Dear Friend,

I hope you are keeping well. We have had good news this week with the positive news or 2 or 3 of the vaccines the scientists and medics have been working on and trialling. Let’s pray that these continue to show good results and that it/they can be rolled out across the world to alleviate the horrendous virus that has caused so much suffering.

 **PROJECT TOTAL:**The Project total for this week is shown on the image below. I am indebted to Addie Redmond who provides me with a video totaliser for the video service and a picture totaliser for posting and emailing out to people. I want to thank those who have given to the project and encourage others that perhaps haven’t yet given. Monies can be pushed through the letter box at Margaret Ogden’s or at the manse.



**OFFERTORY**I also want to thank people who have continued giving their offertory during the months of lockdown.
If anyone wants to give their offertory then that, too, can be given via pushing it through Margaret Ogden’s letter box or the letter box at the manse. Again a huge thanks to all who have and will continue to give.

**CHURCH MAGAZINE**
The combined December 2020/January 2021 magazine should be printed next week and be available the week after. As usual I will post those out to you.

Take care and God Bless,

Richard Bradley

Order of Service Sunday 29th November 2020 (1st Sunday in Advent) Led by Lifeline

**Welcome and intro to first song- by Carolyn:**

Good morning and a very warm welcome to the morning service at Bamford Chapel and Norden URC, today led by some of the members of the music group, Lifeline.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent, the period in the Christian Calendarwhen we start to prepare for Christmas. Some of you will have already started . You might have done your Christmas shopping, buying presents for your family and friends, or you might have written your Christmas cards and so on. But Advent isn’t concerned with Christmas presents or Christmas cards, or parties or extra food for Christmas dinner. One analogy I’ve heard is about Polo mints. With a polo there is something missing in the centre. The sweet part is all round the outside but there is nothing in the middle and for many people Christmas is like that. They focus on all the peripheral things like presents, cards, parties and so on forgetting what should be at the centre which is of course Jesus. Using a well used phrase. ...Jesus is the reason for the season, Jesus promises hope and it is that aspect of the preparations we are going to focus on today.

We will start by singing our first song ‘Shine Jesus Shine’

**Song-** Shine Jesus Shine (Video clip)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. Lord ,the light of your love is shining,in the midst of the darkness, shining:Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us;set us free by the truth You now bring us - shine on me, shine on me. | 2.. Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,from the shadows into Your radiance;by Your blood I may enter Your brightness:search me, try me, consume all my darkness - shine on me, shine on me. |
| 3.. As we gaze on Your kingly brightnessso our faces display Your likeness,ever changing from glory to glory:mirrored here may our lives tell Your story -shine on me, shine on me. | Chorus: *Shine, Jesus, shine,* *fill this land with the Father's glory;**blaze, Spirit blaze,**set our hearts on fire.**Flow, river, flow**flood the nations with grace and mercy;**send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light!* |
| Graham Kendrick ©1987 Make Way ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |

**Prayers- led by Steven:**

Let us pray:

Loving God we praise you for this season of Advent, this time of preparation, thanksgiving, challenge and reflection. Open our hearts to all that you would say to us and help us to listen. We thank you that at Christmas you came into our world in Christ to reveal your love, to show us how we should live, allowing us to know you for ourselves. We praise you that he died for us but then conquered death bringing joy where there had been sorrow, hope where there had been despair and faith where there had been doubt and we praise you too for the promise that Christ will come again to establish his kingdom and bring all your people into life everlasting.

Forgive us that we so easily lose sight of that message of Advent allowing its wonder to be swamped by our busy preparations for Christmas, by concerns which are so often unimportant, by our carelessness and disobedience in discipleship. Forgive us that we forget your promises, we frustrate your Spirit, we lose sight of your love.

Meet with us we pray through our meeting together, through our listening to the scriptures and through the worship we offer.

We join together now in saying the Lord’s Prayer- the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, when they asked him how they should pray:

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, for ever and ever. Amen.

Open our hearts, Lord, to all you would say to us now, and help us to listen so that we may be equipped to serve you better; to the glory of your holy name. Amen

**Introduction to Theme and Children’s Address- led by Debbie:** Advent is the time of year when the church prepares for the celebration of the birth of Christ so long ago and anticipates His return, His second coming. Maybe we should start by thinking about what Advent is not!

