

WORSHIP AT HOME 14th December 2025 3rd Sunday in Advent. final

Good morning, and welcome to worship on Sunday 14th December. My name is Marilyn Britt and I am Worship Leader at Thatcham Methodist Church in West Berkshire. We are in the season of Advent, a time for waiting and watching: a time of preparation. Round and about, in our communities, Advent seems forgotten. It's almost straight from Harvest to preparation for Christmas. Writing cards, buying presents and wrapping gifts and food for the celebrations. Sadly for so many the best present of Jesus Christ being born doesn't feature in the celebration. But we know it is the best gift we've ever been given – so our theme this week is **Come, Jesus and fill us with joy. Let us gather together to worship God.**

James 5: 7 – 10 ⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹ Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Come thou long expected Jesus

Hymn: StF

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| 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. | 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. |
| 2 | Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart. | 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)

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***Let us Pray ¹**

Mighty, Holy God, we adore you for: revealing yourself to humanity through the ages; the promises to Abraham and all his descendants for ever; inspiring the prophet Isaiah to offer hope on the journey home; the blessing of Mary, the joy in her soul and the praises she sang, and today for the blessings we have in our lives.

Thank you, God, that in our differences and in our diversity, you are our God. Thank you: for the changes and chances and challenges that surround us; for your constancy and the blessings we receive from those around us; for the Gospel words

that speak of hope and joy, light and life and love; for the gifts you have given us in abundance; that we can gather to celebrate your coming. Thank you that in hope and expectation we can shout: 'Come Jesus, fill us with joy!' **Amen.**

***A prayer of confession ¹**

Holy God, we confess that we fail and falter because we get all wrapped up in the trivialities of life. So often we look for something better to come our way, ignoring what we already have, not using it wisely for the good of all. We confess we forget to preach the good news to the poor; to those who don't know their need to confess; to those who don't know that Christmas is about the birth of the Christ-child; to those who don't know your Spirit within; to those who do not catch glimpses of glory and light and joy in abundance. Advent God, forgive us we pray and bless our journey. **Amen.**

***Assurance of forgiveness ¹**

The Lord God, the Holy One, the Almighty, the Redeemer, the giver of life, hears our prayer and forgives our sins. Praise be to God. **Amen.**

Reading: Isaiah 35. 1 – 10 The Return of the Redeemed to Zion

35 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and shouting. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you."

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened; ⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp; the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, ⁹ but it shall be for God's people; no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray. ⁹ No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. ¹⁰ And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Reflection

In previous chapters, Isaiah has delivered a message of judgment on all nations for rejecting God. Isaiah 35 was addressed to God's people in exile, who were longing

for home. Here Isaiah breaks through with a vision of beauty and encouragement. It is prophecy of hope and joy. To a people in despair, it is a stunning and shameless vision of a glorious homecoming and a renewed world. There is hope here for humanity, hope for the weak, hope for the fearful, hope for those seeking healing and release, hope too for 'travellers'. God is just as thorough in his mercy as he is severe in his judgement. God's complete moral perfection is revealed by his hatred of all sin, and this leads to judgement. Revealed is his love for all he has created. This leads to mercy for those who have sinned but who have sincerely loved Jesus and put their trust in him. This is a beautiful picture of the final kingdom in which God will establish his justice and destroy all evil. The redeemed can anticipate after the judgment when the creation itself will rejoice in God. The picture here speaks of days when life will be peaceful at last and everything will be made right. The highway, the way of holiness is the way that righteous pilgrims will take. It is found only by following God. Only the redeemed will travel God's highway, they will be protected from wicked travellers and harmful animals. God is preparing a way for his people to travel to his home and he will walk with us. God never stops at simply pointing the way; he is always beside us as we go. This is hope for a world full of the glory and majesty of God.

God plans the way forward and wants things done. Another part of the Advent period is the news for firstly Elizabeth and then Mary that they would have sons. Elizabeth was Mary's cousin and would give birth to John later known as John the Baptist and Mary, would give birth to Jesus. Elizabeth was thought to be too old to carry a child, and Mary was very young, but realised God was involved and that all would be well. Mary visited Elizabeth probably for company and reassurance for them both. Both were full of wonder at these happenings and Mary sings out about the glories of the Lord. This can be read in Luke 1 and 2.

