**Sunday 13th December 2020**

Welcome to Bamford Chapel and Norden United Reformed Church on this third Sunday of Advent. My name is David Watson and I am a serving Elder at our church. It is good that you are able to join with us as we worship God together whilst apart through Covid 19 restrictions.

Hear our call to worship:-

Living God, we come in response to your call, to offer our worship, our thanks, our confession, our lives. Accept now the worship we offer and use us as you will for your kingdom.

We begin our service as we sing,

**I am a new creation (**254 CMP)

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| I am a new creation,  no more in condemnation,  here in the grace of God I stand.  My heart is over-flowing,  my love just keeps on growing,  here in the grace of God I stand. | Chorus: *And I will praise You, Lord,*  *yes I will praise You, Lord,*  *and I will sing of all that you have done.*  *A joy that knows no limit,*  *a lightness in my spirit -*  *here in the grace of God I stand.* |
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We continue as we pray together;

A prayer of thanksgiving

Loving God, we thank you for this new day and for the opportunity it brings to spend a time together in worshipping you wherever we may be, be that alone or with family. In spite of all the restrictions that we have to contend with we have so much to thank you for. At this Advent time we thank you particularly for your great gift of Love, the gift of your Son, Jesus and in a few days time we will celebrate once more the coming of Jesus as the babe at Bethlehem.

And so we give thanks to you, Lord God, and praise you as our Creator, our Sustainer and our Father.

We thank you for Jesus, our Saviour, our Lord and our Friend.

We thank you for the Holy Spirit who is our Strength, our Power and our Enabler.

We thank you for the world around us which speaks to us of your Majesty and fills us with joy.

We thank you for our homes, our family and friends.

We thank you for laughter and play, for tears and for comfort, for peace and for fun and joy.

We thank you for minds that can learn; for things to discover and new challenges to face.

We thank you for those who make God real for us, for those who work tirelessly for us in our NHS, our supermarkets and those who ensure that our lives continue on a daily basis in spite of coronavirus.

We thank you for the wonderful news that a vaccine has been through all the tests and can now be used to help combat this dreadful virus.

We thank you for a Saviour that we can trust, for thanksgiving and worship, for forgiveness and praise, for God’s presence and power and for life itself.

In Jesus’ name we pray.

May God’s name be praised! Thanks be to God. Amen.

A prayer of confession

Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us for the times we turn away from you because we are afraid of what other people might think of us, even though we know that you will still reach out in love to us, never giving up, refusing to write us off. Forgive us when we refuse the fresh start that you offer us so often. This Advent time help us to make a new beginning as we marvel again at your great love for us that we will celebrate again this new Christmas time. Help us to remember again, in this wondrous Christmas story, that you continue to seek us out, offering your wonderful grace to all that will receive it in humility and love; grace undeserved yet freely given.

Lord, grant us your mercy and teach us to receive you with gladness, not just at Christmas but always.

In your name, Jesus, we ask it. Amen

We pray together in the words of The Lord’s 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,

for ever and ever. Amen.

Children’s Address

Advent is the time for preparing. Preparing to begin a new round of remembrance. The prophets had told of the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. At Christmas we celebrate that wonderful gift of Love from God, when he gave himself; Immanuel, God with us, born as a baby in a manger. But have you ever wondered why God became a human? Perhaps this little story may help to explain it.

There was a farmer who did not believe in the Christmas story. To him the idea that God would become a man was absurd. His wife, however, was a devout believer and she raised their children to believe. The farmer sometimes gave her a hard time, mocking her faith and belief in the incarnation of God in the baby of Bethlehem: “It’s all nonsense,” he said, “Why would God lower himself to become human like us? It’s such a ridiculous story.”

One snowy Sunday evening his wife took the children to church while the farmer relaxed at home. After they had left, the weather deteriorated into a blinding snowstorm. Then he heard a loud thump against the window. Then he heard another thump and another! He ventured outside to see what was happening. There in the field was the strangest sight: a flock of geese! They were migrating but had become disorientated by the storm. They were stranded on his farm, unable to fly or see their way.

