

Welcome everyone, wherever you are, once again to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church on this first Sunday in Advent – for me, as, I suspect, for many – perhaps the most profound, certainly the most atmospheric season in the Christian year.

As the national lockdown ends and Bristol goes into a period of ‘Tier 3’ restrictions, with the prospect of a degree more relaxation over Christmas, we find ourselves bewildered in this extraordinary year, when so much that was for so long ‘normal’ about our freedom to come and go and mix and make something of life, has been taken away. Difficult, barren times, bringing much uncertainty, economic hardship and anxiety - and illness, of course. In such times the Christian season of Advent comes to the fore – the waiting time; a dark time, a barren time..

Yet, it is a time shot through with hope. Christ is coming; into the world at Christmas; into the lives of those who own Him; into his Lordship over all things, for all time – that’s the glorious tension of Advent; waiting *now* for Christmas in a few weeks and waiting *always* for the promised return of the King – all collapsed into each and every moment as we wait for the imminent, immediate, knowledge of His presence.

So Advent begins. Sunday by Sunday we will light candles, to shine a hopeful light in a dark world. And as we do so, Tyndale’s singing group sings ‘*Come now Lord Jesus*

Advent Candle lighting song - 'Come now Lord Jesus'

Tyndale Virtual singing group

Call to Worship

Leader This first advent candle will shine here in hope -
All **Wherever we are we each have our dreams.**
Leader Some remain thankful, some have grown fearful,
All **Much in this year has made the world tearful -**
Leader But the candlelight shines here with hope,
All **And in this strange year as we watch for the lighting**
Leader So we wait and we hope and we hold to our dreams.

Leader This first advent candle will shine here for Christ -
All **As we look to the lighting we reach out in faith.**
Leader Some remain faith-full, others are doubtful,
All **All are surrounded – the barren, the fruitful –**
Leader By the candle-like shining of Christ;
All **We may trust in his love and his loving,**
Leader His living, his dying, his truth.

Leader The first advent candle will shine in the world -
All **At this candle’s first lighting we hope as we pray.**
Leader Many are grieving, lonely and fearful,
All **Many are hoping, though careworn and tearful;**
Leader This light is a sign of the light-giving Lord
All **We will trust in his love, his forgiving,**
Leader His holding, his coming, his Day.

BPW 144 ['O come, O come Emmanuel'](#)

Opening Prayer

Immanuel, God with us – Lord, we worship you at the beginning of Advent as it’s great hope comes into view – the promise that you will be with us – and in that hope we worship.

Lord of might – Lord we worship you as the atmosphere of Advent begins to spread into our world, through all its darkness and distress – and in that atmosphere we worship..

Rod of Jesse – Lord we worship you as the ancient roots of Advent work their way under us and over us, with ideas and promises from another territory – and so rooted, we worship..

Dayspring – Lord we worship you as the heart of Advent begins to lighten even these dark days and they begin slowly to give way to daylight – and with lifted hearts we worship you

Key of David – Lord we worship you as the promise of Advent once more does its work in us – we look back and look forward and we worship you

For Christ is coming..God is with us and our world. The might and power of suffering and death are subsumed

into the eternal life of the living, dying, rising, coming Lord by the power of God's love – Amen, Come, Lord Jesus.

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

'Into the darkness'

Maggie Dawn

Reading [Isaiah 64.1-9](#)

'Amen'

Chicago Church of Christ virtual choir

Reading [Mark 13.24-37](#)

Sermon

Lord, we give you this time; may what is spoken ring with truth, may what is heard and understood be touched by your Spirit, and may what is decided lead us on toward your Kingdom

I hardly need to say that our world is in a mess as Advent begins – coronavirus restrictions; economic hardship; anxiety; domestic abuse; illness; death – need I go on?

It's tempting to say it was always like this but the harsh reality is that the uncertainty and suffering that in recent years has been close only to people in war zones, refugee camps and sites of natural disaster has, this year, reached us all.

As one of Job's comforters says to the suffering Job, 'But now it has come to you,' – now it has come to us all – and we are as dismayed and impatient, as was Job; who previously had enjoyed untrammelled prosperity, success, health and good fortune, but from whom it had all been taken away.

Just like us, really. We'd grown used to prosperity in the Western world; annual growth rates, ever-increasing income; a future better than our past, but *now it has come to us all*.

This year, as Advent begins, there's no need artificially to ramp up the sense of frailty – to point to it elsewhere and describe it in a bid to 'enter in' to it ourselves. Now 'it has come to us' – coronavirus restrictions; economic hardship; anxiety; domestic abuse; illness; death - mortality, in a word.

Mortality was always the raw material of Advent, too. Advent used to be overlooked in the rush to Christmas, but recently it's been commercialised to the hilt – expensive Advent Calendars, Christmas markets in November, the annual Christmas advert shmalz-fest – Kevin the Carrot? Really?. Advent has often been just a warm lead-up to Christmas.

But I think, Advent is more real-world than anything like that. This year's Advent brings it home to us; the Bible brings it home to us; Advent readings are all harsh judgement, the imminence of destruction, the darkness of the Day of the Lord.

