



ADVENT 1A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

Advent Sunday - Year A
30th November 2025



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness OR

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

708 STF – O God of hope, your prophets spoke OR

169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Hymn:

495 STF – Dear Lord and Father of mankind OR

377 STF – Down the mountain the river flows

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

185 STF – Sing we the King who is coming to reign OR

188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

550 STF – Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

This Sunday of waiting, this Sunday of beginnings
We are waiting Lord,
Beginning again our journey with you.

We are seeking Lord,
Wanting to know more of you.

Come amongst us, by your Spirit

Amen.¹

Hymn:

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness OR

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness

Opening Prayers

And so it begins...Advent.

Daily chocolate morsels, burning of candles, wrestling with fairy lights, finding room in the fridge, the YouTube video of 10 ways to gift wrap a wine bottle. Carols to sing, services to prep for, cards to write, mince pies to bake and all before 3pm on 25th December to sit down and watch a speech.

Heavenly Parent, switch off our brains, slow our hearts and lift our eyes to the real beginning, the beginning of the greatest story.

Thank you for the blessings you have poured out on us, for the gift of love, gift of time, gift of presence, gift of friendship, gift of your son. Thank you for the gift of Advent, when we can slow down and wait in hope for you.

Help us let go of our long lists of to-dos and swamped diaries, our expectations of what Advent should be. In our time together, we long to be drawn to you. Loving God, we welcome you into this space as we gather.

Let our worship begin...

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Phoebe Parkin

All Age Talk

Have you ever waited for something to happen? Maybe you've sat and waited for Christmas day? Or for a family member to arrive at your house? Maybe you've waited for a baby to be born?

Sometimes we know what time something is going to happen, other times we have to wait patiently not knowing when it's going to happen. God has promised us that the way things are now isn't the way they are always going to be, he has promised a new heaven and a new earth. In this passage we read that we must always be prepared, a bit like having the house ready for a new baby or for someone coming to stay, we might not know when they're arriving but we must have the bedroom ready so that we are prepared. God promises us that the Son of Man will come, and at a time we do not expect him. This is such a wonderful promise, and one we can hold onto when things feel really hard, but God also warns us that we must be ready and prepared for it. So how do we make sure we are prepared?

We make sure we are spiritually prepared, we have a relationship with God by praying either by ourselves or with others. We make sure we are focussed on Jesus not on things of the world that are sent to distract us. Most importantly we live a life that is glorifying to God. We also might want to tell our friends and family about God and his promises, so that they can also be prepared.

Amen.³

Hymn:

708 STF – O God of hope, your prophets spoke OR
169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Hymn:

495 STF – Dear Lord and Father of mankind OR
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Reflections on the readings

Advent Sunday is the first day of a new year – not a calendar year nor even an organisational year, but rather what is called the 'liturgical year', which has more to do with how we read and think about the Bible over the coming twelve months.

So it seems appropriate that the season of Advent opens with an invitation... an invitation to the mountain or house of the Lord and to a time of peace. Isn't that just what the world needs to hear, at the end of 2025? Let's look more closely at the readings appointed for today and find out more about how Advent this year might open new doors for us and our communities and help the world to find peace.

³ All Age Talk written by Pippa Lupton

The few verses we heard from Isaiah chapter 2 speak of a gathering of people from 'all the nations', not just a few people, for they will '*stream*' to '*the mountain of the Lord's house*'. What is meant by this beautiful phrase is more to do with theology than geography – it's not so much about getting to a particular place, it's more about getting close to the presence of God.

The mountain of the Lord is where God dwells and where God can be encountered, although not without mystery, awe and wonder. This part of the book of Isaiah comes from a period when Israel had been having a rough time; oppressed by enemies, the people had been forced into exile, forced to abandon their holy sites and ways of life. Into that time of lament and sorrow, these are words of hope. There is a glorious future, unbelievable as it may seem at the moment.

This message of future hope is clearly an important message as it comes repeatedly in Scripture. Indeed, these very words are repeated in Micah chapter 4. We don't know who wrote them first or who borrowed them from whom, but clearly the repetition only serves to underline how vital it is that we take note. So can we hear that as a message for today? Not a simplistic message, this isn't about waving a magic wand and seeing problems disappear, but it is a statement of faith in a God who has not yet finished with the world or with the human race. We can and must hear that now. The invitation is to us as well.

What will happen if we respond and make our way up to the mountain of the Lord? There will be teaching – God's word will be spoken - and, because God's word is a word of peace, there will be reconciliation. God will take the role of an arbitrator, finding ways to bring people together so that, in that beautiful image, weapons of war will become instead tools of agriculture and well-being. Swords into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks.

For ancient Israel, war was a fact of life, it was how to survive in a tribal world. But in this vision, Isaiah foretells a time when no-one will need to learn about how to wage war, when no nation will lift up a sword against another. Oh, how we pray that for Russia and Ukraine, for the Middle East, for Sudan, for so many places in our world today.

The opening words of Isaiah make it clear that none of this has happened yet, it will be '*in days to come*' and so we, in this Advent season, are called to work and pray for those days to come, those days of peace and good will. That's as good a way to prepare for Christmas as there is!

It's easy to see why today's Psalm, 122, has been chosen to sit alongside those verses from Isaiah. They speak of the same experience, of pilgrim people climbing the hills of Jerusalem to gather where God was understood to live. It's a communal experience, a joyful experience, a time of singing and celebration and, once again, a time to work and pray for peace. There is something of a play on words here, as 'Jerusalem' means 'City of Peace' – a title which has perhaps seemed ironic more than appropriate in so much of its history. The psalmist expresses a deep longing as we are invited, instructed even, to '*pray for the peace of Jerusalem*'. Three times in as many verses '*peace*' is advocated and yearned for. We join with that sentiment today.