The Holy Spirit told Elizabeth that Mary's child was the Messiah because Elizabeth called Mary 'the mother of my Lord' as she greeted her. That greeting must have strengthened Mary's faith. Mary's pregnancy may have seemed impossible but her wise relative believed in the Lord's faithfulness and rejoiced in Mary's condition. Although Elizabeth too was pregnant, she didn't envy Mary whose son would be even greater than her own. Instead she was filled with joy that Mary visited her. Mary recognised and accepted the gift God had given her. Pride is refusing to accept God's gifts or taking credit for what God has done; humility is accepting the gifts and using them to praise and serve God. Christ's birth fulfilled the promise God made to Abraham to be merciful to God's people for ever and Mary understood this. She was not surprised when her son announced he was the Messiah.

Let us sing Mary's song by Timothy Dudley Smith based on the Magnificat.

Hymn: 186 Tell out my soul

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of
the Lord !

Unnumbered blessings, give my
spirit voice ;

tender to me the promise of his
word ;

in God my Saviour shall my heart
rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of
his name !

Make known his might, the deeds
his arm has done ;

his mercy sure, from age to age the
same ;

his holy name — the Lord, the
Mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of
his might !

Powers and dominions lay their
glory by ;

proud hearts and stubborn wills are
put to flight,

the hungry fed, the humble lifted
high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his
word !

Firm is his promise, and his
mercy sure.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of
the Lord

to children's children and for
evermore !

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

Based on the *Magnificat*

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But what of John, Elizabeth's son?

When Jesus began his public ministry, he did so by sharing what is often called the Nazareth manifesto, quoting other verses from Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19) and laying out his vision of good news. When his cousin John, understandably despondent in prison, sends some of his disciples to ask if Jesus really is the one that he and God's people had been longing for, Jesus replies by pointing out that he has done exactly what he promised to do, bringing healing and good news. We are not told how John receives this reply, but we can hope it brought him reassurance and peace, and some of the joy and gladness in place of sorrow and sighing of which Isaiah speaks (35:10).

Prayers for the world, others and ourselves

Let us pray

Loving God, in the busyness of preparation, we take time to thank you for this glad time of year which reveals the extent of your love on offer to us all. We pray for all those people who don't know about you. We remember the birth of your Son who came as a babe and showed us how to love and share the joy of knowing you.

Come Lord Jesus: **Come fill us with love and joy**

We pray for those in relationship poverty – whether it be love, loneliness, for those who mourn loved ones and for those in broken relationships. May they find companionship, kindness, hope and joy within their community. We pray for those organising people getting together, visits, church outreach and our own Vintage Adventure. We thank you for those who care and reach out to others sharing their love and joy.

Come Lord Jesus: **Come fill us with love and joy**

We pray for those in poverty food, fuel, shelter – who have lost jobs, made redundant or are frail and infirm. We pray for those organisations; Foodbanks, Shelters, Hostels, Crisis at Christmas, where the volunteers collect, sort, and share what they have to those who haven't. We thank you for those who donate sharing their love and joy.

Come Lord Jesus: **Come fill us with love and joy**

We pray for justice that their voices may be heard. We remember those who are frightened, perhaps of people in their own home or workplace. We pray for those who are fleeing their homelands because of persecution and torment. We remember those living in camps, hungry, cold, worried and ready to take risks to be in a safer country. We pray for those who work in many different ways to feed, provide shelter and help save lives in emergencies, sharing love and joy.

Come Lord Jesus: **Come fill us with love and joy**

We pray for ourselves. That when you call each of us to listen to your words we act in response to your guidance, wisdom and in the strength of the Holy Spirit to make the world a just, safe and loving place.

We pray for all those who don't yet know you but that by our words and actions of love, kindness and generosity, they come to know the love of God in their lives.

Come Lord Jesus: **Come fill us with love and joy. Amen.**

The 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.
Save us from a time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
Now and for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn: Stf 188 There's a light upon the mountains and the day is at the spring

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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Prayer: using words from hymn Stf 168

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Lord we need you now. Fill us with your peace. Touch us with your love. May we see your light, in this world of ours.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.
Amen.

Francesca Leftley (b. 1955) *Verses can be created and selected as appropriate.*

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