



Western Fells Methodist Circuit

**29<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

# ***Advent Hope***

**Service for Advent Sunday**

by

**Rev Joyce Ellis**

## **Introduction**

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November is the first Sunday in Advent, when we look forward in hope to the coming of Christ at Christmas time.

We normally have our Advent candle wreath in Church and light an additional candle each week. We will still have our Advent Candle Wreath in church as usual this year. However, as we believe that we will not be able to be back in church until Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December, you might like to have a candle at home to light on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

## First Sunday in Advent

God's grace and peace are with us, let our hearts be filled with joy.

### ***The Light of the Coming Kingdom***

#### **Preacher**

Today we begin our four weeks of preparation for the feast of Christmas, the day when we come together to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Each Sunday leading up to Christmas we shall begin our worship by lighting a candle, reminding us of the light that Jesus brings into the world.

#### **Reader**

We light our first Advent candle to remind us that Jesus tells us that we live our lives in the light of God's Kingdom of love and peace.

*The first candle is lit*

Let us pray: Lord Jesus help us to remember that people learn about your kingdom when we live the way you want us to. Amen

#### **Recording**

**StF 706 v1**

*Bernadette Farrell*

*Longing for light, we wait in darkness.*

*Longing for truth, we turn to you.*

*Make us your own, your holy people,  
light for the world to see.*

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts,  
shine through the darkness.*

*Christ be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.*

Advent is a time of waiting, a time of hope, longing and anticipation. All are captured and expressed in our opening hymn.

**StF 180**

*Aled Jones*

O come, O come, Immanuel and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, O come, O Lord of might, who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,  
in ancient times did give the law in cloud and majesty and awe:

O come, O Rod of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell thy people save, & give them victory o'er the grave:

O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by your advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight:

**Prayer : Adoration and Confession**

God of light, shining strongly,  
focused on the deep darkness of despair  
flooding the inky blackness of isolation,  
blazing bright on the dark night of sin,  
piercing the shade of the pains of injustice,  
bathing the world with a sun of renewal,  
we eagerly wait for the coming of Jesus  
as a dawn of healing and of hope and of judgement.

Lord, let the light of your presence burst in on our worship, making our  
ordinary offering burn with the brilliance of your Spirit's inspiration.  
In the name of the Light of the world we pray.

Loving God, we confess that we are not ready. We long to welcome  
once more the birth of your Son, but know that our faith is less than  
steadfast, our love less than strong,  
and our commitment less than sure.

Yet you love us as we are. You call us to repentance, and promise us  
forgiveness and guidance on the way of life.

We ask your forgiveness and for your strengthening grace,  
in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen

## Reading : Words of Hope from Isaiah 40 :1-5, 9

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

<sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'

**Recording** : Comfort ye, comfort ye *Messiah*

**Sermon** : *Advent Hope*

### Introduction

So 'here we are' – or should that be 'here we are again! Advent Sunday and we are back at the very beginning, where it all began. It is a very special time, a time of looking forward with longing, with expectation, as in our reading from Isaiah. It is a time of waiting and preparation for the coming of Christ at Bethlehem **and** the promise that 'Christ will come again' It is a time of hope for our suffering and war-torn world.

### The Hope that Sustains Us

The writer to the Ephesians (2:12) says to those early Christians: *Yours was a world without hope and without God.* And as we look around our country and our world today, we maybe feel that that is an apt description for us too of all we see and hear on our TV screens, or read in our papers. Also, if we are honest, we often have very real questions come into our mind "Is God really at work in the world at this time?"

But the early church were in no doubt that God had indeed acted both in the person of Jesus Christ *and* he would do so once more in the coming of Christ again. This twin focussed belief was the very ground of their hope. Indeed it was *the hope that characterised them.*

So I would like to take as my Advent text just 3 words from [Romans 12 :12](#) - *Rejoice in Hope*. And, as we reflect together on the meaning of this time, I would like to share some of my own experience with you about Christian hope.

### **Zambian Experience**

It is now 54 years ago that Roy and I first went to Solwezi. Solwezi is a small town in Zambia and capital of its N.W. Province. Our nearest town, Chingola, on the Copperbelt, was 105 miles away – 105 miles along a dirt road. We had just joined the staff of a government boy's boarding school, which was 2 miles from the town. On the Sunday we went down to the town to go the service at the local church, St. Alban's. There it was that, over the next 3½ years, we began to gain some understanding of what Christian Hope is all about.

Zambia had gained its independence just 2 years before our arrival. At independence most of the government officials, who of course were British, left Zambia and left also the English speaking church of the town. Thus the church that had served the colonial community now served all those working in the town who used the new national language of English.

But who were we – the worshippers at St. Alban's? Well certainly there weren't many of us and certainly we kept changing. The teachers on 3 year contracts were the long stay members. Those Zambians working for the government were often moved within 6 months.

