

ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT WORSHIP SERVICE WITH COMMUNION
10.30 AM 1ST DECEMBER 2024
REV DR JULIA BINNEY LEADING & REV DR JIM BINNEY PREACHING
www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk.
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THEME: Advent 1 – The God Who Comes (2 Peter 3:4)

ADVENT 1:

The first Advent Candle reminds us of the Advent hope – Jesus is coming again!

We light this candle to remind us of the darkness before Jesus came, and we remember the greater light that will dawn when he returns.

PAUSE TO REFLECT

ADVENT CALL TO WORSHIP:

Lord God, as we wait for your promise, give light, give hope.

We gather together at the beginning of Advent to prepare for the coming Jesus, the One who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

God calls us to be bearers of hope in a troubled world.

In Christ alone we put our hope.

MP 1072:

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.

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ADVENT PRAYER OF PRAISE:

Loving God, we praise you for this new season of Advent, this time of preparation, thanksgiving, challenge and reflection.

Lord, we open our hearts to you and offer to you our worship.

Lord, help us to be ready to welcome Christ – as he came so he shall come again to establish your kingdom and to give life to all your people.

Lord, we look to you, we bow before you.

We praise you for your message of hope as we prepare for your coming afresh into our hearts and lives in confidence and trust.

We honour you and glorify your name and in faith we say,

Come, Lord Jesus, come! Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever and ever. Amen.**

FAMILY TIME: Learning to be Patient

(There will be an offering taken during the following song, and after the song the children will leave us for their own groups)

HYMN MP 605:

Soon, and very soon,
We are going to see the King;
Soon, and very soon,
We are going to see the King;
Soon, and very soon,
We are going to see the King;
Alleluia, alleluia,
We're going to see the King!

No more crying there ...

No more dying there ...

Alleluia, alleluia, Alleluia, alleluia,

Soon, and very soon ...

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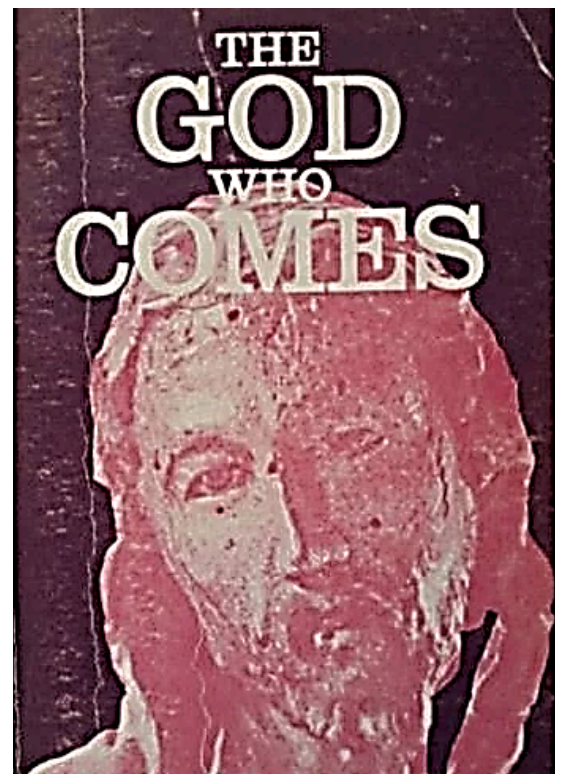
PRAYER OF DEDICATION

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 24:30-35

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE READING: 2 Peter 3:1-10, 14

SERMON: THE GOD WHO COMES (2 Peter 3:4)

A schoolteacher found a little boy from her class staring at the Manger Scene erected in the corner of the classroom. Seeing the confusion etched on his face she asked him what the problem was. What I want to know he replied, is 'Where does God fit in?' Advent is that season at the beginning of the Christian Year when traditionally the Church prepares itself for 'Christmas' or 'Christ's Mass' – the annual celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. In this birth, we see God revealing himself to us in the Person of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-8). Understandably this is confusing for many people not just children. The Apostle Peter records that way back in his day people were confused about 'the promise of Christ's coming' (2 Peter 3:4). So let's try and clear up the confusion (not make it worse). It's really a matter of tenses: past tense, future tense, and present tense.



