

Welcome

Welcome everyone – in church, on line; at home - it's possible, though unlikely I suppose, that you could be watching the recording on a sun-kissed beach somewhere! Anyway, welcome, once again, to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church, on this the third Sunday in Advent.

And once again there are no formal notices in the service, just a reminder that there's to be no standing and no singing – apart from what you are able to utter under your breath, through your masks; which applies as well, of course, to the responses.

So, once again thanks to Ian for the technical work involved today; & to the stewarding team, who as well as stewarding during the service, have to prepare everything beforehand and clean everything down afterwards. As I keep on saying, the best way of showing them your appreciation is by following the directions..

The third Sunday in Advent is traditionally known as 'Gaudete Sunday' – after the first word of the reading of Philippians 4:4 *Rejoice* in the Lord always; again I will say, *Rejoice*'- that, from ancient times in many churches, was used to begin the service. Rejoice.

There has been much rejoicing this week with the first rollout of a vaccine and we will want to share in the happiness that at least, is held out in prospect – but the theme reminds us that rejoicing, inspired by Christian joy, is deeper and more profound than any happy circumstances that may come our way. We rejoice because, under and over and besides all things, we are loved and held for all eternity by God. And we are witnesses to such love – that's part of Advent, too – (lighting the candles)

Advent Candle lighting song 'Come now Lord Jesus'

Tyndale Virtual singing group

Call to Worship

Leader The candle is lit for the witnesses,
All **For those who have heard and are living**
Leader By the way that is laid from cradle to cross
All **That leads from self to the challenge of loss,**
Leader To the duty of service, to the joys of giving,
All **This is the way of the witnesses.**

Leader The candle shines for those who speak
All **Of God who has loved them, forgiving**
Leader Every time that they fall and bringing them hope
All **To guide and change and slowly to shape**
Leader Every moment by loving; each hour receiving
All **His spirit for speaking and witnessing.**

Leader We will shine like the candle, as witnesses.
All **We'll grow bright with the warmth of his loving**
Leader In the moments we care, each minute, each hour,
All **Hope will rise clear in our hearts as we pour**
Leader All our hoping on Jesus; His truth is proving
All **The light in the hearts of the witnesses.**

['Hark the glad sound'](#)

Victoria Methodist Church virtual choir

Opening Prayer

Lord, we rejoice at your love, and we worship; we sense your love, at work in our hearts and set loose in the world by Christ, we recognise that the deep joy He brings lies beneath every circumstance, and we worship. We have heard the story of your love, in the stories of the ancients, in the story of Jesus – and we worship; we follow on from all those who have witnessed to your love in the world down all the years; we are called to witness in this generation, and we worship.

For the world's sufferings have been taken into your very heart and overcome – and we rejoice; we have been lifted out of the mire of our sinfulness, and we rejoice; around us the world quakes with fear and runs after every sign of happiness or ease or normality, but we would witness to deep things in such a world – and we worship as we rejoice.

Lord, forgive us when we have allowed our joy to give way to transient pleasure or failed to share the deep things of God with others who are distracted by worldliness – forgive us and restore us we pray – as we wait on your word (pause) – John writes: “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” thanks be to God.

Now Lord, we, the witnesses to your love and saving power in Christ, as we rejoice once more with thankful hearts we ask you to renew in us once more that deep joy so that we might rejoice in our lives and continue to witness in the world

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

'Christ be our light'

Bernadette Farrel

Reading: Isaiah 61.1-4,8-11

'The Cherry Tree'

Mike Garnier

Reading: John 1.6-8,19-28

Sermon

Lord, we give you this time. May what is spoken ring with truth, may what is heard & understood be touched by your spirit & may what is decided lead us on towards your Kingdom. Amen

Sometime back in the 90s we visited my aunt and uncle in their caravan on the Solway coast - a glorious spot, with its front window looking out over the sea towards Scotland.

As we sat talking, one of the neighbours, John I think was his name - drove off and turned right onto the coast road. Suddenly there was a fearful crash. John had turned into the path of a car that was coming fast round the blind bend.

Both cars were completely written off, but thankfully neither John nor the other driver were badly hurt. A small crowd gathered, sat them down, brought drinks – someone went and phoned (this was before mobile phones..) for police and ambulance.

I spent the next 15 minutes or so in the road flagging down approaching cars, before they piled into the wreckage. Then the police arrived; I left my details and slowly things returned to normal – a few weeks later, I received a letter summoning me as a witness – for the prosecution – the other driver was being charged for driving without due care and attention -

So it was in the next January I fetched up at the court in west Cumbria. You now how it goes – ‘do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth’..