**Video Clip**: Advent in Two Minutes

I wonder how many of you children (and maybe even adults) have an Advent calendar ready to start opening a door each day as you count down to Christmas? Perhaps yours has chocolate in it like this? Does it have any pictures on the front? Snowmen? Santa? Reindeer? Is this really Christmas? Or maybe you have a more traditional one, one like I had when I was a little girl? One like this with a nativity scene that shows that Christ is at the centre of Christmas? There’s no chocolate, just pictures behind each door. Maybe you have an Advent candle like this that you can light each day to countdown to Christmas? I love these because they bring light on the dark winter nights reminding us that Jesus is the light shining in the darkness. However you countdown to Christmas this Advent, each day as you open a door on the calendar or light your candle, remember- Jesus is the reason for the season!

Now join us in our second song: My Lighthouse by Rend Collective

**Song-** My Lighthouse by Rend Collective (Video Clip)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Verse 1: In my wrestling and in my doubtsIn my failures You won't walk outYour great love will lead me throughYou are the peace in my troubled seaYou are the peace in my troubled seaIn the silence, You won't let goIn the questions, Your truth will holdYour great love will lead me throughYou are the peace in my troubled seaYou are the peace in my troubled sea | Chorus:*My lighthouse, my lighthouse**Shining in the darkness. I will follow You**My lighthouse, my lighthouse**I will trust the promise**You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore* |
| Verse 2:I won't fear what tomorrow bringsWith each morning I'll rise and singMy God's love will lead me throughYou are the peace in my troubled seaYou are the peace in my troubled sea | Chorus:*My lighthouse, my lighthouse**Shining in the darkness. I will follow You**My lighthouse, my lighthouse**I will trust the promise**You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore* |
| Fire before us, You're the brightestYou will lead us through the stormsFire before us, You're the brightestYou will lead us through the stormsFire before us, You're the brightestYou will lead us through the stormsFire before us, You're the brightestYou will lead us through the storms | Chorus:*My lighthouse, my lighthouse**Shining in the darkness. I will follow You**My lighthouse, my lighthouse**I will trust the promise**You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore* |
| Rend Collective, 2013 Thankyou Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811  |

**Lighting of the Candle of Hope on the Advent Wreath (Debbie)-** We will now light our first candle on the Advent wreath- the candle of Hope

**Voice Over for the lighting of the Candle- by Emma**

Christ is the world’s light, he and none other;

Born in our darkness, he became our brother.

If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:

Glory to God on high.

As we light this first Advent candle, the candle of expectation and hope, we want it to remind us to watch for what God will give us, and to see what he has already given. May it remind each and everyone one of us of God’s great promise to us. He is our hope, He is our Redeemer, and He is Saviour.

We pray:

O God, we want to thank you for your gift of Christ, not just with words, but also with deeds. Help us to be grateful every day. Give us faith to listen to your voice that our hearts may be filled with the hope of our Lord Jesus.

Amen.

**Reading 1: Lamentations 3 v19-26 read by Beccy**

 **19**I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. **20**I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. **21**Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: **22**Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. **23**They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. **24**I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” **25**The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; **26**it is good to wait quietly  for the salvation of the Lord.

**Reflection 1 by Carolyn**

ln one of his books, A common Worship Year, Nick Fawcett says this: "we are here to celebrate the first Sunday in advent; a day which is almost unique in the Christian calendar, for it calls us to consider both past, present and future.”

It looks back to the coming of Jesus not just his birth in Bethlehem, but the promises of God made so long before to Abraham and his people across the centuries. It looks forward to his coming again; that day when he will return in glory to establish his Kingdom and gives us hope.

We have just lit the first Advent candle which represents hope. Hope is an important theme relating to Christmas, and especially relating to the Advent season leading up to Christmas. Our world is in desperate need of hope. As we approach the end of 2020, we look back at what has been a very challenging

year for all of us. Bound in our homes due to self-isolation, unable to see our families and unable to take part in the many activities that we normally take for granted, many people today live without hope or have given up hope. But Christ came at Christmas to bring us hope, and that is what we want to share

with you this morning.

We are going to look at different aspects of hope this morning relating to Christ and Christmas with making reference to some work from Ray Fowler on his website ‘Thoughts on God and life from a Christian perspective’

First of all, hope in Christ helps us to be patient in waiting. The Advent season is all about waiting. It’s a time when we recall the events and stories of the prophets and people of the Old Testament that preceded the first coming of Christ, and then a time when we reflect on our own season of waiting for the second coming of Christ. The period of waiting goes all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, to Genesis chapter 1 and the story of Adam and Eve all the way through the Old Testament stories of the prophets to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The first signal of hope during that long period of waiting came after Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. God told Adam in Genesis 2 verses 16-17: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” Adam and Eve both disobeyed this command from God, bringing death not only upon themselves but on generations to come.