Advent Celebrates the God Who Came! When Jesus commenced his public ministry aged 30 his cousin John the Baptist, who had initially pointed others to Jesus as the Promised Messiah, became doubtful and asked Jesus, 'Are you indeed the One who was to come or should we expect another?' (Luke 7:19). We can perhaps forgive

John's rather pathetic query ... he was after all, at that time, in prison, in darkness, awaiting probable execution, so no wonder he was full of doubt. Jesus' response to those who brought John's message to him was, 'Go back and tell John all you have seen and heard [that I have done]: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, dead people are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor' (Luke 7:22). The Advent Narrative reminds us that Jesus is indeed the God who came amongst us in human form! When Jesus came the first time it was to be born in a manger and die on a cross to save us all from the power of Satan, sin, death, and an empty or wasted way of life. The Apostle Peter tells us that Jesus 'bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live righteous lives ... he suffered once and for all for sin – the righteous for the unrighteous – to bring us to God' (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). In the Old Testament, there are 353 verses foretelling the First Coming of Christ ... coming as Messiah, coming as Saviour. Indeed, prior to his birth, an angel appeared to Joseph and foretold that the child who would be born to Mary would be special. He would bear two names – 'Immanuel' (meaning God with us)' and 'Jesus' (because he will save his people from their sins) (Matthew 1:21,23).

Advent Celebrates the God Who is to Come! We have already noted that in the Old Testament, there are 353 verses foretelling the First Coming of Christ. But throughout the whole Bible there are eight times that number of verses foretelling a Second Coming of Christ! When Jesus returns the second time it will not be to be born in a manger or die on a cross ... but as 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (Revelation 19:16) ... coming to judge the living and the dead and take those who are his to be with him in Glory! This is the theme of Peter's message to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) here in 2 Peter 3. These new believers were having a tough time of it as a result of the Roman Emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians. Scattered throughout Asia Minor one of the things that kept them going was the promise of Jesus' return. Had not Jesus himself told them: 'The Son of Man is coming [he] will appear in the heavens... [you] will see [him] coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory... he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world' (Matthew 24:30,31). As the angel had told the disciples on the day of Jesus ascension: 'Why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!' (Acts 1:11). They thought this would happen in their lifetime. We know of course that it would take a lot longer. As Peter reminds them (and us) in this Second Letter: 'But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed but wants everyone to repent' (2 Peter 3:8,9). As we have already seen when Jesus returns the second time it will not be to be born in a manger or die on a cross ... but as 'King of kings and Lord of lords' ... coming to judge the living and the dead and take those who are his to be with him in Glory! The key question is not so much 'When will Jesus return?' but 'Are we ready for Jesus' return?' I would suggest that all the 'signs of the times' have already been fulfilled. Jesus could return at any time. Are we ready? Have we committed our lives to Jesus? Are we living lives that demonstrate that we are truly his (2 Peter 3:14)?

Advent Celebrates the God who Comes to Us Today! Perhaps the most wonderful thing, however, about the Advent Narrative – and something which makes the Good News of the Gospel so personal to us all – is that God still comes to us today in the Person of Jesus Christ. One of the greatest exponents of the Gospel was the Apostle Paul. Speaking to the Galatians about the message he proclaimed he says: 'I want you to know that the Gospel I proclaim did not come from any human source ... it came to me by direct revelation of Jesus Christ' (Galatians 1:11,12). Paul became a Christian as a direct result of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ on Damascus Road. You can read the whole story in Acts 9. The point I am seeking to make here is that the Advent Narrative celebrates a God who comes to us in Jesus Christ today. Paul (as far as we know) never met Jesus Christ 'in the flesh' (so to speak). But here (as in Acts 9) he speaks of personal spiritual encounter with Jesus Christ. This is what he himself experienced, and this is what he wants the Galatians, and everyone else for that matter, to experience also. He is telling us that God (through the agency of his Spirit) still comes to us today in the Person of Jesus Christ! The Apostle John, writing possibly some 50-60 years after the Ascension of Jesus, speaks of the intimacy of knowing Jesus in a personal way – hearing him, seeing him touching him – enjoying that special *koinōnia* fellowship that is a creation of the Holy Spirit that every true believer (even today) can enjoy (1 John 1:1-5).

It is time to stop talking about vague belief in God being sufficient to make us a Christian. What we really need is the kind of dynamic encounter that the Bible speaks of, that those Apostles and early believers (and others like him down through the ages right up to the present) experienced. We need the God who comes, to come into our hearts and lives in dynamic, life-changing power.

Advent God, we worship you – the God who comes. You are not remote from the world you have made, but each day you come to us, blessing us with your presence. You came in Jesus Christ, made flesh in our world of weakness and need. You came in power to raise him from death, a mighty promise for all creation. Each day you come, by your Spirit, gently and powerfully working in the lives of men and women. At the end of time you will come, in power and righteousness, in mercy and redeeming love. Grant us the grace to welcome your coming. In flame our love to yearn for your presence. Enlarge our vision to recognise your coming day by day. We greet you, Advent God! Amen.

