

**Morning Worship with Christine Ghinn
28th November 2021
The First Sunday of Advent**



Prelude

Call to Worship

God of all light, Creator,
Light of the World,
we approach You
with joy in community,
with gratitude for love,
and with prayerful stillness
revealing the love and light
at the heart of all creation.

Amen.



Lighting of the Advent Candle & Advent Candle Song

1. Light one candle for hope,
one bright candle for hope.
He brings hope to every heart.
He comes! He comes!

Words and music: Natalie Sleeth

Let us pray

The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth
and bring my promised salvation to Israel.

The Lord is our righteousness.

The days are surely coming, says our God,
when justice and mercy will be executed
throughout the land.

The Lord is our righteousness.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when my promised one will teach transgressors my
ways,

and heal the world with love and mercy.

The Lord is our righteousness.

(Jer. 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10)

Song: SoF 410

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel.
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O key of David, come,
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Oh, bid our sad divisions cease,
And be yourself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

CCLI Song # 31982
John Mason Neale
Words and music: Public Domain
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The Collect for today, the First Sunday of Advent

Almighty God,
as your kingdom dawns,
turn us from the darkness of sin to the
light of holiness,
that we may be ready to meet you
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The reading is taken from 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God

Our hearts and our minds are open

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The reading is taken from Luke 21:25-36

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already

near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.



Friday, 21st June 2019, 8pm. It's a beautiful summer's evening and I'm enjoying the warm breeze, my crochet

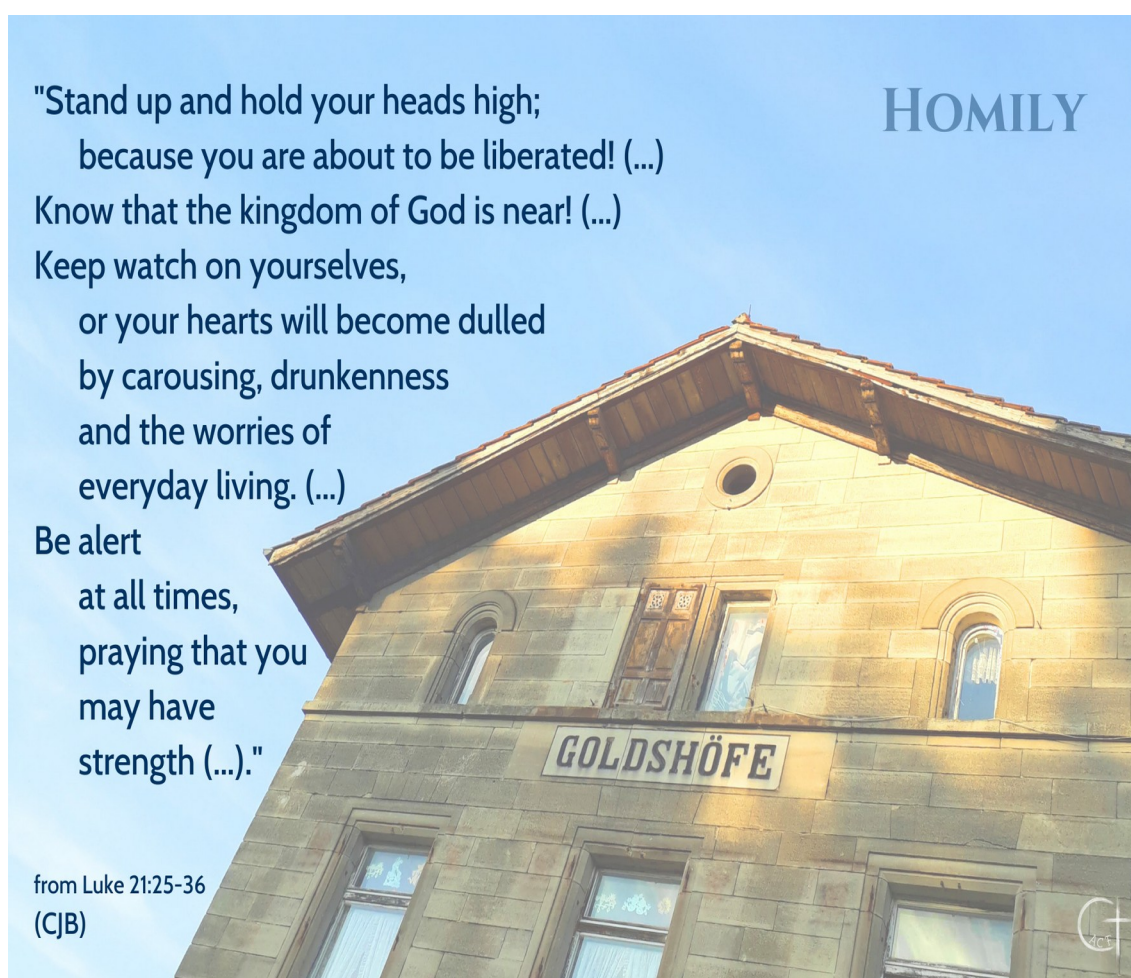
and the fact, that I've got a long-awaited weekend without my family ahead of me. I'm sitting happily on the ground (*I love sitting on the ground!*), my back resting comfortably against... the building of a country railway station in the middle of nowhere, out in the Swabian Alps. The truth is, I had never planned to spend that evening in Goldshöfe, neither was I alone there. With me were 200 or so other people, walking up and down the crumbling platform, sitting on the dusty ground, speaking into their mobile phones, chatting, smoking, hanging around. We were stranded there together (*...and this is so cliché!!!*) after some slightly tipsy young men on a stag do (*bachelor party*) had managed to set off the fire safety system of the brand new Intercity train we all had been on. (*Here's a nugget of wisdom for you: Don't smoke on train toilets, especially not after your friends have already set off a couple of fire alarms, which resulted in several resolute announcements over the train's intercom.*)

