



Newcastle City Temple Connected

Reimagining Church Together

Dear Friends

Last Sunday we celebrated the first Sunday in Advent and for those who were able to join with us on Zoom will have seen how we lit the first candle on the Advent Wreath.

The wreath and its candles provide a visual focus for Advent. One of the candles is lit each week as Christmas approaches. The circle of the Advent wreath has no beginning and no end. It portrays for us God's timelessness and His eternal plan. The evergreen colour denotes eternal life. The shape of the wreath is round, reminding us of the fellowship of believers around the world who share with us the celebration of His coming. The four outer candles represent the gifts of His spirit in us: Hope, Peace, Love and Joy; and the centre Candle represents Jesus Christ – The Light of the World.

In lighting the candle of Hope we were reminded of how the prophets of Israel spoke of the coming of Christ, how a saviour would be born, a king in the line of David. How he would rule the world wisely and bless all nations, we said that;

On Christmas day the Christ of our hope was born.
On Good Friday the Christ of our hope died.
On Easter day the Christ of our hope rose from the dead.
He then ascended into heaven.
On the last day, the Christ of our hope will come again
to establish his kingdom over all things on earth.

Today we light the second candle, the Candle of Peace. This candle is sometimes called the Bethlehem Candle to remind us of the place in which preparations were made to receive and cradle the Christ child. Peace is a gift that we must be prepared for. God gives us the gift of peace when we turn to him in faith. The prophet Isaiah calls Christ "the Prince of Peace." Through John the Baptist and all the other prophets, God asks us to prepare our hearts so that he may come in. Our hope is in God, and in his son Jesus Christ. Our peace is found in him.

Hark the glad sound! the Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long;
Let every heart prepare a throne,
And every voice a song.

3. He comes, the broken heart to bind,
The wounded soul to cure,
And with the treasures of his grace,
To enrich the humble poor.

2. He comes, the prisoners to release
In Satan's bondage held;
The gates of brass before him burst,
The iron fetters yield.

4. Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
Thy welcome shall proclaim,
And Heaven's eternal arches ring
With thy beloved name.

<https://youtu.be/xSEBGfYcRfi>

THANK YOU

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to providing material and recordings for our Pre Recorded Carol services, it was good to finally get chance to meet some people face to face at Brunswick, your patience and commitment to the recordings is appreciated and like myself I'm sure you are looking forward to seeing the end result.

Thank you too to those who gave their time to collect at Morrison's Cowgate, the total amount collected will be announced next week. Finally thank you to all who have contributed to and purchased goods from the Virtual Christmas Fayre - the total amount raised to date is £300. Orders may still be placed, however, please note that some items are now at zero or limited stock.

NCT SA Connected

VIRTUAL CHRISTMAS CARD...

I said last week that I intended to start sharing the Christmas Greetings which corps members wish to share with one another in lieu of sending Christmas Cards, and that I planned to do that this week in two ways;

- A simple pre recorded virtual Christmas Card presentation of Videoed Messages interspersed with Christmas Carols.
- A typed list of Christmas Greetings which will go out weekly with the worship bulletin (Similar to the Prayer list).

Thank you to those who have submitted their greetings – unfortunately things have been a little chaotic this week, not helped by an unscheduled three hour walk round Jesmond Dene in the mizzling rain, whilst my car was awaiting an unexpected tyre replacement, so I am now deferring this til next week.

A VIRTUAL CHRISTMAS - WITH NEWCASTLE CITY TEMPLE...

Sunday 6th December: Advent Windows 2. *A Season of Preparation*

Zoom Worship at 10:00

Sunday 13th December: Advent Windows 3. *A Season of Promise*

Zoom Worship at 10:00

Zoom Sunday School at 14:00

Simply Jesus - Pre-recorded Worship available from 3pm: Contemporary Lessons & Carols

Sunday 20th December: Advent Windows 4. *A Season of Celebration*

Christmas Joy! - Pre-recorded Carol Service available from 3pm

Friday 25th December: Christmas Day

Manger Scene - A simple pre-recorded service available for viewing from midnight on Christmas Eve

ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

This week I shall largely be involved in sorting and allocating toys donated to the annual toy appeal, as well as recording my own contributions for the pre-recorded Carol Services. Unfortunately this means that whilst I wont be able to attend this week's 'Virtual Coffee Morning & Catch Up' it has been suggested that those who are free continue to meet. This weekly chat has been very much appreciated by some members of the corps, especially those who live alone—and so if you are able to join the Zoom session on Tuesday morning I know that there will be those who will really appreciate seeing you.

TUESDAY 1st December Virtual Coffee Morning and Catch Up 11am via ZOOM

<https://zoom.us/j/91349683764?pwd=WVZYMUdrUW02eUdIMUM5WTJVOTk0QT09>

Meeting ID: 913 4968 3764

Passcode: 603486

THURSDAY 3rd December BM Bob Dare's LYFE Housegroup at 7pm via Zoom

Bob & Yvonne will be sending out the meeting codes to those in their house group; this will be the final house group of 2020, but we look forward to recommencing the house groups in the New Year.

If anyone would like to join a house group in the new year—please do let us know.

Initially we shall continue to meet on Zoom but look froward to the day when we can meet in each others homes.

We shall however, subject to ongoing interest, continue to host one of the house groups on line.