It looked as though hope was gone but then God spoke telling the serpent in Genesis 3:15: “And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike

your head, and you will strike his heel.” Commentators believe that the serpent and his offspring represent Satan and all who follow in Satan’s path whilst the woman and her offspring represent Eve and all those who love and follow God. It is believed that the ultimate seed of the woman would be Jesus Himself. Therefore, so early in the Bible, we have hope, the first promise of a Redeemer.

These signals of hope in the form of prophecies and promises from God continued throughout the Old Testament period. In Genesis 17 God speaks to Abraham promising him a son and in verse 7 states that this covenant relationship will never end. God will keep these promises into eternity. The hope that God will continue to look after his people. God fulfilled this promise by bringing the nation of Israel out of Abraham, and through the nation of Israel, God continued to give promises about this special individual who would bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth. The stories continue throughout the people who were to follow, through Noah and Moses and as time passed, the prophets became more clear that the Messiah would come as a king and that God would keep his promise. In the 8th Century before Christ we come to the prophet Isaiah who told the King of Judah in Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” This was the clearest prophecy yet that there would be a child born who would be a great ruler. Although Isaiah was not talking directly about Jesus, he knew that God had hope and that he always kept his promises and so would watch and wait for that great day.

There were still many years of waiting to come, but the prophets and others like them continued to give the people hope. These were long and difficult days for the people of Israel, and yet their hope in the Messiah, the Christ to come, helped them to be patient knowing that God would keep his promises. In

Jeremiah chapter 29 God gives the people hope saying in verse 11 ‘For I know the plans I have for you,” .... “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” And it’s the same for us today. We all go through periods of waiting in our lives, and we need hope to be patient. Waiting is never easy and when we are waiting it can seem like forever – children wait in eager anticipation for their birthday, a holiday or even tea time. But there is hope in Christ, and the candle of hope reminds us that hope in Christ will help each and every one of us when the world seems lost and we feel as though we are walking through dark times.

At the end of Advent we look forward to Christmas, the fulfilment of God’s promise and hope of the early Church that as Isaiah wrote in chapter 9 ‘Unto us a son is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Although Advent and Christmas might be a little different this year, I pray that we all we have hope this Advent. Let us thank God for all he has given us and all he has promised us from the beginning of time. Amen

Let us sing together ‘ Come thou Long Expected Jesus’

**Song:** Come Thou Long Expected Jesus (Video Clip)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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 SpiritRule in all our hearts alone;By Thine all-sufficient merit,Raise us to Thy glorious throne. |
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 **Reading 2: Romans 5 v1-5 read by Sam**

Romans 5 v1-5: “1Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our LORD Jesus Christ, 2through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” (NIV)

**Reflection 2 by Debbie:** So, we heard, in our first reflection, how Jesus was the hope for all nations and we will now reflect on how through the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit He is still the hope for us now and in the future.

Present hope: What a wonderful comfort we have in our hope in Christ! Knowing that as we go through our lives facing times of adversity and sadness, He is with us. Through the love of God- who gave us the greatest gift of His son; the sacrifice of Jesus- who died that we might be saved and the power of the Holy Spirit we can come through the trials of the here and now if we put our hope in Him, if we have faith and trust in Him to lead us through.

David wrote this about our Deliverer and all-powerful God: “You are my rock and my fortress. … You are my strength. … Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD” (Psalm 31:3, 4, 24).

In the book of Jeremiah, God contrasted the worthlessness of trusting in other humans for strength (Jeremiah 17:5-6) with the blessing that comes from hoping in God: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit” (verses 7-8).

With the hope of Christ, we can put faith above fear we can be sure that God will lead us through- that good will come from any suffering we might have to face. As our second reading in Romans said: “we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character and character; hope.”

He is our daily and ever-present hope because we can trust in the promises He has made. We know God fulfils His promises- Jesus Christ is the evidence of this!

Future hope: Christ has come and our hope is in Him, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Hebrews 6:19). But our true hope in Christ is not in this life only. It is in everlasting life. A hope that is eternal. The ultimate hope is our hope in Christ’s resurrection that makes it possible for us to live forever as God’s children.  Paul writes of the amazing future awaiting us through Jesus Christ: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:16-18 NIV). Our hope rests in the power and promises of God. What God says, He will do. As Paul wrote, we live “in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2 NIV). Jesus is our living hope of the fulfilment of this promise.