SONG: <https://youtu.be/UViC6DIIcEa>

Sometimes I fall to my knees and pray
Come, Jesus come, let today be the day
Sometimes I feel, like I'm gonna break
But I'm holding on, to a hope that won't fade

*Come, Jesus, come
We've been waiting so long
For the day You return to heal every hurt and right every wrong
We need You right now
Come and turn this around
Deep down I know, this world isn't home*

Come, Jesus, come

There'll be no war, and there'll be no chains
When Jesus comes, let today be the day
He'll come for the weak, and the strong just the same
And all will believe, in the power of His name

One day He'll come, and we'll stand face to face
Come and lay it all down, 'cause it might be today
The time is right now, there's no need to wait
Your past will be washed, by rivers of grace

STEPHEN McWHIRTER © 2020

RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

COMMUNION

WORDS OF INVITATION

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is right that we call to mind the meaning of this Supper. It is a remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ for the sin of the world; an encounter with the risen Lord; a feeding on him in faith; a communion with one another in his body, the Church; and looking forward to the day when he will come again. Therefore, we need to come in faith, conscious of our weakness, renouncing our sin, humbly putting our trust in Christ, and seeking his grace.

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION & THANKSGIVING

THE INSTITUTION:

'The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way after supper he took the cup saying,

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

This is the body of Christ, broken for you.

(take a piece of bread and eat as it is served to you)

This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

(we drink together once all have been served)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION:

Whatever life may bring, whatever you are facing, do not lose hope.

For the One who died is risen and will come again.

To him be praise and glory, honour and worship now and for evermore!

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS: – Anne McFarlane and Nigel Varndell

In this season of Advent;
while we wait in darkness for the coming of your light,
while we wait in fear for the coming of peace,
while we wait in trepidation for the coming of hope,
we pray for the people of our world.

We pray for the people of Ukraine and the middle-east;
for the fragile peace in Lebanon, that it will hold
for the ongoing horror in Gaza, that it will end
for all who fear the violence in the Ukraine will spread.
In a time of war, we pray for the coming of the Prince of Peace.

We pray for everyone fearful for the future
Fearful because of the language used by politicians
to spread hatred and to divide us one against one another
Fearful of the speech used to blame and denigrate the "other".
Lord in a time of division, we pray for the coming of your unifying love

We pray for the people of this country;
for those who are struggling to make ends meet or pay for celebrations as we come to Christmas
for those who have come to these shores seeking safety and a new start
In a time of despair we pray for the coming of new hope.

We pray for the people of Reading and of this church;
in our work with the homeless and hopeless, the faithless and fearful,
as we work to show them they are loved.
In a time of darkness, we pray for the coming of the Light of the World. Amen

MP 835:

Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in Your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
Touched by the madness and lies.

*Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit we pray.
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit on us today.*

May now Your church rise with power and love,
This glorious gospel proclaim.
In every nation salvation will come
To those who believe in Your name.
Help us bring light to this world
That we might speed Your return.

Great celebrations on that final day
When out of the heavens You come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrow will end,
And rulers will bow at Your throne.

Our great commission complete,
Then face to face we shall meet.

NOEL RICHARDS & GERALD COATES © 1992 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

CLOSING PRAYER: *from Revelation 22:20*

Jesus says, 'Yes, I am coming soon!'

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

ADVENT BLESSING:

May the blessing of the Lord rest and remain on you and all his people of every race and language;

May the Lord meet you in mercy and fill you with hope.

May the Lord comfort you with his tender loving care.

And may the Lord hasten his coming and give you the blessing of peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE GRACE:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.**

TODAY and dates for your diary:

Church Meetings:

- There will be an extra single item agenda Church Meeting after the service TODAY! All welcome.

The Leadership Course continues with Session 3 on:

- Tuesday 3rd December – 2.30 pm in person in the Brookside room.
- Friday 6th December – 7.30 pm on Zoom (ID: 828 1505 7805 Passcode: 41165).

Church Prayer Meeting:

- Friday 6th December - In person in the Upper Room Prayer Room at church 10.30 – 11.30 am.
- Every Tuesday evening 8- 8.30 pm Zoom – see church WhatsApp group for link or Meeting ID: 862 1518 8882 Passcode: 657161

Christmas Programme: details are on the publicity flyers. Please give others a copy of the flyer as an invitation to the Advent and Christmas services.

Baptismal Service: Another baptismal service is being planned for January. If you would like to be baptised and/or become a Church Member please speak to the Minister or one of the Deacons.

If you would like to contribute financially to Abbey International Baptist Church electronically, please use the card reader at the back of the church or scan the following QR code below to pay:

QR Code for Offering:

