

Service - What Advent Means to us

Intro:

In Christian communities around the world, Advent refers to the 4 Sundays before Christmas, which is when we remember and celebrate the arrival of Jesus on earth.

Today we're going to look at the meaning of "Advent" and Hope with what it means for each one of us. Advent means "Arrival" and signifies the start of an event or the arrival of a person. The 4 candles of Advent are themed as Hope, Joy, Peace and Love. Today we're looking at what we mean by "Hope".

"In Romans 15:13 we read: **"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."**

Hope, when associated with an anticipation of something or an aspiration toward something, is not guaranteed because it is subject to changeable people and changeable circumstances. Hope can only be guaranteed if it is anchored in Jesus Christ, the unchanging Son of God, and every unchanging promise found in His Word. Christian hope serves as the anchor for our souls, holding us steady in uncertain times.

Let's start our Service with a prayer of hope:

Heavenly Father, we come before You with hearts open, seeking Your presence and Your light. In a world that often feels heavy with burdens, we hold onto the vision of the girl reaching for the balloon, a symbol of hope that drifts toward the heavens.

Lord, may we, too, reach out with the same longing and faith, trusting that Your promises will never fail us. Fill our spirits with the courage to pursue our dreams and the strength to let go of our fears, just as the balloon is released into the sky.

Grant us the wisdom to see beauty in brokenness and the grace to find peace amidst the chaos. Help us to remember that even when hope seems distant, You are always near, lifting our hearts and guiding our steps.

Bless us with an unwavering belief in Your love and a steadfast hope that can light the darkest paths. May our lives be a testament to Your enduring faithfulness and boundless mercy.

In Your precious name, we pray. Amen."

(Source: Cong. Fed. Life-Light Day 35).

Time for our Prayers

SoF 1047

These are the days of Elijah,
Declaring the word of the Lord:
And these are the days of Your servant Moses,
Righteousness being restored.
And though these are days of great trial,
Of famine and darkness and sword,
Still, we are a voice in the desert crying
'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.'

*Behold He comes riding on the clouds,
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call;
Lift your voice, it's the year of jubilee,
Out of Zion's hill salvation comes.*

These are the days of Ezekiel,
The dry bones becoming as flesh;
And these are the days of Your servant David,
Rebuilding the temple of praise.
These are the days of the harvest,
The fields are as white in the world,
And we are the labourers in the vineyard,
Declaring the word of the Lord.

1st Reading – Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way" –
³ "a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him."

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

SoF 410 – O Come, O Come Immanuel

O COME, O COME, IMMANUEL,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of
might
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's
height

In ancient times didst give the
law
In cloud, and majesty, and awe.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people
save
And give them victory o'er the
grave.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come
and cheer

Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of
night,
And death's dark shadows put to
flight.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly
home;
Make safe the way that leads on
high,
And close the path to misery.

2nd Reading – Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the "Most High". The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the "Most High" will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Hymns & Psalms 81

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.

Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art,
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom come.

By Thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

THE MESSAGE

In our first Reading from the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Mark is quoting from Isaiah 40:3 when he writes:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way" –
3 "a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him."

Preparing a straight path means removing obstacles and rolling out the red carpet for the coming of the Lord. The "wilderness" is a picture of life's trials and sufferings. We are not immune to these, but our faith may not be hindered by them. Isaiah told people to prepare to see God work. John the Baptist used these Words as he challenged the people to prepare for the coming Messiah.

Our second Reading which comes from Luke's Gospel never fails to amaze me! The Angel Gabriel came to a teenage girl who was engaged to be married to Joseph. Gabriel didn't go to the daughter of the Rabbi in the synagogue, no he went and gave the Message to a teenage girl. Mary didn't question him, she simply said ""I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled." Even though in the culture at that time she could have been stoned to death for having a child outside of marriage. I expect that such faith was most probably very rare in a person so young.

With the candle for Hope, the word "Hope" means that it is something you want to happen in the future, so in today's Service we are hoping, we are longing for, Christmas when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Here are 7 verses of Hope to fill you this coming week with the Hope that Jesus Christ brings us throughout His Word, the Bible.

Psalm 31:24 Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Psalm 119:114 You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.

Psalm 130:5 I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his Word, I put my hope.

Isaiah 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Ephesians 1:18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful.

Romans 15:13 **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.**

Let's pray: Let's make that last verse our prayer, 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.

Heavenly Father, You are the God of Hope. Walk with us on this Advent journey as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Your son Jesus. Father, during this time of Advent let us remember to fix our eyes on the only reason for this season, that is your Son who is the only hope for a broken world. May You fill our spirits with the hope and joy of Christ's coming, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

SoF 1346

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.

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 save:
Till 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.

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 victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine -
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

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 man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

THE GRACE

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all for ever more, Amen.

This Service has been prepared by: Christopher Stirling of West End Congregational Church, Haverhill, UK.
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