200 strangers on a sleepy province train station, a congregation in an interregnum, a society in a pandemic, a family waiting for their visas, a world navigating climate change, a church finding their place in the bigger picture ...

People, that are in the same boat. People, who are in a bit of a mess. People, confronted with challenges. ... Compared to the apocalyptic scenarios Jesus paints for his disciples, some of the just mentioned situations seem trivial. In today's gospel reading Luke records Jesus talking about cosmic signs, distressed nations and natural disaster.

When venturing into today's passage I (and surely many others) trip over the metaphorical 'elephant in the room', the by scholars hotly debated sentence, "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place." There are many different theories to what exactly Jesus was talking about here, and as I'm no biblical scholar I would like to invite you to bypass this debate with me. Maybe one day our newly arrived minister will give us some more qualified insight on this at some point.

So, let's head past this controversy towards some of the nuggets of wisdom that Jesus is offering. (*And no, these nuggets of wisdom have nothing to do with smoke detectors on German highspeed trains!*) The wisdom that Jesus preaches is not a manual on how to best problem-solve, instead it cares about the inner posture of the waiting ones, the challenged ones, the stranded ones. Amidst doom-and-gloom predictions, Jesus casts a vision... through messages of hope - advent messages.



"Stand up and hold your heads high;
because you are about to be liberated! (...)
Know that the kingdom of God is near! (...)
Keep watch on yourselves,
or your hearts will become dulled
by carousing, drunkenness
and the worries of
everyday living. (...)
Be alert
at all times,
praying that you
may have
strength (...)."

HOMILY

from Luke 21:25-36
(CJB)

He says,
"Stand up and hold your heads high; because you are about to be liberated! (...)
Know that the kingdom of God is near! (...)
Keep watch on yourselves, or your hearts will become dulled by carousing, drunkenness and the worries of everyday living. (...)

Be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength (...)."

This is what Christ whispers in my ear, when he looks over the shoulder of me, aimlessly scrolling my Instagram feed.

It is what keeps a diaspora congregation going during an 18 months interregnum.

It is his advise to all overwhelmed by news on new virus variants and climate destruction.

It's what the middle-aged man needs to hear, who's furiously marching up and down the platform in Goldhöfe, ranting breathlessly about the failings of the Deutsche Bahn.

Those words are the ones that give hope, when, yet again, one faces a glaringly empty letterbox, devoid of any post from the visa agency at the German consulate.

It is a road sign for a community of believers and their new minister trying to find and inhabit their unique place in a city, a denomination, and a world.

In today's passage, we are encouraged to look beyond the current disasters and to grow in a healthy way of living; to lay down passive enduring for the sake of active waiting.

Christ's way of living is summed up by the deep & beautiful advent word 'HOPE'.

It is calling us to 'hang in there'; to look out and get ready for liberation, salvation, redemption.

In recent decades, countless scientific studies have confirmed these words, written in the first century.

There is a clear, almost mind-blowing, correlation between people's attitude and their happiness, achievements and positive impact on the world around them.

Yet the meaning of Jesus' words is more profound than inner posture and psychology. They invite us on a journey - a journey with each other and with a God who himself travelled all the way from Bethlehem, to Golgotha and finally out of an empty tomb. And yes, there are plenty of times that feel as if this journey is not a journey at all. We feel stuck like a long highspeed train on a short, crumbling Swabian train platform.

These are moments of being trapped in a pandemic, moments of frustration during an interregnum, moments of wondering about the mysterious, snail-like proceedings of bureaucracy. We wait for specific outcomes, we wait for relief, we wait for liberation... sometimes clearly defined and sometimes blurry. In these moments it seems counterintuitive to hear Jesus exclaim excitedly, "When you see these things taking place, you are to know that the Kingdom of God is near!" To him they are full of possibilities; possibilities for God's working in this world and for profound spiritual growth which in turn inspires action and builds community.