Advent does not just serve as a commemoration of the anticipation of Christ’s birth in the season leading up to Christmas but as a reminder that we are waiting for His second coming- that we wait and hope in prayerful expectation for His return, for the fulfilment of the promise of God’s Kingdom, for when He takes us to be with Him for eternity as Christ promised in John 14, 2-3: “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

That first Christmas when He first came amongst us, He came with the frailty of a baby, born on this earth in the squalor of a stable witnessed by a few humble shepherds but we know that when He comes again He will come in glory and majesty from the Heavens and that “every eye will see Him” (Revelation 1:7) to fulfil the promises of His second coming. This is the hope of Advent. A hope that we need to share!ohop

A Shared Hope: Throughout this year we have held special prayer services on the 20th of every month to pray that we might be given many opportunities to share our hope in Christ with others as part of the HOPE 2020 initiative and what a year this has been, where hope has been needed more than ever in our world that continues to face the challenges of war, the plight of refugees, the exploitation and trafficking of fellow humans, the destruction of our beautiful planet by mankind and a global pandemic that has instilled fear and isolation. It is our duty as Christians, as disciples of Christ to go out and share the Good News of our hope in Christ as our reading from Romans says “we boast in the hope of the glory of God”. This is indeed what we should do so that the gospel of the Good News- the love of Christ and the hope we have in Him can shine a light in the darkness of our world.

As Paul says in his letter to the Romans in chapter 15 verse 13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”. This is my prayer for us all and for everyone especially as we focus on the candle of hope this first week of Advent and reflect on the hope we have in Christ that we are charged, as His disciples, to go out and share with others. For if, as in the opening words of our final hymn which will follow the prayers of intercession, in Christ alone our hope is found it would be unchristian of us not to share it!

**Prayers of Intercession- led by Chris**

In these strange and difficult times, we thank you Lord that we belong to you and trust in your love and guidance to see us through and that that you watch over us. These are bewildering times and there are lots of things that currently are not possible such as seeing our friends and family and not being able to enjoy physical contact whether it be just a handshake or a hug. Give us your peace and understanding that in the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “I know the plans for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future”. We pray that we can stay together as a Church family and know that although we are currently physically apart we are as one in you.

We thank you Lord for the beauty of your creation. Whatever we do or wherever we are, help us to admire and wonder at your creation. When we walk or just simply look out of the window let us marvel at what we can see. Let us still our minds with what we can see or hear or smell and just watch the clouds, the weather, all what we can see and help us in these moments to rest our minds from the turmoil of not just our daily life but of what is going on in the world at the moment and our fears, concerns and worries.

The imposed restrictions have stopped many things, especially those times and places where we can meet and share events together, whether it be Church, cinema, theatre, concerts or social gatherings. Help us to keep on praying for the communities in which we live and show us the ways we can help and support those around us. Make us mindful that kind words or actions or just making time to speak and chat to a family member, a friend, or someone we often see whether out walking or in places such as the supermarket can make all the difference. We pray that that you will give us the confidence and guidance to show your love in whatever way is appropriate to those we meet and spend time with. We know that it can make a difference to them and support or comfort them in their concerns and worries about what’s happening whether it be about family contact or work.

We remember especially at this time all those who have died in our community whether from the virus or otherwise. Send your peace and love on those who knew and loved them. Give us your peace and reassurance that they too are at peace now in your endless love and eternal glory.

We ask these prayers in your name AMEN

We will now sing our final hymn; In Christ Alone

 **Song-** In Christ Alone (video clip)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. In Christ alone my hope is found,He is my light, my strength, my song;this cornerstone, this solid ground,firm through the fiercest drought and storm.What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!My comforter, my all in all,here in the love of Christ I stand.  | 2.. In Christ alone - who took on flesh,fullness of God in helpless Babe!This gift of love and righteousness,scorned by the ones he came to savetill on that cross as Jesus died,the wrath of God was satisfied,for every sin on Him was laid;here in the death of Christ I live.  |
| 3.. There in the ground his body lay,light of the world by darkness slain, then, bursting forth in glorious day,up from the grave He rose again!And as he stands in victorysin's curse has lost its grip on me,for I am His and He is mine - bought with the precious blood of Christ.  | 4.. No guilt in life, no fear in death,this is the power of Christ in me;from life's first cry to final breath,Jesus commands my destiny.No power of hell, no scheme of mancan ever pluck me from His hand;till he returns or calls me home,here in the power of Christ I'll stand! |
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 **Blessing- by Steven**

Dear Lord, we thank you for the words that we have shared together today. At this time of advent help us to remember the real meaning of Christmas and to go out and share our hope with anyone we meet, and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us today, this advent and always. Amen