It may be a little more challenging to link this message to today's Gospel passage which comes towards the end of Jesus' life. We may need to remind ourselves that Advent is the season in the church's year when we intentionally turn our thoughts to what is sometimes called 'the end times'. ('Eschatology' is the word given to this by scholars and theologians).

The return of Christ is an aspect of our Christian faith which we tend to ignore for much of the year, but it is there in the creed, 'We believe... He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.' So let's not miss the Advent invitation to think about that a little more deeply too. This belief is deeply rooted in the Hebrew scriptures, where, as we have seen in our verses from Isaiah, there is a sense of

longing for that kingdom of peace and harmony, to which Isaiah invites us. Over the six centuries or so between Isaiah and Jesus, that has become an expectation of these 'end times' with some kind of cataclysmic happening. So, at the start of chapter 24, when Jesus tells his disciples that the majestic temple building will be thrown down, we find them responding by asking Jesus, *"Tell us, when will this be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"* Today's verses are part of his extensive answer to that question.

They begin with a warning that whenever the end comes, it will be unexpected and unpredicted. So don't waste time on trying to work out a date, as many have done in the past. No, rather, be prepared for something which may happen at any time. Noah is mentioned, as someone who had to adapt to unexpected circumstances! A thief is also mentioned – not, perhaps the happiest of images for us as we anticipate the end of time as we know it, but the point is more about the unexpectedness of Christ's return than about its nature.

There are other images in these verses which are not easy to digest; the image of people being separated as some enter the new kingdom and others are left behind. Again, people have spent much time and energy on such verses, but perhaps the point we all need to take is simply what Jesus goes on to say – *'keep awake... be ready'*. But, we may say, how can we be ready for something when we don't know when it will happen? Whilst ignorance of the day may lead to spiritual lethargy, Jesus in Matthew demonstrates that it can also lead to moral preparation. If you are a fan of the writings of J. R. R. Tolkien, you will know that the opening chapter of his book, 'The Hobbit' is called 'An unexpected party' and there is much humour and reality in the pages which unpack that!

There is only one way to be ready at the right time, and that is to be ready all the time. To be the kind of people who notice when God invites. Not just to the final party, but to all sorts of opportunities for encounter along the way. How might our lives be different if we lived each day looking out for invitations from God? Invitations to notice the glory and splendour of creation? Invitations to step aside from busy-ness and sense God's presence? Invitations to notice a need in a neighbour or stranger? Invitations to speak words seasoned with salt?

And what about this goal of peace?

How might we work for peace to come, as foretold by prophets for so many hundreds of years? Again, perhaps, our best way to is to be found in the little things. Not many of us have power or influence at international level to negotiate peace treaties or arbitrate between nations. But we can pray for those who do.

But peace is more than that, isn't it? It is also about how we live our lives day by day. Peace is about how we speak to each other, at home, in church, in our neighbourhood. Peace is even about how we speak to cold callers on the telephone! Peace is about how, as a congregation, we come to decisions when there is disagreement, it's about how as a denomination we deal with contradictory convictions. Peace is about every aspect of our lives and if we genuinely want to be part of God's future kingdom of peace, for which we pray and yearn in this Advent season, perhaps we need to start looking for and accepting whatever invitations to peace come our way now.

For perhaps it is as we learn to spot and respond to these daily invitations that we are learning to be ready for the final invitation to the mountain of the Lord?

Amen.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Jill Baker

Hymn:

185 STF – Sing we the King who is coming to reign OR

188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains

Prayers of intercession

On this Advent Sunday, let us focus our prayers of intercession on the appeal in the psalms to pray for peace. You may like to provide a map of the world on which people can place a candle or an olive leaf or some other symbol of peace. But the prayers are also for ourselves and our own communities, so it could be appropriate to have a range of symbols available to illustrate the prayers, which can be adapted to suit the congregation and situation.

We hear the invitation today to pray for peace and we respond...

Gracious God, we hold before you the nations of the world. The nations who will one day stream to your mountain, but who now are so preoccupied with war and greed.

We name before you (*aloud or silently?*) those lands where peace is a distant dream as we pray for peace...

We hear the invitation today to pray for peace and we respond...

Gracious God, we hold before you this nation. We hear your invitation to our lands to draw close to you and yet all around we see strife, greed, selfishness and exploitation.

We name before you (*aloud or silently?*) those situations in our land where we pray for peace...

We hear the invitation today to pray for peace and we respond...

Gracious God, we hold before you this community in which we live. We give thanks for the witness of this and other churches and we hold in our thoughts those who have not yet heard your invitation.

We name before you (*aloud or silently?*) those individuals and groups locally who need your peace...

We hear the invitation today to pray for peace and we respond...

Gracious God, we hold before you people we know who are hurting today, because of physical, spiritual or mental illness, for whom peace is hard to find because of pain or turmoil.

We name before you (*aloud or silently?*) those we know and love who long to know your peace today...

We hear the invitation today to pray for peace and we respond...

Gracious God, we hold ourselves before you today. In a moment of silence we recognise all within us which does not make for peace, all our conflicts, jealousies, grudges or feuds which prevent your peace from coming...

We name these silently before you, praying for your peace to conquer our own hearts...

We offer all our prayers in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.⁵

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

We will now take up the offering.

Thank you, Advent God, for all your goodness to us.

Thank you that you came and lived amongst us, and continue to come amongst us today.

Accept these our gifts, as a measure of our response to your love, in Christ Jesus.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

550 STF – Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

Advent, patient God,

As we rise from this place,

Draw us to your light, draw us to you,

Draw us to the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

And may that same Spirit be among us, and remain with us always.

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker