

## **Worship at Home 7th December 2025 (2nd Sunday in Advent)**

A short act of worship for use in people's homes prepared by Jon Skeet.

### **Introduction**

Hello, and welcome to Worship at Home for Sunday December 7th 2025. I'm Jon Skeet, and I worship at Tilehurst Methodist Church when I'm not out and about as a local preacher in the Circuit. My wife Holly will be joining us to read our Bible passages later in the service.

It's good to share worship with you today, as we celebrate the second Sunday in Advent. This service is also being shared with Thatcham Methodist Church in the morning, and I thank God that we can join *together* in worship, even as we come before God in different times and places. Our worship today is richer because *you* are part of it.

Our call to worship this morning is from Isaiah, chapter 11.

### **Call to worship (Isaiah 11:1-2, 10)**

Jesse's family is like a tree that has been cut down. A new little tree will grow from its stump. From its roots a Branch will grow and produce fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on that Branch. The Spirit will help him to be wise and understanding. The Spirit will help him make wise plans and carry them out. The Spirit will help him know the Lord and have respect for him.

At that time, here is what the man who is called the Root of Jesse will do. He will be like a banner that brings nations together. They will come to him. And the place where he rules will be glorious.

### **Hymn: STF 180 O Come, O Come Immanuel**

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | O come, O come, Immanuel,<br>and ransom captive Israel,<br>that mourns in lonely exile here<br>until the Son of God appear :<br><i>Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel<br/>shall come to you, O Israel.</i> | and give them victory o'er the<br>grave : |  |
| 2 | O come, O come, O Lord of<br>might<br>who to your tribes, on Sinai's<br>height,<br>in ancient times did give the law<br>in cloud, and majesty, and awe :   | 4   | O come, O Key of David, come,<br>and open wide our heavenly<br>home ;<br>make safe the way that leads on<br>high,<br>and close the path to misery :                    |
| 3 | O come, O Rod of Jesse, free<br>your own from Satan's tyranny ;<br>from depths of hell your people<br>save,  | 5   | O come, O Day-spring, come<br>and cheer<br>our spirits by your advent here ;<br>disperse the gloomy clouds of<br>night,<br>and death's dark shadows put to<br>flight : |

Latin, 18th century, based on the ancient *Advent Antiphons*  
*translated by* John Mason Neale (1811–1866)

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## Prayers

We offer our prayers of adoration and confession.

Lord, you inspire us with awe. We cannot comprehend your scale, in time and space – you created far-distant galaxies, and yet you know each one of us, every cell in our bodies. But beyond the *physical* scale of your creation, we marvel more at the scale of your love: that you care so much for us that you came to dwell among us, to show us “the way that leads on high” and grant us grace that we may be reconciled with you. We worship and adore you – we will never understand you fully, but everything we see of you is perfect and full of love. We offer ourselves in your service, that we may show that love to others.

But Lord, we also know we have let you down. We have not walked the path you have set before us. We have ignored the needs of others. We have said and done hurtful things. We have missed opportunities to embody your love. For the sins we can bring to mind, we are sorry. For the sins we are not even aware of, we are sorry.

We turn back to you, and ask your forgiveness in the name of Jesus, that through his death and resurrection we might be reconciled with you. We rejoice that we can rely on your grace.

Amen.

## Reading: Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19

<sup>1</sup> God, give the king the ability to judge fairly.

He is your royal son. Help him to do what is right.

<sup>2</sup> May he rule your people in the right way.

May he be fair to those among your people who are hurting.

<sup>3</sup> May the mountains and the hills produce rich crops,

because the people will do what is right.

<sup>4</sup> May the king stand up for those who are hurting.

May he save the children of those who are in need.

May he crush those who treat others badly.

<sup>5</sup> May the king rule as long as the sun shines

and the moon gives its light.

May he rule for all time to come.

<sup>6</sup> May he be like rain falling on the fields.

May he be like showers watering the earth.

<sup>7</sup> May godly people do well as long as he rules.

May they have more than they need as long as the moon lasts.

<sup>18</sup> Give praise to the Lord God, the God of Israel.

Only he can do wonderful things.

<sup>19</sup> Give praise to his glorious name forever.

May his glory fill the whole earth.

Amen and Amen.

### **Reading: Matthew 3:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> In those days John the Baptist came and preached in the Desert of Judea. <sup>2</sup> He said, "Turn away from your sins! The kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>3</sup> John is the one Isaiah the prophet had spoken about. He had said,

"A messenger is calling out in the desert,

'Prepare the way for the Lord.

Make straight paths for him.'"