"Stand up! Be alert! Pray!" aren't merely words, that try to make the current circumstances bearable, but that transcend them. If taken to heart - however imperfectly - they will not only inspire hope for the kingdom of God, but also make us builders and part-takers in this kingdom.

To 'stand up, be alert & pray' will sensitise the people of God to the needs around them, whilst at the same time cultivating a hope-filled vision of the bigger picture. It will help them not to miss the tiny and big opportunities of doing God's work. It will make them notice the golden kingdom-threats that are woven into everyday life and also into extraordinary challenges. 'Standing up, being alert & praying' will inadvertently translate into fellowship - with God and with each other. People 'who stand up, who are alert & who pray' may be the ones who, during their retirement, prepare and lead regular communion services for a congregation in an interregnum. They may be the individuals who do all they can to stay in touch with their loved ones even over great distances, just like Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians, from which ... read earlier. They may be the folks who organise joint taxi rides or kind reassurance to distressed train passengers. They may be the women and men who pour their hearts into teaching, demonstrating, decision-making, building, nursing, writing, accompanying, ... who pour their hearts into caring.

So let us all individually and together 'stand up, be alert and pray!' Let us travel this road together and be full of

anticipation as for how the coming of the kingdom of God will manifest here among us. It's foreshadowing might be grand and glorious, or small, but nevertheless delightful, just like shared giggles of finally rescued passengers who are greeted by an intercom announcement that "...this train, too, boasts highly sensitive smoke detectors!"
 Let us stand up, be alert and pray, for we know that the kingdom of God is near!

Song: ACF 121

Wait for the Lord,
 whose day is near.
 Wait for the Lord:
 keep watch, take heart.

Words and music: Jacques Berthier
 Ateliers et Presses de Taizé

Intercessions (by Wolfgang)

The passage from Luke seems to announce a period of physical transformation before the second coming of Christ, and since then every comet drawing its fiery tail across the sky, every earthquake and before the modern period even solar and lunar eclipses have been interpreted as signs that the end was near. However, so far every single prediction and announcement of a date for the end of the world has come, and has passed, and subsequently scores of religious quacks and fanatics have lost their credibility and usually also their following.
 Lord, help us to understand that yours is not a reign and kingdom that will come trailing disaster and destruction, but that it is our task to learn from the changing earth and sky that we need to spread your word, and work towards saving the environment.

The day of the lord cometh like a thief in the night – yes, but this does not mean that we have to sleep with

one eye open, so to speak. The idea of permanent alertness and permanent availability is a neoliberal one that has been derived from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. Lord, help us to understand that constant vigilance taken to these extremes is ultimately destructive of its purpose.

Be Prepared rather than be vigilant: this is the moment to quote Robert Lord Baden Powell, who not only founded the world scout movement, but introduced first aid training on a broader scale, and who left as part of his legacy this sentence "But the real way to get happiness is by giving out happiness to other people. Try and leave this world a little better than you found it ... Lord, let us always be prepared to do just that.

So let us not wait for disasters, but help us, Lord, to be prepared in the event they should happen. This past week, I was given the chance to cook for and support a Light Rescue team en route to certification by the United Nations, 24 people and three dogs. These guys are permanently on call to ship out to wherever there has been an earthquake, an explosion, a cave-in or collapse. Lord, guide them on their way, and give them the necessary physical and psychological strength whenever they need to apply their training in earnest.

Finally, we pray for ourselves:

For many months, we have been waiting for our new priest, without knowing who they were going to be, and if and when they would come. Some of us were on constant alert, and some of us grew tired of waiting and we don't see them no more. Lord, not that we have a new minister, help us to gather our strength and try to bring back our brothers and sisters. And while we are at it, we might as well also bring along a few new ones.

The Lord's Prayer

In the language of our hearts, let us pray as our Saviour taught us

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.

*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that You're my God.
And You're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

CCLI Song # 3266032
Tim Hughes © 2000 Thankyou Music
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The Blessing

God of the watching ones,
the waiting ones,
the slow and the suffering ones,
the angels in heaven,
the child in the womb,

**Give us Your blessing,
Your good word for our souls,
that we might rest and rise
in the kindness of Your company.
Amen.**

Announcements

(see below)

The Conclusion

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.
Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Sources of the liturgy:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/new-patterns-36>
- Call to worship & Sending: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk>
- "The Lord is our righteousness": <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>

Wed, 1st December 2021	<p>Evening Prayer on Wednesdays</p> <p>9pm (for 20-30min)</p> <p>(Please use the usual Sunday service link.)</p>
Sun, 5th December 2021	<p>Look forward to our next Communion Service</p> <p>with Revd. Peter Widdess</p> <p>Second Sunday of Advent 11:30 hrs, Zoom link see website and in person in the church 😊</p>



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