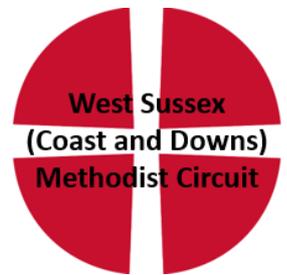


Worshipping Together

West Sussex Coast and Downs Circuit

December 2021 & New Year 2022



What are you waiting for?

This month we take a journey of waiting with expectation and anticipation as we journey through advent and into the Christmas season.

In this edition of *Worshipping Together* we have two sections:

- ➔ **Worship for Advent** (weeks beginning 5th, 12th & 19th) - Page 2 – 8
- ➔ **Worship for Christmas** (beginning from Christmas Day) - Page 9 – 14



Worshipping Together comprises an act of worship for the month, with a different set reading and reflection for each week, shared as a starting point for your own reflections. As you worship and draw closer to God, may God draw close to you, speak to you and journey with you beyond the words of these pages, strengthened by God's ever-present Spirit.

We invite you to use **Worshipping Together** at a time that suits you, in whatever way works for you, to spend time with God knowing that you are **Worshipping Together** with others across the circuit family.

Please share these resources with others.

Also available at: www.westsussexcoastanddownscircuit.co.uk

As you prepare to worship, you may like a period of quiet, or to light a candle. Become aware of God's already present presence.

Gathering Words¹

My soul waits for the Lord: In his word is my hope.
Out of the depths I call to the Lord: In his word is my light.
With a longing heart I look to the Lord: In his word is my strength.
In joyful expectation for Christ's coming we worship: come Lord Jesus!

Sing the following Advent Carol, or a favourite of your own...²

- 1 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 you, O Israel.*
- 2 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:
- 3 O come, O Rod of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave:
- 4 O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery:
- 5 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:



¹ Adapted from patterns for Worship, Church House Publishing, p115-6

² Latin, 18th century, based on the ancient Advent Antiphons, translated by John Mason Neale (1811–1866) StF No.180

Prayers of praise: Advent Prayer to Jesus³

You are our eternal salvation,
The unfailing light of the world.
Light everlasting,
You are truly our redemption.

Grieving that the human race was perishing
through the tempter's power,
without leaving the heights
You came to the depths in your loving kindness.

Readily taking our humanity by Your gracious will,
You saved all earthly creatures, long since lost,
Restoring joy to the world.

Redeem our souls and bodies, O Christ,
and so possess us as Your shining dwellings.

By Your first coming, make us righteous;
At your second coming, set us free:
So that, when the world is filled with light
and you judge all things,
We may be clad in spotless robes
and follow in Your steps, O King,
into the
heavenly hall.
Amen.



³ Unknown Author, 10th century,

Below are readings and reflections for each week December.

This month we think about Advent's journey of waiting.

These reflections are mere starting points, and you are encouraged to ponder and pray through and beyond what is written, as you listen and respond to God.

Waiting to see Salvation

Week beginning Sunday 5th December

Reading: Luke 3:1-6

In the biblical story the wilderness often seems to be a place where God's presence is made known, and here seems to be no exception. God meets John the Baptist in the desert who then travels the region proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

If we read Luke chapter 1 & 2 we see that John was always intended by God to have a purpose – to point people towards the 'coming one'. At this point in the story it seems that John himself comes to see God's purpose for him – and so he heads off to fulfil what God has required of him; preparing the people and the way for the salvation of God to be made known afresh on earth.

As we journey through advent we wait with John and his community. We wait with anticipation and expectation for the coming one. We wait to see again the Christ-child who was born into this world to save us. We wait to see our salvation.

In the mess of the world, in the brokenness of humanity - the truth that we can be saved and made whole through Jesus should fill us with hope and excitement. But yet, despite our faith in Christ, despite our knowing salvation is here, the world is still a mess. Can we really **see** salvation? I wonder if, for now, we experience salvation in us and the lives of others – but one day, when Christ comes again, then all flesh will see the full salvation of our God.

Pray: **Loving God, we wait with expectation and hope,
Prepare my heart to be ready to receive,
Make speed to be salvation to us.**

Waiting for the Coming One

Week beginning Sunday 12th December

Reading: Luke 3:7-18

We pick up Luke 3 from where we left it last week, and John gives a damning accusation to the crowd – ‘You brood of Vipers!’ I’m not sure that would be a very welcome accusation for me to begin a service with today! But no doubt it would get a congregation’s attention, and so too, maybe John adopted an attention-grabbing line to draw people in.

The people had been waiting, for many years, for the promised one, the Messiah to come. They had been waiting so long in fact that some had begun to stop believing a Messiah would come at all. They were losing hope.

