

Sunday 30 November
Morning Worship
First Sunday of Advent
Led by Michaela McNeill, ALM
<https://zoom.us/j/82311473640>



Gathering and Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
and also with you.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

People of God: awake!
The day is coming soon
when you shall see God face to face.
Remember the ways and the works of God.
God calls you out of darkness
to walk in the light of his coming.
You are God's children.
Lord, make us one as we walk with Christ
today and for ever. Amen.

Hymn – O Come, O Come Emmanuel

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 victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, 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.

Latin 13th century translated by John M Neale (1818-1866)

Confession and Forgiveness

Heavenly Father,
you have created a universe of light:
forgive us when we return to darkness.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus,
you are the light of the world:
cleanse and heal our blinded sight.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Holy Spirit,

you give us light in our hearts:
renew us in faith and love.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God,
who in Jesus Christ has given us
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed,
forgive us our sins,
open our eyes to God's truth,
strengthen us to do God's will
and give us the joy of his kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Comfort Ye from Handel's Messiah

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,
saith your God:
Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem,
and cry unto her,
that her warfare is accomplish'd,
that her iniquity is pardoned.
The voice of Him that crieth in the wilderness:
Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

(Isaiah 40:1–3)

Readings by Ann Griffiths

Isaiah 40:1-4

40 Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out:

‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

John 8:12

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Reflection by Rev Clare Coates

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for the gift of music. May the music we sing and the beautiful music we hear this Advent and Christmas inspire us, strengthen our faith and help us to experience the great joy and wonder of this season. Amen.

One of my favourite things at this time of year in the run up to Christmas is seeing Christmas lights appearing, whether it's in and around our villages or further afield. What kind of Christmas lights do you like best? What do you find most enchanting? Last week Stephen and I went for an afternoon walk at Wimpole around the estate. We saw the National Trust team preparing their Christmas lights event which opened last weekend. As it grew darker, we turned and headed back towards the house and gardens and as we walked closer, to our surprise and delight, we saw all the lights were on! They were being tested by the team there. What an incredible experience! From the Hall, lit up by multi colours and snowflakes, with the tunnel of lights -

which looked a bit like a Cathedral - leading to it and with a huge Christmas tree outside the Hall itself; to Christmas carols and Christmas music, accompanied by a dazzling display of changing lights, which looked like rippling, rapid waves of light. It was truly magical. And very festive!

Today marks the beginning of Advent. This season is meant to be a time of spiritual preparation, waiting and anticipation for Christmas. The run up to this Christmas is the culmination of our year long focus on Jesus and his message of love. This December, during the Advent and Christmas seasons, we will be embarking on a special sermon series inspired by Handel's Messiah, focusing on the events leading up to Jesus's birth. Next year we will be picking up the story during Lent 2026 and focusing on the events leading to Jesus's death and resurrection. Each week during our sermon series, we will hear a piece or two of music from the Messiah during the service. Our Bible readings will be the same ones that Handel referred to in the Messiah, and hopefully you will be able to see the connections.

The Messiah holds a very special place in my heart. It was the first big Choral piece I sang with my sons Harry and Bobby when they were still trainee choristers at St Mark's in Newnham. Bobby and Harry were both very talented trebles with beautiful voices and were very angelic then! The moment we started rehearsing this piece, I was taken by how powerful it was, both spiritually and musically. There is a reason why this piece of music has lasted the test of time and it is as popular with singers, musicians and audiences today as it was when it was first performed in 1741. The reason why Handel's Messiah is worth studying and reflecting on is because Handel, and his librettist Charles Jennings, gave a very detailed and personal interpretation of Jesus using both Old Testament and New Testament texts. At the end of the score, Handel wrote: "Soli Deo Gloria": To God alone the glory. And this is a clear indication of his devotion to God. Its biblical focus is the reason why so many theological as well as music scholars study this piece, including many in Cambridge University, just down the road from us. Handel's oratorio can be summed up, despite its complexity, by its simple and powerful message: Jesus is the light of the world, and he has the power to overcome all darkness.

In today's first piece of music, Handel introduces us to the concept that Jesus is King. He uses an overture which was in the style of those typically used for announcing worldly kings and in particular French kings. As you will hear, its dramatic music heralds Jesus, the King of kings and light of the world. The reason Handel focuses on Jesus as the light of the world throughout his Oratorio is to emphasise that Jesus has unique redemptive power. Jesus is the one who brings spiritual light, which illuminates and transforms our lives, bringing us hope even in the darkest of times. Handel may have lived in the 18th century, and we live in the 21st century, but for both him and us, Jesus is our guiding light. The one in whom we place our trust and hope. Jesus gives us the endurance and strength to carry on no matter what.