### **Hope and Depression in Solwezi**

The church in Solwezi was not large enough to support its own minister or priest. This meant the church was led by whoever was there and was able. Prior to our arrival the church had been run by an Anglican on the staff of the school – but he was due to leave at the end of the term. Thus it was that Roy and I (2 very newly accredited local preachers!) found our selves running the church and conducting the services. There was also a church at the school and - for most of the 3½ years we were there – one week I would take **one** of the services and Roy **the other** and the following week we would swap over. Not surprisingly we were to know times of spiritual and emotional depression and doubt.

There were times when the work became hard, tedious and draining. How can we keep going without spiritual nourishment our selves?

I remember one Sunday when I had really hit rock bottom and I didn't think it was worth carrying on. We didn't seem to be making any progress with the congregations which were often very small. Why on earth were we bothering? Deep despair had set in.

Somehow Roy managed to persuade me to go along and there was just a tiny handful there as usual. But at the end of the service a woman in the congregation, the wife of one of the government officials, came up to me and said *'Please would it be possible to start a club for the women in the town? There are many wives of the men working in the government offices who would like to have a place to meet.'* This was the day I had wanted to give up!

### **Christian Hope**

I began to learn that day the lesson learned 2000 years ago by Paul. It is not in our own strength that we have to rely. It is on God's. Our Christian Hope is not founded on what **we** can do or achieve. Our hope is founded on what **God** has done.... and continues to do.

The club grew and became very popular, bringing more women, and some of their husbands into the church. We were worried what would happen when our 3½ years were up – who would run the church then? But 2 terms before we were due to leave a young Salvation Army couple arrived on the staff at the school. By the time that they left, 3 years later, the congregation had grown so much they had to buy new pews and also they were able to support their own minister. When we made a return visit 20 years ago the church had moved into bigger premises next door, with a congregation of 100s. No - our hope as Christians is not grounded in our own strength, but in a God who provides and meets us in our moments of depression and failure.

### **What Does Hope Mean?**

What then are we talking about when we speak of Christian Hope! Is hope **wishing** for something we would like to have? - a world of peace and harmony; justice for all. Is it being **optimistic** about the outcome of events – such as in Afghanistan, or Syria or of life in pandemic? We all know that all of these ways of looking at hope are shallow and will not stand up to being tested. For Christian hope has never been rooted in wishful thinking, nor has it been rooted in 'cockeyed optimism'. As we are reminded at Advent, It is founded first and foremost in what God has done for us and for the world, supremely in the coming of Jesus,

## God in Christ

For during Advent we remember how God did not leave the world to the results of its own sinfulness, greed and power-seeking; but that God reached out through Abraham, Moses, the prophets and finally through the birth of Jesus to bring liberation to God's people and to the world. *Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free.*

## Christ will come again

But our Advent hope goes further than this. In one of our Eucharistic Prayers we say the words *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again*. And it is that *Christ will come again* that we also celebrate. But what are we to make of that phrase in a world with a very different understanding of itself to that of 2000 years ago? Well I think the first thing we can say is that the first Christians disciples had to adapt their own understanding of what it meant! They certainly originally believed that Jesus was going to return in their own lifetime – and they had to adjust their thinking when he didn't! For some today a literal understanding of the words presents no problem, but for others of us, including me, we would want to look at them in a slightly different way. God, in Christ, comes into our lives and into our world, again and again: in the way He did in Solwezi, and in the way He did at other times in our own churches and in our own lives.

## Advent Hope

For our Christian hope is that the God who came in Jesus 2000 years ago is **always** and **everywhere** active in the world and in people's lives, where Jesus comes again to bring us God's grace, God's forgiveness, God's guidance, and God's power & strength and comes again to the world to bring justice and peace. No, our Advent Hope is not cockeyed optimism, but a hope that has been tested through hardship and suffering. A hope that has discovered that we do not need to rely on our own strength, which is weak and fickle, for we can rely on a God who is there beside us. It is indeed a hope that gives us confidence to face an unknown future. A hope that relies on God to lead us forward. A hope indeed that compels us to rejoice. It is an enduring hope that makes this time of Advent a time of rejoicing and of celebration. Amen.

## Prayers of Healing for our World

*And now, as we look at our Advent candle, let us remember those suffering in so many ways and pray for the healing of our world.*

We pray for:

- all those affected by the corona virus and its affect on families and medical workers
- for the healing of those who are suffering oppression at the hands of others:
- for those suffering from poverty and malnutrition
- for those suffering because of their beliefs and who are prisoners of conscience
- for those suffering from natural and other disasters
- for children and adults who have been the victims of abuse and of people trafficking
- for the victims of war and of terrorism and refugees

We pray for the healing of nations and especially do we pray for lasting peace and justice in Palestine and Israel, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East. We pray for the people of America at this difficult time of transition.

Let us bring our prayers for the coming of God's kingdom together as we say the Lord's Prayer.

**StF 169**

*Truro Cathedral*

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 for ever, 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*

**Blessing**

Expressive God, we have heard your word, may we learn to speak its truth. We have been challenged by your call to action, may we go out to do your will. We have been inspired by your presence with us, may we share your love with others, through the power of your Spirit. Amen.