John’s ministry was one of reminding people of the hope they once had – placing before them that which was already there – the promise that God would send the Messiah. Except, through John’s own ministry of preparing the way, people begin to think he is the way. They start to think he himself is the Messiah – the one to save them.

In our lives and communities, we too can fall into the same place of consciously or subconsciously thinking leaders, politicians, ministers (!) are the ones who save us. But just like John, they too are in need of a Saviour. We must listen the John’s words and remember the only Saviour is Jesus.

Pray: **Saving One, Messiah and King,
Aid us, that we will not put others in your place,
but keep you, our saving one,
at the centre of our hope,
at the core of our being,
as the root of our living.
Amen.**

Waiting for it to be as God has said⁴

Week beginning Sunday 19th December

Read: Luke 1:31-33

Reflect: When does an ordinary life become extraordinary?

A mundane day become revolutionary?

A moment in time change history?

When God enters in

Forgives sin

Allows us to begin again

When we repeat those words of Mary

'May it be to me as you say'.

Read: Luke 1:35-38

Lord God, you choose the very least and raise us up to greatness

For nothing is impossible with God

You take the weak, the poor and blind and raise us out of darkness

For nothing is impossible with God

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures forever.

Teach us obedience, Lord in every part of our lives.

Ears to hear your word

Hands to do your work

Feet to walk your path

A heart for all your people

A mouth to shout your praise

A childlike faith

Humility & confidence that says to the possible and the impossible

I am the Lord's servant

May it be to me as you have said. Amen

⁴ Reflections from www.FaithandWorship.com, by John Birch – Resources for Advent

Advent carol for Reflection: Hills of the North, rejoice!⁵

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Hills of the north, rejoice, river and mountain-spring, hark to the advent voice; valley and lowland, sing. Christ comes in righteousness and love, he brings salvation from above.</p> | <p>3. Lands of the east, arise! He is your brightest morn; greet him with joyous eyes, let praise his path adorn: your seers have longed to know their Lord; to you he comes, the final Word.</p> |
| <p>2. Isles of the southern seas, sing to the listening earth; carry on every breeze hope of a world's new birth: in Christ shall all be made anew; his word is sure, his promise true.</p> | <p>4. Shores of the utmost west, lands of the setting sun, welcome the heavenly guest in whom the dawn has come: he brings a never-ending light, who triumphed o'er our darkest night.</p> |
5. Shout, as you journey on;
songs be in every mouth!
Lo, from the north they come,
from east and west and south:
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.

Prayers of Intercession⁶

In Joyful expectation of his coming we pray to Jesus saying:

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus.

Come to your church as Lord and Judge.

Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing for your rule.

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus.

Come to your world as King of the nations, before you rulers will stand in silence.

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus.

Come to your people with a message of victory and peace.

⁵ Hills of the north, rejoice! by Charles Ernest Oakley (1832–1865) and Editors of English Praise, Singing the Faith No.172

⁶ Adapted from Patterns for Worship, Church House Publishing, p66.

Give us victory over death, temptation and evil.

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus.

Come to us as Saviour and Comforter.

Break into our failure and distress and set us free to serve you forever.

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus.

Come to us from heaven with power and great glory,
to lift us up to meet you with all your Saints and angels
and to live with you forever

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Sing the following carol, or your own favourite: Come thou Long expected Jesus⁷

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 forever
Now thy gracious kingdom bring

4. By thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone
By thine own sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne

Closing Prayer⁸

In this Advent of expectation draw us together in unity,
that our praise and worship might echo throughout our lives.

In this Advent of expectation draw us together in mission,
that the hope within might be the song we sing, and the melody of our lives.

In this Advent of expectation draw us together in service,
that the path we follow might lead us from a stable to a glimpse of eternity.

⁷ Come Thou long expected Jesus by Charles Wesley, Singing the Faith No.169

⁸ From www.FaithandWorship.com, by John Birch – prayers for Advent

*As you prepare to worship, you may like a period of quiet, or to light a candle.
Become aware of God's already present presence.*

Gathering Words⁹

God of majesty and power, who spoke and this world was,
Who breathed and this world lived,
Who counts the hairs upon our head,
Who sees our thoughts and reads our hearts,
Who loves us more than we deserve,
How can we not bring today our sacrifice of praise?

For in the child at Bethlehem lies the promise of intimacy
With a Saviour who would die even for me.
And the promise of an eternity in which to praise you more each day
God of promise we praise your name, **Amen**

Sing the following carol, or your own favourite: O come, all ye faithful¹⁰

1. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him, born the King of angels:

*O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

2. True God of true God, Light of Light eternal,
lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father, begotten, not created:

3. See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;
we too will thither, bend our joyful footsteps:

4. Lo, star-led chieftains, Magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold, and myrrh;
we to the Christ-child, bring our hearts' oblations:

⁹ From www.FaithandWorship.com, by John Birch – prayers for Advent

¹⁰ O come, all ye faithful, Latin, 18th century, possibly by John Francis Wade (c. 1711–1786) and others, StF212

5. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
'Glory to God, in the highest:'

6. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory given:
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:

Prayers of Praise¹¹

Holy and lowly one, Jesus, friend and brother
we rejoice in your coming among us.
you come down to lift us up.
you come as the light to our darkness: we welcome and adore you.