The farmer had compassion on them. He wanted to help them and realised his barn would give them shelter for the night. He opened the barn doors and stood back, hoping that they would make their way in. But they didn’t realise it would be shelter for them. So he tried to shoo the geese in, but they ran in all directions. Perplexed, he got some bread and made a trail to the barn door. But they still did not catch on. Nothing he tried or could do would get them into the warmth and shelter of the barn.

Feeling totally frustrated, he shouted out loud, “Why don’t they follow me? Can’t they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm? How can I possibly get them to follow me?”

He thought for a moment and then realised that they would not follow a human. He said to himself, “How can I possibly save them? The only way would be for me to become a goose. If only I could become one of them, then I could save them.”

Then, at last, he understood God’s heart towards humankind. He realised that God had had the same thought and so he had to send his Son! He fell on his knees in the snow and worshipped God!

God believed that the only way to get peoples attention was to come in human form, to be one of us! Jesus left heaven and came to earth to prepare us so that we can share in everlasting life with him in heaven.

Jesus himself said, in John Chapter 3 verse 16: ‘***For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.’***

Our second song is:- How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him

(Our God reigns)

**How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him  who brings good news, good news  proclaiming peace, announcing news of happiness,  Our God reigns, our God reigns!  Our God reigns, our God reigns,  our God reigns, our God reigns! | 2..You watchmen lift your voices joyfully as one  shout for your King, your King.  See eye to eye the Lord restoring Zion:  Your God reigns, your God reigns!  Your God reigns, your God reigns,  your God reigns, your God reigns! |
| 3.. Waste places of Jerusalem break forth with joy,  we are redeemed, redeemed.  The Lord has saved and comforted His people:  Your God reigns, your God reigns!  Your God reigns, your God reigns,  your God reigns, your God reigns! | 4.. Ends of the earth, see the salvation of your God  Jesus is Lord, is Lord.  Before the nations He has bared His holy arm:  Your God reigns, your God reigns!  Your God reigns, your God reigns,  your God reigns, your God reigns! |
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We will now have our bible readings

Matthew chapter 11 verses 2 to 11

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor

Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:“ ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

James chapter 5 verses 7 to 10

## [Patience in Suffering](https://www.biblestudytools.com/passage/?q=james+5:7-12)

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Address

In verses 7 to 11 of our reading from Matthew, Jesus speaks specifically about John the Baptist. He asked them what they expected to see when they went into the desert looking for John. Did they expect to see a blade of grass bending in the wind? Something more spectacular? A man dressed up in fine clothes? Jesus told them they should look in palaces for that kind of thing! Or, perhaps, a prophet? And Jesus says they saw much more than a prophet. For, John, he tells them, is much more than just a prophet, he is the one of whom scripture says ‘God said, I will send my messenger ahead of you to open the way for you’. To prepare the way! Jesus says that John the Baptist is someone special indeed!

Who is this John the Baptist that Jesus is so sure is someone special? There is no getting away from it, John was special, he, was unique! Luke tells us in chapter 1, verse 17, of his gospel that the Angel Gabriel gave the message to Zechariah, his father, telling him that John would ‘go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Isaiah’, and Zechariah himself confirmed this in verse 76 of that chapter when he said, “You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God. You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare the road for him.” Zechariah said this when John was only one week old. John was one who was set apart for God’s service, from before his birth, and he remained faithful to his calling to the end of his life.

He was a wild looking man. He wore odd clothes, he ate strange food and he preached an unusual message to those that went out into the wasteland to see and listen to him. He had no power or position in the Jewish religious/political system yet he spoke with such, almost irresistible, authority, that people were moved by his words because he spoke the truth with conviction. He challenged the people to turn from their sins and baptised them with water as a symbol of their repentance. He baptised hundreds, but even as people crowded to him he always pointed beyond himself, never forgetting that his main role was to announce the coming of the Saviour.