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

SUNDAY: 6th December 2020

Theme: Advent Windows 2. *A Season of Preparation*

Key Text: Luke 1:5-17



Last Sunday morning, I introduced a four part series which I have entitled 'Advent Windows'. To reiterate some of the things we spoke about, Advent is a season for looking forward, anticipating the future, and **preparing** ourselves for the coming again of Jesus Christ. One of the reasons we light our Advent candles is to symbolise our mood of expectation at this time - But when will He come? the answer is we do not know, we cannot know, and you know what... we do not need to know; or at least not if we heed the word which Jesus gave to his disciples...

*About that day and hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven,
nor the Son, but only the Father... Therefore keep watch,
because you do not know on what day your Lord will come...
be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

(Matthew 24: 36,42 & 44)

You know, it's not when Jesus comes that matters, but the fact that he will come, coming in God's time. There is no point in speculating about times and places; as some are prone to do; such things are unimportant. What matters is that we live in such a way that, whenever he comes, we are happy to be found by him, and ready to welcome him as our living Lord and Saviour.

In Isaiah 40:1-5 we find these words;

'Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A Voice of calling: *"in the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

Here Isaiah prophesied the Birth of John the Baptist; a prophecy which was fulfilled some 700 years later - as recorded by Luke in his Gospel. **READ:** Luke 1:5-17

The mission of John the Baptist can be summed up by one word, "preparer." And as one writer notes, *'It was his happy chore to prepare a people for the coming Messiah'.*

According to Luke's gospel it was the angel Gabriel who had informed Zechariah that his son would be instrumental in turning many to the Lord; making ready a people prepared for him.

John came from God in order to "bear witness to the light; that is to say, to bear witness to Jesus Christ; and I guess, the fact that the birth of Christianity was such a resounding phenomenon, impacting the ancient world tremendously, and surviving across the centuries, is, in some measure, a testimony to just how well John accomplished his mission.

And so recognising 'Preparation' as a central theme in this Season of Advent – just as John prepared the way for the first coming of Christ, so too must we prepare the way for his second Advent.

In considering the idea of Advent being 'A Season of Expectation', as part of last weeks Windows on Advent reflection, we considered the idea of there being three main secular expectations of Christmas - the emotional, the material and the relational expectations. And we spoke about how in each case - such expectations were heavily dependent on ideal circumstances and how easily such expectations could be dashed, resulting in disappointment.

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

Continued...

We could in the same way - classify secular Christmas preparations under the same three headings... emotional, material and relational. (We psych ourselves up in anticipation of the big day itself- preparing ourselves mentally; we allow ourselves to get caught in the whole frenzy of shopping for gifts, the wrapping of presents, the purchase and preparation of seasonal treats, the writing and sending of cards, the decoration of our homes - just thinking about such things is enough to make one feel exhausted; furthermore we make preparations to visit relatives and receive guests into our homes) but again how easily our preparations can be scuppered by the winds of circumstance.. And how quickly we can feel deflated, and even resentful of all the effort we have made.

So I don't think Advent is meant primarily to be a time of emotional, material and relational preparation, but more importantly we need to consider how we can prepare ourselves spiritually.

Advent is a time for preparing, a time for ensuring that we are spiritually ready to celebrate the coming of Christ and to truly welcome him when he finally comes again. It is the need to prepare for the coming of the Messiah which Isaiah spoke about, which John the Baptist preached about, and which this season is all about.

Isaiah spoke of God's messenger who would prepare the way for the promised Messiah. John came to prepare that way, making it clear what people needed to do if they were to be ready for his coming, and today challenges us in turn to ask whether we are ready for his return.

Advent is not simply a countdown to Christmas, the burning down of the advent candle, the opening of doors on the advent calendar - but rather it is a God-given time to prepare ourselves to receive Christ, to receive the forgiveness and new life that he brings, and to commit ourselves afresh to his service.

We cannot stress enough, that Advent is the season to remember that Jesus not only came, but that He's coming again. He came the first time as a baby in manger, but when he returns at the end of time He will come as our Lord and our Judge... so, we better be ready! Advent is a time of personal preparation in readiness for His return. I encourage you to check out for yourselves the following three great Advent parables found in Matthews Gospel

Each of these parables is set at night The first features a thief (Matthew 24:42-44); the second a bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13; the third a returning master (Matthew 25:14-30) Each of them offers a solemn warning that as followers of Jesus we should not take our ease but be alert! They remind us that Advent is the season when we should review our lives, face up to our failures and prepare to meet Jesus face to face.

Jesus' purpose in telling about his return is not to stimulate predictions and calculations about the date but to warn us to be prepared. So will you be ready?

In Ephesians 3:16-17 we find the words;

¹⁶ *I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.* ¹⁷ *Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him...* (NLT)

It's all too easy to get so 'wrapped up' (if you'll pardon the pun) in the gift buying and gift giving frenzy of this season; that we sometimes miss the opportunity to take time to 'unwrap' God's gift to us. A big part of Advent, our preparing for the coming of Christ Jesus our Lord – must surely be to come aside and rest awhile - to be still in his presence and allow him to minister His love and his grace and his peace and his power to us.

Suggested Song for further Reflection

Thou didst leave thy throne (SB 153)

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus;
There is room in my heart for thee.*

JESUS WANTS TO PREPARE ME FOR CHRISTMAS BY...

COMING to me, as I WAIT for Him
SPEAKING to me, as I LISTEN to Him
GIVING to me, as I OPEN MYSELF to Him
LOVING me, as I respond in LOVE