<sup>4</sup> John's clothes were made out of camel's hair. He had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea. They also came from the whole area around the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup> When they confessed their sins, John baptized them in the Jordan.

<sup>7</sup> John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing. He said to them, "You are like a nest of poisonous snakes! Who warned you to escape the coming of God's anger? <sup>8</sup> Live in a way that shows you have turned away from your sins. <sup>9</sup> Don't think you can say to yourselves, 'Abraham is our father.' I tell you, God can raise up children for Abraham even from these stones. <sup>10</sup> The axe is ready to cut the roots of the trees. All the trees that don't produce good fruit will be cut down. They will be thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup> "I baptize you with water, calling you to turn away from your sins. But after me, someone is coming who is more powerful than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup> His pitchfork is in his hand to clear the straw from his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the storeroom. But he will burn up the husks with fire that can't be put out."

## Hymn: STF 182: On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

1	On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh ; awake and hearken, for he brings glad tidings from the King of kings !	without your grace we waste away like flowers that wither and decay.
2	Then cleansed be every life from sin ; make straight the way for God within, and let us all our hearts prepare for Christ to come and enter there.	4 To heal the sick stretch out your hand, and bid the fallen sinner stand ; shine forth, and let your light restore earth's own true loveliness once more.
3	For you are our salvation, Lord, our refuge, and our great reward ;	5 To God the Son all glory be whose advent sets his people free, whom, with the Father, we adore, and Holy Spirit, evermore.

John Chandler (1806–1876)

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## Sermon

### Introduction

The theme of today's service is "The Coming Of The Kingdom". One of the things I've always found interesting about Advent is the multiple meanings. I've sometimes heard it called a period of "active waiting" – which is a phrase I really like. But what are we waiting *for*? I think there are three answers here:

- We're waiting for – preparing for – Christmas, celebrating Jesus, Immanuel, God with us as a baby
- We're waiting for – in whatever way this makes sense – the *event* of second coming of Christ
- We're waiting for – and being part of – the kingdom of God

Now at this point I probably ought to pause to set a few expectations for this sermon. Many preachers have a gift of taking complicated questions of theology, resolving and explaining them so that by the end of the service you have a clear understanding, a greater sense of the love of God, and a call to action for work in God's kingdom. I do not have this gift.

Instead, I tend to find complicated questions that you may not even have wondered about before, explain why I find them difficult, and offer some thoughts. I very rarely provide anything resembling an *answer* – but I do hope you still have a greater sense of God's incredible love for us, and that you feel a call to action for work in God's kingdom.

So when I listed the second coming of Christ – which heralds the fulfilment of God’s kingdom – and also being part of God’s kingdom now, I’m aware there’s a bit of a contradiction involved. I know there’s ambiguity about what the second coming might involve, and in what way we should be looking forward to it. And, of course, “waiting for” something that happened over two thousand years ago. Advent gives us time and space to think about all of these things – perhaps with no expectation of fully understanding them, but at least an aim of reaching a deeper appreciation of the *mystery* of the Incarnation.

### *John the Baptist*

Let’s turn first to John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel. For some of us, this is such a familiar passage that it’s easy to skip right over the awkward aspects. There are plenty to choose from, but I’ll highlight two of them in a minute: unquenchable fire, and punctuation.

Before that, let’s welcome the easier parts of this reading. John preached repentance and announced the coming of Jesus who would baptise with the Holy Spirit. More: John announced that “the kingdom of heaven has come near”. All of this is important, and to be celebrated. And it sounds like this was a popular message, with people coming to John from all over the place, coming to be baptised.

What was John’s appeal? Was he a curiosity? Or a powerful and charismatic speaker? Or was there just *something* that rang true in his message, even if his listeners couldn’t put their fingers on it? I hope it was the latter – I hope and trust that God is able to use *every one of us* to bring God’s message of love and reconciliation.

But some of what John said is more uncomfortable: Jesus will also baptize with *fire*, and fire is also mentioned in terms of “burning up the chaff”. This certainly appears to be a reference to judgement and the possibility of hell.

I’m not comfortable talking about hell. I’m pretty liberal in my theology, and I find it hard to reconcile eternal damnation with the unconditional love that I see in Christ. But we can’t just ignore this passage or the many other references to hell in both the Old and New Testaments. Psalm 72 has a similarly difficult verse: “May he crush those who treat others badly” or “May he crush the oppressor” in the NIV translation. This verse from the psalm is not an anomaly – the psalms are *chock full* of calls for God to obliterate enemies. All I can say for now is – I think it’s okay for there to be different perspectives on this, and none of us can claim to know for sure.