But, as always happens, the words of truth that moved so many to repentance moved others to resistance and resentment. He even challenged Herod to admit his sin and as a result of that he was thrown into prison. It was from prison that John sent some of his followers to find Jesus and ask the question, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

It seems to be a strange question to be asked by someone like John. John was very forthright in all that he said and did. He never seemed to have any doubts or fears at all, yet here his words certainly seem to be expressing doubts. This is a far cry from the John we read about in chapter 3 verses 13 to 15 of Matthew’s gospel. Jesus came to John to be baptised by him and John says to him, “I ought to be baptised by you and yet you come to me!” And Jesus replied to him, “Let it be so for now. For in this way we can do all, that God requires.” And now; he has heard about all the things that Jesus had been and was doing, and he appears to questions what he truly knows.

Jesus answers John’s followers by telling them to believe the evidence of their own eyes. The blind can see, the lame can walk, those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life and the Good News is preached to the poor.” Jesus must have thought that John’s question was odd, as well, because he finishes by saying to them, “How happy are those who have no doubts about me.” John must have asked himself questions such as, if Jesus is the Messiah, why am I in prison when I could be out there, preaching to the crowds, preparing their hearts and helping the cause?

I can find this very helpful for myself. If a person, hand picked by God, can have such doubts, then my own doubts pale into insignificance. But the answer given to John is also very helpful to me. When I sometimes have doubts about my own salvation or that my sins will be forgiven, the evidence in scripture tells me not to turn **away** from Jesus but to turn **to** him.

In verse 10 of our Matthew reading, as I have already said, Jesus confirms what was foretold by Gabriel and John’s father, Zechariah. He says, “John is the one of whom the scripture says, ‘God said, I will send my messenger ahead of you to open the way for you.’ Jesus had no doubts as to who John was. In verse 11 he emphasises this and says, “I assure you that John the Baptist is greater than any man who ever lived.” He then says, “But he who is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than John.” No man ever fulfilled his God given purpose better than John, but, John expected judgement to come before the kingdom. He had things in the wrong order. His fiery message had stirred up force and violence and did not equate with righteousness. Because of this, in God’s coming kingdom all his subjects will have a greater spiritual heritage than John as they will have seen and known Jesus Christ right through to his finished work on the cross.

We are in this time of Advent, this waiting time, this preparation time, so how can we use it. James helps us in this as he tells us we must, above all things, be patient until the Lord comes. He uses, as an example, the farmer, who, after all his preparation of the land, waits patiently for the Autumn and Spring rains to come before the land produces its precious crops. He cannot hurry the process. The farmer knows that there are other jobs to be done while the seed that he has sown germinates and grows, all in its own time.

We too have things that we can do as we wait patiently for the return of Jesus. He too will come in his own good time. We can remain faithful. If things go wrong we can hold our council and not blame others for the miseries we can bring down on ourselves with negative and malicious thoughts. Instead of blaming others we can accept our responsibilities for what goes wrong and work towards putting them right instead of waiting for others to do it for us. Don’t judge others; James reminds us in verse 9 that the Judge is near, ready to appear.

What then are we waiting for during this Advent time? We are waiting for the greatest gift that God could ever bestow on Mankind. The giving of his own Love, in the person of Jesus. I am sure that in spite of any restrictions that will be in place that it will be an exciting time, a happy time and even a sad time but isn’t that what life is about. As long as we remember that God can use everything that happens for his good purpose we can have his joy in our hearts. The story began way back in time. It continued and was recorded in the scriptures and it continues today. We are as much a part of the story as any that have gone before. Our individual lives are important in God’s story and we should live them accordingly.

Advent is a time to reflect. Have you taken the time to think about our Project? It may be a little more difficult to give this year but I am sure with a little good will and ingenuity we can still find a way to make a contribution.

