



Today is the first Sunday of the churches year, the first Sunday of Advent. To the secular world Advent begins on the 1st December and is marked with a calendar to count down to Christmas, these days a calendar containing anything from chocolate, alcohol, coffee, cheese and even lego! For us this also means we begin of our countdown to Christmas as we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ. It is the Sunday when we light the first of the candles on the Advent ring. This made me think to where the tradition of the Advent ring came from and its symbolism. The concept dates back to Germany Lutherans in the 16th century, the 'modern' version we have today also began in Germany in the late 1800's. The circle reminds us of God's unending love and the eternal life He makes possible whilst the evergreen foliage symbolising everlasting life. 2 Sundays ago Fr Rodney reminded us of the traditional meanings of Advent, death, judgement, heaven and hell. There has not been much traditional about 2020 so for our Advent themes this year we are going to use some slightly more modern themes of hope, love, joy and peace, as well as the light of Christ coming into the world. In our current times these

seemed to bring with them a sense of positivity to lift us through the coming weeks, a month long reminder of all that the birth of Gods Son brings with him and the real reason we celebrate at Christmas. Our Advent wreath this year will journey with us through to Christmas day, wherever we are, it too will be, this morning the wreath is with Sian and James and shortly James will light the first of our candles in a short Advent liturgy, it includes the hymn Christ be our light written by Bernadette Farrell, a hymn that could not be more appropriate for our lives today. A few weeks ago I was delighted to receive a gift from a friend of a candle Advent calendar – a small candle for everyday, a daily reminder of the light Christ brings at Christmas.

Collect for the day

Almighty God give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

A reading from the book of Isaiah

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
² as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
³ When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
⁴ From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
⁵ You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

⁷ There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
⁸ Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹ Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

A reading from the 1st letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that
has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been
enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶ just as the
testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— ⁷ so that you are
not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord
Jesus Christ. ⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be
blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; by him
you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.



A reading from the Gospel according to Mark

²⁴ “But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. ²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵ Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Words from Fr Rodney

I had a friend who loved reading ‘who done it’ novels, but who liked to read the last chapter first to find out what happened, and then to start at the beginning to find out how it came about. I suppose the Christian year is a little like that as we start with Advent Sunday in which the collect and the readings all speak about the end of time when Jesus will come again in glory and usher in the Kingdom. Sometimes people find the themes of Advent a little gloomy at a time when in the midst of the pandemic the world around us is already focussed on the Christmas celebrations. But for Christians these four Sundays celebrate our Christian hope and longing, the promise of heaven and the assurance for believers that either at the end of our lives in this world, or when Jesus comes again as He promised, we shall share the glory of heaven and the fullness of eternal life with Him. In his Narnia books, which are joy to Christian adults as well as children, C.S.Lewis captures that great sense of joyful hope and expectation that finds its fulfilment in the return of the Christ-like figure of Aslan. As Christians both young and old, the message of Advent is not

one of gloom but one of joyful hope and expectation, don't let its message of hope slip you by amidst all that is happening in world at the moment !

Intercessions - Let us pray

God of Hope as we come together with our brothers and sisters in faith at the beginning of a new Church year we reflect upon the challenges of the last year that so many faith communities have faced and pray for all those who have struggled without the face-to-face support of their Church families. As we light the first candle on the advent wreath, help us to draw comfort and strength in the coming months from the light of hope that it symbolises, a reminder of Gods unfailing love even in the darkest times. We continue to give thanks for all those within our own Churches who have worked so hard to meet the needs of those within our communities during the past year, in particular Father Rodney, our Churchwardens and Council members and all those who have made it possible to come together remotely week on week from the safety of our homes. And as we look at that candle burning bright we pray in the hope that we will soon be able to come together to worship and sing joyfully once again. Amen

God of Peace as we begin this period of preparation for the coming of your infant son, we are reminded that he also came into a broken world in need of love and healing and so we pray for the peace of the world. We ask that you guide and strengthen all those who work for peace, unity, tolerance and compassion so that their voices speak louder than those who encourage violence, hatred and fear. We particularly ask for your blessings on our own government as it seeks to respond to the virus and pray especially for all those areas of the world struggling in the pandemic without the resources they need. Amen

Father of Joy we thank you for the blessings of our families, friends and neighbours and we pray for their safety. As we face new government guidelines we pray particularly for all those whose livelihoods have been threatened by the new rules and we pray for the strength and resilience to see us through the coming weeks and months. We pray particularly for all the young people returning from university shortly, that they are able to do so safely and we continue to pray for all those working in our care homes and hospitals under enormous pressure at this time. We also give thanks for all our key workers and for the many acts of kindness, which continue to bring us joy and comfort during these long, dark days. Amen

Father of Love we bring before you all those who are sick in body mind or spirit, particularly those who are suffering in the pandemic and all those who care for them. We also bring before you any we wish to hold in our prayers today... We continue to pray for all those within our communities suffering from loneliness and mental illness as well as those who fear for their futures. We ask that they may draw comfort and strength from your love and that they are able to access the support that they need. Amen

Finally Father, we remember today all those who have gone before us, those who have died recently, especially in the pandemic, those whose anniversaries are around this time and any we wish to pray for today... we thank you for their love, friendship and our memories of them and we pray for comfort and peace for their loved ones. Finally, remembering God's gift of eternal life we ask that they rest in peace and rise in glory,

In a moment of silence bring your own prayers

The Lords prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