Gracious God you are high over all the earth and greatly to be praised
yet you have come to us in Jesus, your eternal Word,
And saved us according to your mercy.

He is the reflection of your splendour,
the imprint of your being,
the heir of all things,
through whom you created the worlds.
In Christ we see your glory, full of grace and truth.

Glory to God in the highest;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.



¹¹ Adapted from Companion to the Lectionary Volume 10, Neil Dixon, p10; and Glimpses of Glory, David Adam, p14.

The waiting is over

Week beginning Christmas Day – Saturday 25th December

Reading: Luke 2:1-14

After a long wait, the season of Christmas has begun – Happy Christmas! Today marks the start of the festival of Christmas – 12 days where we receive partridges, maids a milking and five gold rings among other things, until we reach 6th January and celebrate the feast of Epiphany...

Or at least...it should be the start... but, as I write this reflection in late November, a neighbour has already got their Christmas lights up and every time I am driving with my daughters in the car while it is dark they are excitedly finding more and more lights and Christmas trees in windows. I love hearing their excitement (I don't see it because, you know I'm driving and looking at the road, honest!).

But it seems that, perhaps, we are struggling to **wait** for Christmas to come, but are willing it along at full speed, and cutting out the waiting, the anticipation, the expectation.

but then again, we must also ask **what have we been waiting for?** Is it a turkey dinner, or seeing some family or friends we've not seen for a long time? Waiting for the Queen's speech? Those may all be things we look forward to – but of course they are not the main event we as Christians are waiting for. We travel through Advent waiting with anticipation and expectation for the coming king who was born as a babe in a borrowed manger.

As we begin the festival of Christmas, may we daily celebrate Christ's birth. May we all remember and celebrate that Christ is not just for Christmas – that Christ is for everyday of our lives. As the partridge in a pear tree symbolises in the song, Christ was born to live and then be sacrificed on a tree for you and me, and then to rise again in glory, offering us freedom from sin and a way to eternal salvation.

What a story to celebrate today! Christmas blessings to you all.



Waiting to be stirred

Week beginning Sunday 2nd January

Reading: Luke 2:22-40

For many years Simeon had waited. Now an old man, Simeon had been waiting for the Messiah. The Spirit had revealed to him that he would see the Messiah before death. We read Simeon was righteous and devout and was looking forward – watching for the comfort of Israel, longing for the light that was promised to shine. When God would hold Israel in his arms. Into that righteousness, into that waiting, comes the revelation that the Messiah's arrival was on the horizon.

One day, a couple enter the temple, not an unusual thing to happen. Normal. Mundane. Expected. But yet, Simeon is stirred. Stirred by the Spirit, he sees the child, and takes the baby in his arms and somehow, somehow by the Spirit's stirring, he knows this is who he had been waiting for. God's presence in a baby, this is the Messiah. God's promised comforter.

Simeon sees God's salvation, in a bundled baby in his arms. Simeon sees the light of salvation in a baby's cry. As Simeon finds the end of his waiting for the one who will hold the world in his arms, Simeon holds God in his arms.

No sooner has Christ been born, that the purpose of the Christ-child begins to be made known. Through Christ, salvation will come to all the world. Christmas points to Easter, without Christmas there would be no Easter.

Reflect: What is God's Spirit stirring within you today?

Prayers¹²

To us a child is born, to us a son is given.

Wonderful counsellor, give your wisdom to the rulers of the nations.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Everlasting father, establish your reign of justice and righteousness.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Prince of peace spring in the endless Kingdom of your peace.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Almighty Lord, hear our prayer and fulfil your purpose in us,
as you accomplish your will in our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Sing the following carol, or your own favourite: Hark! The herald-angels sing¹³

- 1 Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim:
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'
*Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.*

- 2 Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail, the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel:



¹² Adapted from Patterns for Worship, Church House Publishing, p67-8.

¹³ Hark the Herald by Charles Wesley (1707–1788) StF202

3 Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth:

Closing Prayer¹⁴

Shout for joy the whole earth
And everything within Rejoice!
For Light has come into the world

The mountains sing, the seas resound,
To the praise of your name!
Salvation, once promised is here on earth

The angels' song rings in the air,
A child has been born - Hallelujah!
The Saviour of the world is here.



Acknowledgements

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¹⁴ From www.FaithandWorship.com, by John Birch – prayers for Christmas