We have been supporting different places through our projects for more than 30 years, perhaps not physically but certainly spiritually as we gave our gifts and supported our projects around the world. Why spiritually? John tells us in 1 John chapter 4 verses 19 to 21, ‘We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.’ Each time we have supported anybody or any charity then we have spread God’s love to others. This year our project is based around children in Kiribati. Can we show some of the love that God has commanded us to use, to help us raise a good total for these our brothers in Christ? God loves a cheerful giver. Are you feeling cheerful amid the stress of spending money whilst buying food and presents? Try and put some to one side for our project this year.

Well I really have to mention Christmas because isn’t that what we are all waiting for? Here are a few lines of verse that can perhaps say it better than I can. I have taken them from a book compiled by J.John and Mark Stibbe, in Monarch Books.

*It’s Christmas time at our house and we’re putting up a tree.*

*I wish I could find some simple way to remember God’s gift to me.*

*Some little sign or symbol to show friends stopping by,*

*The little babe was born one day but he really came to die.*

*Some symbol of his nail pierced hands, his blood he shed for me.*

*What if I hung a nail, on my Christmas tree?*

*I know it was his love for us that held him to a tree,*

*But when I see this simple nail I’ll know he died for me.*

*It may seem strange at Christmas time to think of nails and wood,*

*But both were used in Jesus’ life to bring us something good*

*From manger bed, to crown of thorns, to death on Calvary,*

*God used the wood and nails of men to set all people free.*

There are only two more weeks before Christmas Day. Two weeks to reflect, to get ready. Find time to think of God amongst the hustle and bustle. Don’t forget where the Christ in Christmas comes from.

May you each have a blessed Christmas. Amen

We will now pray for others and for ourselves

Intercession

Father, we pray for the whole church, which you called into being through your Son. We are aware that it is always your intention that your church should be a blessing to all people everywhere. We ask that by your Holy Spirit your church may be daily renewed and empowered for the task for which you gave it life.

We pray, Father, that we and all our fellow Christians may be ready for any sacrifice, any action, any declaration that will clearly demonstrate faith, hope and love, to our neighbours, to those with whom we work, to our family and friends and those we meet on the journey of life each day.

We pray for those who, because they know God has made them his special people, do all that they can to make others special too; for those involved in feeding the hungry, seeking the lost, healing the broken, enabling the defeated; for those who care for the sick and the dying; for those who care for others whose lives and emotions are in need of health and healing.

We pray for those whose faith has lost meaning, whose worship is all ritual and empty words, for those who are no longer aware of God’s presence, his power or his love; for those who only see the hurt and the pain and the darkness of life. We ask that they may see the joy and the goodness and the light of Christ in the lives of his people.

We pray for those we know who have been reduced to despair; for those whose joy has been crushed by the indifference of others; for those who have suffered great grief, who are left numb by sorrow and loss; for those still overwhelmed by the separation death brings from someone they loved and who loved them.

We pray for ourselves. In the face of all of life’s uncertainties, sorrows, hurts, disappointments and failures, we ask that the reassurance of Christ’s presence, power and love may give us strength, hope and faith.

In the name of Jesus we pray this.

The Lord hears our prayer. Thanks, be to God. **Amen**

Our final song is:- My Jesus, my Saviour

**My Jesus, my Saviour**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. My Jesus, My Saviour,  Lord, there is none like You.  All of my days, I want to praise  the wonders of Your mighty love.  My comfort, my shelter,  tower of refuge and strength,  let every breath, all that I am,  never cease to worship You. | Chorus: Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing,  power and majesty, praise to the King!  Mountains bow down and the seas will roar,  at the sound of your name!  I sing for joy at the work of your hands,  forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.  Nothing compares to the promise I have in You. |
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I thank you for joining in this service and I wish you all, wherever you may be, a happy and joyful Christmas

**Benediction and blessing**

I pray that the comfort of God will surround you;

The strength of God invigorate you;

The grace of God enliven you,

and give you hope in all that you say and do.

And now, may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, today, tomorrow and always. Amen.

And now tomorrow and always. Amen. tomtomorrowtomorrow and evermore. Amen.