The second song we will hear a bit later was inspired by our first reading from the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah was addressing the people who were going through a very dark and very difficult time. Isaiah's message is one of hope because it promises the people God's comfort and reassurance. God has not forgotten them. He is there alongside them. God is still with them despite their struggles. Given our present day situation and problems, this message really resonates and is as relevant in 2025 as it was then. God is here. God has not forgotten his people. So when you hear the second piece, I pray the music allows you to experience the peace and serenity that God's comfort will bring.

The reason we are going to spend time looking at Handel's Messiah is this: as Pope Francis once said there are many doorways to God and the music we hear in church, and spiritual music in general, is one of the pathways to Jesus and God. Pope Francis believed just as prayer matters as part of our worship so does music, art, and other expressions of creativity, because God loves the way we bring all of ourselves to God, including our musical side. I remember when we were at Saint Mark's Church in Newnham, Professor Jeremy Begbie (a professor of both Theology and Music at Cambridge and Duke Universities) used to say he could spend a whole lifetime studying great composers such as Handel and Bach. A bit like when you see or read a Shakespeare play, you can hear a genius at work when you listen to Handel's music. There is a mystery in experiencing his art form and there is great spiritual power in his music which is inspirational. Music

can move our souls in a way that maybe words cannot always do. And of course, by bringing together musicians and singers in a performance a bit like an opera, Handel's Messiah is a very significant devotional effort towards God by groups of people working together. Of course, we're not Kings College Chapel, so we can't quite deliver the same majesty during our service (!), but many church choirs up and down the country have loved performing parts of Handel's Messiah together in smaller settings. For example, next year in May we are holding a Come and Sing Messiah in Dry Drayton with St Catherine College's Music Director Dr Edward Wickham, and I warmly invite you to join us, whether you're a singer or as a member of the audience for the performance later that day. Singing together is a powerful witness to our faith and is also great fun!

Looking ahead to the coming weeks, Handel's Messiah is sufficiently interesting, varied and challenging that we can look at the familiar Christmas story in a fresh way and link lots of different themes and ideas. There's a lot that's contemporary and relevant in what appears to be ancient music. Just like when we read a good novel, we can partly see Christmas through the eyes of someone else and this can help us on our own spiritual journey. Next week we will be anticipating the glory of God revealed once more at Christmas time. Just as I was excited by the spectacular Christmas lights at Wimpole last week, I am really looking forward to journeying with you this Advent and Christmas time. And I hope you enjoy the music when it's played a bit later on in our service!

The Apostle's Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;**

**he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession by Michaela McNeill

God of Hope

Be with us on our Advent journey
be with us in our gathering
And in our travelling together,
Be with us in our worship
And in our praying together,
Be with us on this Advent journey of hope.

This Advent time we remember Mary and Joseph,
Giving thanks for their faithfulness,
Courage and obedience,
Stepping out into the unknown
In the strength of your spirit,
Playing their part in the fulfilment of your plan
To bring your people home again.
We pray that their example might be the pattern of our lives,
That when your gentle whisper
Breaks through the noise of this world and into our small corner,
We might be ready to listen
And having listened, to act.

Lord in this season when every heart should be happy and light
Many of us are struggling with the heaviness of life,
With burdens that steal our joy.
Fill us with your light instead of our darkness,
Help us clear the way in our hearts and minds

To concentrate on the true meaning of Christ's coming
And not on the worldly things,
Which so often block out our thoughts and worship of you.
We live in disturbing days across the world;
A world filled with doubt and conflict, inequality and justice.
Make this time of waiting we pray, the time of a new awakening
Of thought, consideration, endeavour and action,
By all leaders and all nations,
To bring about health, peace, freedom and understanding.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty and merciful God,
Whose son, Jesus Christ,
Understood people's fear and pain
Before they were aware of them,
Have mercy on those in need,
For the hungry and the homeless,
For those in refugee camps, hospitals and care homes,
For those who are cared for in their own homes.
Bless those who work to bring them relief,
Inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts
At this time of goodwill to all men.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those we know and love,
those who are unwell and those who need comfort and strength.
We pray you surround all those who mourn,
with your continuing compassion.
We pray for our government –
all governments and those in authority in our church
as they all struggle to seek to do what is right and fair
in these difficult times.
We pray for all our children
and think especially of all our school children
who are learning the true story and meaning of Christmas this advent.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of hope, who brought love into this world,
Be the love that dwells between us.
God of hope, that brought peace into this world,
Be the peace that dwells between us.
God of hope, that brought joy into this world,
Be the joy that dwells between us.
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
Be the centre, the focus of our lives
Always, and particularly, this Advent time.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of thy son, our saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Collect for the First Sunday of Advent

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Awaiting his coming in glory, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**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.**

Hymn – Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

- 1 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.
- 2 Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.
- 3 Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
- 4 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)

Notices

The Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon us,
scatter the darkness from before our path,
and make us ready to meet him when he comes in glory;
and the blessing be always on us.

Closing Prayer

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.