



“Journeys”

Sunday 29th December 2020

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This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use as you are unable to attend church. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.



1st Sunday of Advent

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

To those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

We join with sisters and brothers around the world, lighting candles to mark our steps in this Advent journey.

Today, we light the candle of Hope.

(light candle)

Even though the world seems dark and cold, we know that the Light of Christ is coming. The face of our Lord will shine, and we shall be saved.

Testifying against all suffering and darkness, we kindle this light. Together, we proclaim to the world that, in Christ, we have hope.

Song 1 (STF 215 v.1) See, amid the winter's snow

See, amid the winter's snow,
born for us on earth below,
see the tender Lamb appears,
promised from eternal years.



*Hail! Thou ever-blessed morn!
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."*

Edward Caswall (1858)

Prayer

Loving God, how is it Advent already?! When the year has flashed us by and we don't know where the time has gone, we take a moment to slow down for one moment and reflect on the year gone by.

Although this year has been full of tragedy and difficulty for so many people, we remember the good things that have happened in our lives and give you thanks.

For the incredible beauty that amazes our senses. The smell of fresh rain, the wonderment of the stars, the vastness of the sea, the palate of a sunset; the tune of a favourite song, the scent of home cooked food, the feel

of our favourite blanket to keep us warm in these winter months, the taste of a hot drink and the comforting voice of a loved one. Precious God, you are in all of those delights and we praise you.

God of love, thank you for bringing us here to this moment. For slowing us down in our hectic day and drawing us into your presence as a gathered community and taking a moment to pause and give you thanks.

As we maybe stress about the run up to Christmas and what that might look like in these strange and dark times, we are reminded that you are the light of the world and now more than ever; you shine in the darkness. We praise you for shining into our lives and through us into the communities in which we live.

Can you think of something that's happened this week? A conversation, a phone call, a letter, a pet, something you saw maybe where you felt the presence of God? Bring it to mind and say thank you for being in our lives even when we didn't know it.

Holy God, thank you. Amen

Song 2 Like a candle flame

Like a candle flame
Flickering small in our darkness
Uncreated light
Shines through infant eyes

God is with us, alleluia (Men)
God is with us, alleluia (Women)
Come to save us, alleluia (Men)
Come to save us (Women)
Alleluia! (All)

Stars and angels sing
Yet the earth sleeps in shadows
Can this tiny spark
Set a world on fire?

Yet his light shall shine
From our lives, Spirit blazing
As we touch the flame
Of his holy fire

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Reading introduction

So, this morning we're thinking about journeys, planned ones, unexpected ones and how some can even be a blessing, just like our last song reminded us. The bible reading is a well-known one. You'll know it from school nativity plays, Carol Services and Christmas readings. It might seem out of place for the First Sunday of Advent, but carry on reading and you'll soon understand why we've chosen the opening to the second chapter of Luke's Gospel which tells the story of Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

The Birth of Jesus

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius (QWE-RIN-E-US) was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting child.



That child, which Rob read about is of course, Jesus Christ .. and there's a traditional hymn sung on the first Sunday in Advent which looks ahead to his birth but also looks back at the prophecies in Holy Scriptures which predicted his coming as the Messiah many, many centuries before Mary and Joseph took that journey to Bethlehem.

We may not be able to lift our voices in church this morning ... but sing along with me ... O Come O Come Emmanuel!

Song 3 – O come O come Emmanuel

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
who mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God draws near:

*Rejoice, rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

2 O come, true Wisdom from on high,
who orders all to mind and eye:
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in her ways to grow.

Rejoice, rejoice!...

3 O come, O come, great Lord of might
who long ago on Sinai's height

gave all your tribes the ancient law,
in cloud and majesty and awe:

Rejoice, rejoice!...

4 O come, true Branch of Jesse, free
your children from this tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save
to rise victorious from the grave:

Rejoice, rejoice!...