Witnesses. How much in courts – and, actually, in much of everyday life, depends on witnesses – those who have seen something, and are called to recount what they have seen and heard, to ‘tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’

Witnesses belong in Advent. John the Baptist is the witness ‘extraordinaire’, called to prepare the way of the Lord – to point to Jesus – in the next verse in John’s gospel, ‘He saw Jesus coming & declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Twinned with Isaiah 61 – The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me’ :The great calling of the prophet – Isaiah, the other prophets (Amos, Ezekiel etc etc) all include similar ideas; John quoted other words of Isaiah –

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”

Jesus himself, later, in the synagogue at Nazareth, takes Isaiah’s words as referring to himself - The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon *me*, because the LORD has anointed *me*;

Lots of ministers and preachers do as well – someone asked me, at a Church Meeting when I was seeking its support for me going forward for ministerial preparation, if I could point to any particular Scripture that the Lord had ‘laid on my heart’ !! – I came up with Isaiah 61 - The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; . –

That seemed to satisfy everybody, but strictly, being a Baptist, I couldn't claim such a thing – 'anointing', is done by the whole church – it's a process of recognising a call to ministry; involving church meetings, committees, CVs, college courses

And not until at the last a church calls someone to ministry can we say anything like ' *anointed* ' - though one has met several folk over the years who've been quite sure that

'The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me';. – never mind what an Association, the BU, a College might say; this guy's a nightmare...' 'she hasn't got a clue'; 'wouldn't recommend him to minister in a telephone kiosk (!!)' never mind a church...'

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon *me*, because the LORD has anointed *me*;

Like Donald Trump...never mind 7 million or so votes; he's still saying 'I won!'..

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon *me*, because the LORD has anointed *me*'..

But in Advent, really the themes get a bit mixed – the Word, John the Baptist, witnesses – this much is sure, Advent isn't just about a Word coming down from on high; about a few special prophets pointing the way; it's about us.

Advent, we keep saying – *I* keep saying – is a waiting time; a time of darkness, waiting until the coming of the light – certainly it is;

But let's not just think of it as some kind of fairy-story cod-medieval dark-ages historical fantasy, as we imagine benighted humanity yearning (!! for a Dickensian fantasy Christmas

See; Advent is about Word, about John the Baptist preparing the way – but it's also about you and me – Advent every day, if you like; Advent a living, breathing reality in the hearts and lives of all those who are called to be witnesses – the spirit of the Lord God is upon...me, and you...and you...and you....

That's the gospel – *in the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all.. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,*

That's the spirit of Advent, I think; it's for the witnesses, it's for you and me – if John points the way to Jesus so do we *point the way to Jesus...*

If we speak about anointing John, we need as well to speak about anointing you & me

And if we are in darkness, waiting for the light, be sure the light shines and the darkness is over – and that's what it means to live by faith – *in the darkness* the light shines; *in the waiting* the darkness ends –

Not Advent once a year and Christmas once a year – and not that other aspect of Advent that hasn't got a look-in this year; the return of Christ, the coming of the Kingdom, but Advent all the time, Christmas all the time – waiting all the time, and God-with-us all the time..

Both things true for us all, always – not for a few special, anointed ones who might bring us enlightenment – preachers, Presidents, priests, whatever – but for us all, each and everyone

We like the idea of great men – usually men – bringing enlightenment to dark lives – but this isn't the Church of England, it's a Baptist Church..as Morris West used to say - not Christians first and then Baptists, but Christians and Baptists as the same time –

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me – and you, and you- *annointed* us to the waiting, and serving, and living;.

That's the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

'He became poor'

Tyndale virtual singing group.

Prayers

Witness as a theme for prayers today

We pray for all those who witness to the truth they have encountered, as they live by faith and serve the world – here in this church; in other churches near by and further afield; those who write and speak and who serve in all manner of practical ways; financial, social, technological, organisational

May we all know the indwelling power of God's spirit and the encouragement and prayerful support of each other as we wait and serve; pray and seek to do the right.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for all those who witness to the truths that are common to us all as they live by faith and serve the world - in other faith communities, in charities and aid organisations, in health and social care settings, in government institutions and private foundations

May they all acknowledge the unseen effects of God's Spirit and the appreciation and thanks of the whole of society as they work and serve and seek to do what's right.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for all who discover new truths in science and art and those who work in business and commerce as they bear witness to human creativity

May they all know the enabling power of God's Spirit and the fulfilment that comes from the flourishing of the human as they design and build and make and mend the world

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for all who witness dreadful things – disease and suffering, destruction and war – who grow more anxious and fearful with every passing day.

May they all know the surrounding love of God's Spirit and the support and care of the rest of us as we look for the signs of God's Kingdom in the world

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Offering

And in a world grown dark from the effects of restrictions; surrounded by people made weak from physical and financial worries; still we give of ourselves in these and all our gifts with hopeful and thankful hearts; determined that in such a world darkness and weakness should not have the last word, but light and strength lead the way to God's Kingdom. Amen

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 149 ['There's a light upon the mountains'](#)

Blessing

The blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us always, Amen.

Thanks to Rachel, Sarah, to the Tyndale Singers & to Mike Garnier, to Ali and Julian for the readings and to Nick & Tina for getting the script out in the post. Thanks to Ian H for producing and recording the service in the church and to Ian W for managing the website and to the stewarding team for all their efforts on our behalf.

As the waiting continues on into the coming week I wish you all well and would encourage you to encourage one another to keep looking for the light of Christ

A 'together though apart' time follows from 11.30pm