But the real point of all this is not to dwell on the dreadful, but to recognise Advent as a hopeful, waiting time – in the darkness we believe and trust and hope and wait in a light that is coming –

First, we remember. Advent comes after the remembering of November, but Advent is also a time of remembering.

In the last few chapters of Isaiah, the prophet remembers the glory days of Israel, when the mountains quaked at the presence of God – in Advent we remember, amid all this distress, the days when churches were full, faith was fantastic - the presence of God seemed near –

There were times in all our lives when it was much like that

But don't forget, in all this remembering, that even *in those times* it still seemed as if things used to be better. Don't forget that 80 years ago this week Tyndale was bombed – in Advent! Destruction everywhere! How, then they must have remembered how it used to be. Don't forget that more than 70 years ago this week, Auschwitz was in full operation

Primo Levi describes it, *'By now Christmas is approaching..it is night and it is snowing; it is not easy to keep one's feet..to keep up the pace..'* he goes on to describe black mud, greasy clothes, shaven heads, sickness,

freezing hands..frequent divisions between the fit and the no-longer-fit to live..in Advent, probably! How, then, they must have remembered how good life used to be..

It is always like this, isn't it? When things are hard, we remember – how good things used to be; how once faith was full; how life was better than it is now-

But that's not really the spirit of Advent; the Advent spirit takes us past remembering; it doesn't leave us wallowing in our present predicament; it leads us on, the Advent spirit –

The NT reading for today, from the harsh climax of Mark's gospel, includes the words, '*From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near*'

You've heard the rest of the reading – all about darkness, suffering and tribulation – but *not* remembering – rather, looking forward - *when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near.*

See, that's the thing about Advent – it can seem to drag and it's full of candles and waiting and - one of my favourite words..*yearning* –

And there's no getting round feelings of dismay, impatience, like Job – when will this all end, when will things go back to some kind of normality? The vaccine rollout can't come quick enough, can it? Lockdowns and tiers must end soon, surely –

But the spirit of Advent takes us in a different direction – *not* into impatience at a long-drawn out present or to wishful thinking about a long term future but into – I like to think of it as 'nowness' – the sense that the waiting might be over any moment..that the present darkness might not last for more than another instant – that the yearning is for God's presence that's *just around the next corner of our lives.*

Like when Jesus spoke to his disciples, 'you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn.. he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

For He came into the world when no one was expecting him, at Bethlehem, and he died on a cross when lots of folk were expecting him to save himself, and he rose again when no one was looking for anything like that to happen..

And didn't he say, one time, to those beleaguered disciples – *and we are his beleaguered disciples in this generation, in a world filled with beleaguered, hurting, anxious people* – - there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Or, 'now He has come to you' - Amen, come, Lord Jesus.

'Life is a journey

Mike Garnier

Intercessions

We give thanks for the expertise and hard work of the scientists who continue to develop vaccines and for the trust of the volunteers – we pray for all those involved in planning and organising and who will soon be involved implementing the hoped-for rollout.

We ask that a hopeful spirit will prevail amongst all these involved and that any spirit of mistrust or of injustice will lose force during both the administration and the distribution.

In the life of our world

Your kingdom come, O Lord, Your will be done.

We give thanks for the knowledge, care and dedication of NHS staff at all levels that have greatly improved the outcomes of many who have been struck by this still-dangerous disease – and for those many other hidden public servants – carers, refuse collectors, cleaners, dispensers of food and social care.. We pray for those who, still, are gravely ill from coronavirus or are undergoing treatment for other conditions in this challenging time.

We ask that a spirit of perseverance might prevail amongst those who work and a spirit of comfort will surround those who yet still suffer

In the life of our world

Your kingdom come, O Lord, Your will be done.

We give thanks for the freedoms we have taken for granted and for those we may rediscover in coming days. We pray for those for whom lockdown and tiers bring continuing economic and emotional and physical hardship. We ask that a spirit of gratitude will mark all our lives and that a spirit of help will fill us and reach all who are in need

In the life of our world

Your kingdom come, O Lord, Your will be done.

Words of Offering

And in prayer we dedicate our offering..We give of ourselves in these and all our gifts with grateful hearts. As economic woes spread all around, may generosity lead the way as we look for signs of your Kingdom

The Grace:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.

BPW 139 ['Come thou long expected Jesus'](#)

sung by Fernando Ortega

Blessing

The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore, Amen.

Thanks to Rachel, Sarah, to the Tyndale Singers, to Dave and Rachel for the readings and to Nick & Tina for getting the script out in the post. Thanks to Ian for producing and recording the service in the church.

As the current lockdown ends and we enter another tier, with different restrictions and with some more freedom (which makes life more difficult, in some ways – it's not certain how or if we can open up again for worship – one day at a time, sweet Jesus' as the song has it) and as we enter another week once again I commend everyone to each other's care and concern and call you to pray for each other and the leadership of the church as it seeks the best and most God-honouring way forward..

A 'together though apart' time follows at 11.30 am