5 O come, strong Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home;
upon our journey give relief,
and close the path to pain and grief.

Rejoice, rejoice!...

6 O come, bright Daystar, come and cheer
our spirits by your advent here;
dispel the long night's lingering gloom
and pierce the shadows of the tomb:

Rejoice, rejoice!...

7 King of the Nations, come, embrace
and unify the human race;
command our sad division cease
and be for us the Prince of Peace.

Rejoice, rejoice!... John Mason Neale (Translator)

Reflection

When you go on holiday (can you remember what that is?!) you fall into one of two categories. You're a planner, or you're a "we'll work it out when we get there" type of person. I'm a planner. Every time I read the story of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, I know the ending and I think "Joseph was NOT a planner."

On this first Sunday of Advent, I'm reminded that Mary and Joseph made a long and difficult journey of 100 miles at 9 months pregnant without the comforts of modern transport. I wonder how long it took Joseph to pluck up the courage to have that conversation with Mary...!

Sometimes we are taken on journey's we don't want to go on. Sometimes it feels like we don't know the way, and sometimes we end up in places we never thought we'd find ourselves. I don't think any of us thought we'd be on a journey of a global pandemic this time last year.

My brother works at Manchester airport and he often tells me of stories when he's helped out stranded passengers whose journeys have gone terribly wrong. When I listen to those times, I thank God that he's there to help them. It also made me realise, when we are on

journey's we don't want to go on, find hard or don't expect; we're never on our own. God sent my brother to minister to that lady. Whatever you are facing, you are not on your own.



When Mary thought she would have to give birth in a dingy unsanitary stable all alone, God sent shepherds to help.

When she wondered how on earth she would bring Jesus up, God sent the Magi to help. When she wondered how could she protect her child against Herod, God gave Joseph a dream.

Whatever journey you are on. You are not on your own. You might not be able to see or recognise the angels and people God is sending into your life right now, but trust me when I say; you are not on your own.

As we start this journey of advent together, who might God send to you to help you out? Who might **you** help out and be that light, guide and helper to someone who needs the hand of God?

In a few moments we're going to be offering some prayers asking God to help us to journey well especially during this Advent season... but first ... let's reflect with Jonathan Veira ... here he is with 'Go Peaceful'

Song 4 Come thou long expected Jesus

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Prayers of intercession

Loving God, we pray for our world and for everyone who is on a journey of travel right now. We pray that they are safe. We pray for drivers, pilots, customer service personnel, ticket sellers, dispatch, security and technicians. For everyone that makes travel possible; send them your blessing and guide them as they help people on their way.

As we journey towards Christmas, we pray for those for whom this will be a difficult time. When anniversaries fall around now and it's hard and painful, for those who will be experiencing this as a 'first' without someone they love. Lord, may they know the warmth and comfort of your Spirit and the consolation of your love.

We pray for our friends and family, our work colleagues and all those we call to mind who are on difficult journeys right now; for those on the path to recovery of illness, addiction, forgiveness or sorrow. Send them shepherds, Magi and a friendly Inn Keeper to have compassion on them.

For the journeys we are on, Loving God you know our hearts and you know what we struggle with; you know more than anyone the path we are walking and how hard we find it. Show us the way, take our hand and guide us, may your rod and staff bring us comfort and peace.

We pray for those who are on their final journey, give them courage, support their family and grant a peace, which passes beyond all understanding.

God of compassion and mercy, listen to our prayer. May what we ask in Jesus Christ your Son be done according to his word who said, 'Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.' To you merciful God, through your son, in the life giving spirit, be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Song 5 Joy to the world

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Isaac Watts (1674 – 1748)

Blessing

As you journey towards the Kingdom, know that God is with you.

As you journey towards Christmas through this Advent seasonmay you feel God's presence with you.

As you guide another pilgrim on their way, know that God has sent you.

As you walk in the way of Christ, know that Christ walks beside you.

Amen.