The other difficult part of this passage from Matthew is at least less uncomfortable. It’s about punctuation which I strongly suspect didn’t even appear in the Hebrew. Listen to these two different ways of grouping the same words from Isaiah:

- The voice of one calling: “In the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord.”
- The voice of one calling in the wilderness: “Prepare the way for the Lord.”

The second is used in Matthew’s Gospel to fit with John the Baptist being in the desert – but I think the first is a more powerful statement. You’d only make a road in

the wilderness for a king – no-one else would be worth the effort. Isaiah 40 continues with a geographical theme in terms of transformation: raising up valleys and lowering mountains. So let's talk about the Kingdom.

### *What is the Kingdom like?*

Despite proclaiming the coming of Jesus, John the Baptist doesn't actually talk about what the Kingdom of God is like, at least not in Matthew's Gospel. But we have clues from Isaiah 11 earlier, and from Psalm 72:

- And the place where he rules will be glorious.
- May he rule your people in the right way.  
    May he be fair to those among your people who are hurting.  
    May the mountains and the hills produce rich crops,  
    because the people will do what is right.  
    May the king stand up for those who are hurting.

There's a lot more – but I'd like to go beyond our readings, too – to Jeremiah, Micah, and 1 Corinthians, some of my favourite passages:

- “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”
- “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”
- “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

There are contrasts all over the Bible between the broken world we live in now, and what the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God looks like. The Kingdom of God is one of peace, prosperity and social justice. A world of healthy relationships with each other, and with God. And this is where I get a *bit* of an idea of what it might mean to wait for the *coming* of the kingdom, while recognising that our time *now* is part of *living* the kingdom.

We recognise that Christ is King – we are in Christ's kingdom already, and always have been. But the world is broken in how it operates, because our relationship with God is broken. Christ comes to repair that relationship – to reconcile us with God, with the natural effect that we are reconciled with each other at the same time. *That* is what we are both waiting for, and what we are called to right now.

### *Conclusion*

Mark Twain is credited with writing: “Sing like no one is listening, love like you've never been hurt, dance like no one is watching, and live like it is heaven on earth.” I believe we are called to make it heaven on earth, through an ever-closer relationship with God, reconciled through the mystery of the Incarnation in Jesus, and emboldened by the power of the Spirit. What a thing to wait for – and what a thing to be a part of.

Amen.

### **Prayers of intercession**

We offer our prayers for God's people and the world. You may wish to pause to offer your own prayers for people and situations you know of.

Lord, we pray for your church. Grant wisdom to leaders, and courage to all the faithful. May we uphold the values of your kingdom, and reach out in love within our communities. We pray particularly for all those who truly hear the message of the Incarnation for the first time this Christmas – may they find fertile ground in which their faith can grow.

Lord, we pray for the nations. We take hope from your promises, even when the world seems so full of division, conflict, injustice and inequality. May the song of your kingdom find an echo in the hearts of all people. We pray particularly for peace in all countries involved in war at the moment.

Lord, we pray for your creation. We pray for the ingenuity, wisdom and a unity of purpose required to tackle climate change. We pray for the compassion and selflessness to address pollution and other factors that harm the biodiversity of your amazing world.

Lord, we pray for each other. For those suffering from physical or mental health challenges, and for those who care for them. For those with financial or employment difficulties. For difficult family and social situations. Lord, we pray for your strength and the warmth of your love to be felt by all who need it.

All of these prayers we ask in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

You may wish to say out loud the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation you prefer.

## Hymn: STF 188 There's a light upon the mountains

1 There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring,  
when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King ;  
weary was our heart with waiting,  
and the night-watch seemed so long ;  
but his triumph-day is breaking,  
and we hail it with a song.

2 There's a hush of expectation,  
and a quiet in the air ;  
and the breath of God is moving  
in the fervent breath of prayer :  
for the suffering, dying Jesus is  
the Christ upon the throne,  
and the travail of our spirit is the  
travail of his own.

3 He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way ;  
he is calling for his angels to build  
up the gates of day :  
but his angels here are human,  
not the shining hosts above ;  
for the drum-beats of his army are  
the heart-beats of our love.

4 Hark ! We hear a distant music,  
and it comes with fuller swell ;  
'tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of  
our King, Immanuel :  
Zion, go now forth to meet him ;  
and, my soul, be swift to bring  
all your finest and your noblest for  
the triumph of our King !

Henry Burton (1840–1930)

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## Blessing

As we look for signs of God's Kingdom here and opportunities to serve as part of it, may God bless each one of us as Creator, strengthen us through the Spirit, and unite us through Christ. Amen.

## Acknowledgements

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