit about itself too!

We've not been happy about the closure of church buildings, but we've cracked on. Shutting buildings doesn't shut the church, as we've said many times, but it does change it. This new-found ability to stream our worship will have implications for the way we re-emerge – we might not know what they are yet, beyond knowing we reach more people, but we've had a glimpse at a new way to communicate.

With that and other things, we can either mourn the loss of what was familiar, or we take responsibility for shaping what might become – daring to be bold, creative and humble in our New Year resolutions as we renew our worship.

2020 will undoubtedly have stung us financially as a church, but in other ways I think we may look back on this year as a watershed moment where our growth as followers of Jesus Christ intensifies - alongside our sacrificial service and care for our communities in his name.

Back to our preparations for Christmas, which Advent signals.

The Church of England has a media campaign called 'Comfort and Joy' for this year. As we anticipate an unusual Christmas, with a changed shape to our collective worship, I'm hoping it helps us all to get closer to

the heart of Christmas and what it means and can mean! It's interesting that Christmas usually just comes towards us at a relentless pace; but this year, when it's under threat, we've been fighting for it!

I wasn't too sure about 'comfort' at first – I needed to think about it!

I wondered about the significance of comfort in our common understanding – like beds & sofas or 'comfort zones' – because it's said that nothing grows in a comfort zone – so is that what we're offering, much as we might like it?

But I went to look in the Bible to see that 'comfort' is about having our minds put at rest, being refreshed, gaining clarity, confidence and hope. It's the result of, for instance, the angel's words to Elizabeth, Mary & the Shepherds 'Fear Not' which set them on their respective adventures! And Jesus words to his friends, 'Fear Not' - just when they needed to hear it. Comfort doesn't exist for itself, but in order to strengthen us. And joy – well it goes with it perfectly. Joy isn't a feeling, like happiness; it's a disposition, a way of being. It's a fruit of the Spirit – and in the Bible true joy often emerges out of challenge or suffering, (like Paul's rejoicing in Philippians, written in the lockdown of a prison cell. It's knowing we are God's and in his hands. Our gospel – of light shining in the darkness – is rich, and I think has special resonance for such a time as this. Comfort and joy are what we have to offer, not just for Christmas, but year round!" And that enables us to meet challenges, not cower away. We need this and we need to build one another up in faith as we venture into an uncertain but hopeful New Year of 2021 and beyond.

So for this New Year, I bring you early tidings of comfort and joy to urge you and inspire you!

## Meditation

From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.

At the turning of a troubling year, we wait: for Christmas, for normality, for healing.  
We wait for the light: with excitement, hope and trepidation.  
We wait, secure in the knowledge that God is the one who waits with us  
and the one who comes to meet us:  
that God's love is an ever-present comfort, however dark the night;  
that God's arms enfold us, however cold the day.

Let us spend a few minutes, waiting together,  
deeply aware of our care for one another, and of God's love for each one of us.  
And as we wait, let us pray:  
Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

## O Sapientia - O Adonai

O wisdom, whose spirit swept over the deep,  
bringing order and form,  
through whose eternal Word all things came into being:  
come to us, in our confusion, our ignorance, our chaos.  
Be our guide and our light on the road.  
Be our still water and our journey's end.

O Adonai, almighty Lord,

source and fulfilment of the law,  
whose Spirit, dwelling in our hearts,  
gives us a new commandment:  
that we love one another, as Christ loves us.

Be the wisdom and strength of those  
who are working to help us through the pandemic:  
those who care for the sick,  
those who are developing vaccines,  
and planning how they can be delivered.

We pray too for those who are looking for ways to rebuild the economy.  
Grant them a vision of your Kingdom,  
that they may strive for equality, justice and compassion,  
in all they do.

### O Radix Jesse - Rex Gentium

O root of Jesse, a sign to the nations,  
a rebuke to the powerful,  
who raises up prophets,  
that God's message of peace may be heard in the land.

We pray for those who suffer injustice:  
for the lives shortened by poverty, war and exploitation,  
for the pain and anger which is sown by racism and all forms of bigotry.  
We pray for those who have been silenced and ignored,  
whose suffering has been sidelined, while the powerful are protected.

Help us to reject all forms of prejudice in our own lives,  
and to work for a society where all God's children have an equal place.

O key of David, who leads us like a flock,  
whose Son, our Saviour, frees us to a life of joy,  
who rescues us from the darkness,  
and brings us comfort.

We pray for those who suffer in body, mind and spirit:  
for those who have been bereaved by and during the pandemic,  
for those who are sick,  
especially those whose lives have been made more difficult  
by the effects of the lockdowns:  
delayed treatments and diagnoses,  
increased anxiety, lonely pain.

O Lord, our rescuer and redeemer,  
who unlocks the shackles, and frees the imprisoned,  
lead us out of darkness, into your glorious light.  
Grant patience, healing and peace to all who suffer,  
and all those who watch over them.

## O Clavis David - O Oriens

O morning star,  
splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness.  
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness.

As we wait, and watch for the morning star, for healing, for redemption,  
we wait in the sure and certain knowledge of God's love for us.

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 for ever.  
Amen.

## Hymn

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here,  
until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice, rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou rod of Jesse, free  
thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell thy people save,  
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave:  
Rejoice, rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer  
our spirits by thine advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice, rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Key of David, come  
and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery.  
Rejoice, rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, thou Lord of might,  
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times didst give the Law,  
in cloud and majesty and awe.

Rejoice, rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

## Blessing

I wish to express my huge gratitude to all who have been involved in preparing today's worship for us all to share in. I don't think that ever before have so many different people been able and willing to contribute, and if you are feeling that you too would like to be involved, please do get in touch.

We are developing provisional plans for Christmas, and hope to share these soon.

Our benefice magazine has been available online each month through the St Nicholas Dunnington website, so do explore that. You can also access back copies from the past 6 months or so. We are planning to print and distribute the Grapevine magazine right across the benefice in the run up to Christmas.

We have no plans to stop producing worship that can be joined in with online. Next week our service will be a Christingle-based one, in which everyone can join in and enjoy. The following week will be another communion service, and on the 20th December we shall be putting out a carol service. And finally, we shall create something short and joyful for Christmas Day, before taking a bit of a rest until the new year.

I invite you to open your heart to God's blessing as we enter Advent:

Go now and let the Lord steer you in the way of truth.

Be on your guard so that you will not be caught up  
in the trivialities and anxieties of the world.

Be alert at all times and pray for strength  
to escape the traps that would keep you from God.

And may God make you increase in love for one another;  
May Christ Jesus teach you how to live in God's ways;  
and may the Holy Spirit strengthen your hearts in holiness,  
as you ready yourselves for the coming of the Lord.

And the blessing of God almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with you and those whom you love and pray for  
now and always. Amen.