

ADVENT 1 - 28.11.21

1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13, Luke 21: 25-36. Sermon by Sarah Maybury 28.11.21

WAITING, WONDERING and GETTING READY

Our first Candle has been lit, (out of four)! Now is the season of Advent!

It's a new Church Year – Year C! (For those of you who follow the C.of E. Lectionary)

The cycle of the Church Year begins all over again – In Advent!

Advent has a special colour – purple – the church's WAITING and **GETTING READY** colour!

In Advent we remember God's people WAITING for the Saviour, the Messiah, for Jesus to come and save them. We remember Mary WAITING for Jesus to be born. We WAIT for God to come in to the world as a human being, as one of us.

But, we also **LOOK FORWARD** to the time when Jesus **WILL COME AGAIN** and bring in His Kingdom – a New Heaven and a New Earth.

I've found the following *godly play* version of this mornings' Gospel reading to be insightful and would like to share it with you. It may appear simple, but actually the questions that come out of it, you may find to be challenging. *Godly play* is often used with parents and children together....so, *are you sitting comfortably, can you hear me OK....then I'll begin!*

Jesus told his friends that the coming of God's Kingdom would SHAKE even the sun and the moon and the stars in the sky. (PP Slide Van Gogh – '**Starry Night**')

He told them, when these things begin to happen, when the sun and the moon and the stars change (PP Slide **Star**); people will be afraid and **wonder** what is happening. But you will know that the Son of man, your Saviour is **COMING AGAIN** to save you. So you don't need to be afraid.

Then Jesus said, 'think of the fig tree, you know that when you see the leaves growing and the fruit beginning to grow on the fig tree, that is a *sign* that summer **is near**. (PP Slide **Fig tree**)

You will know what *signs* to look for, they will show you that God's Kingdom **is coming**".

And then he said "Listen; everything on earth will one day pass away, but the word of God will not pass away. The word of God will last forever".

And then he said "Don't let your hearts get weighed down by all the worries and distractions of this world. (PP Slide – **a decorated heart**) Stay alert, keep watch. Keep your heart and your mind on God and waiting for God's Kingdom".

And his friends who heard these words about God's Kingdom coming and troubling the sun and the moon and the stars (PP Slide **Star**), about there being signs, signs of a fig tree (PP **Fig tree**) ready to grow its fruit, about keeping your heart open (PP Slide - **decorated heart**) and WAITING for God's Kingdom, **wondered** what it meant.

They **wondered** when God's Kingdom would come. They **wondered** how long they would have to wait. And thousands of years later, Jesus' friends and disciples.... **US** are still waiting and **wondering** about God's Kingdom. And we especially wait and **wonder** about God's Kingdom during the time of Advent as we remember God coming as a human being thousands of years ago.

And we WAIT for God to **COME AGAIN**. And as we WAIT we can **wonder** together. (Pause)

I **wonder** if having just heard this Gospel reading from Luke 21, you are left with as many questions as I am?

1. I **wonder** what your favourite part of this story was?
2. I **wonder** what Jesus' Kingdom is like?

3. I **wonder** what it feels like to have to WAIT for something? A Doctor's appointment? For the result of a test or examination? After a job interview?
4. I **wonder** where God is **whilst** you're WAITING?
5. I **wonder** what part of this story is for you?
6. I **wonder** why Jesus told his friends all of these things?

I expect like me, there will have been questions that you found **difficult** to think about and others that were **easier**.

This Advent theme, God **COMING AGAIN**, implies the arrival of something new. **How** are we to **GET READY**?

In the Gospel reading from Luke, we are told to be alert, to be on our guard, to be careful, to watch for the signs and to pray for strength and resolve whilst waiting. We are to lift up our heads (Be positive!) as we anticipate the second coming of Jesus. We are warned that the Son of man will appear to everyone, to the whole of mankind with great power and glory.

In Daniel chapter 7, the first reference to the Messiah as the son of man can be found, where God's kingdom is described as one that "will never be destroyed... coming with clouds of heaven".

So, the idea of **LOOKING FORWARD** to the time when Jesus **WILL COME AGAIN** to bring in His Kingdom – a New Heaven and a New Earth has a prophetic element to it. The book of Daniel and the book of Revelation, are examples of apocalyptic (stuff about end times) and eschatological (stuff about Jesus coming back) reading.

In a similar vein, Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians takes on the theme of the second coming. Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ!

This can be seen in the last verse of Chapter 3, in verse 13 '*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones*'.

This verse (13) along with the previous two verses in the chapter (11+12) are Paul's words of blessing over the Thessalonians. Paul declares to them that he is praying for them, particularly for their trials and tests as new converts to Christianity.

Are there people who you know who are experiencing trials and tests, how could you ask God to bless them? Could you ask God to increase their love for others to overflowing? Paul believed so! He wrote "*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us*" in Ephesians 3: 20.

Paul is an amazing example to us of a Christian who prays sincerely for his fellow believers to have a stronger faith, especially in light of Jesus returning at the second coming and the need to **GET READY**. He seeks and asks God to supply whatever is lacking.

I **wonder** how we can ensure that our hearts are strong? How do we **GET READY**? How do we seek God's heart - to be filled with confidence in the presence of God the Father when Jesus comes? One way to '**keep praying**' (Luke 21: 36) and '**not to let our hearts get weighed down with the worries and distractions of the world**' is to meet up with other Christians to pray. It can be over a coffee, whilst walking and talking or meeting up in a small group, like a prayer triplet. We often need guidance, opportunities to learn how to pray and to be encouraged by others.

God's purpose for us is that our faith, trust, faithfulness and loyalty to Him (Luke 21:34) **grows** stronger every day of our lives.

Another way to '**keep praying**' is to think about extending your prayer time. "*Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know Him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring*" Hosea 6:3 (NLT) Take time to know the Lord, slow down and take time to pause and rest in God's presence. As Bishop Richard of Chichester first prayed, sometime around the year 1244; '*may we see Christ more clearly, love him more dearly and follow Him more nearly, day by day*'. I **wonder** what the most important part of this story was? Amen

St James Notices



Saturday 27th November
St James Community Hall,
Beaufort Grove BD2 4LH
7pm for a 7.30pm start.

All Welcome to join us!

All money raised will be going to TEARFUND. At this point you do not need to book – just turn up. Suggested £5 per person includes refreshments.

Helpers: we could do with more helpers, please let Will/Sally know!

Join us for an
Family ADVENTure!
as we prepare for Christmas

Stories, Crafts & Food

ST JAMES CHURCH, BOLTON, BD2 4LH **Saturday 4th December**
10.30am – 12.30pm

(Event to be held both Outdoors and Indoors if weather allows. so please wrap up warmly!)

A FREE event for all the family, ending with lunch.
www.boltonstjames.org.uk
www.facebook.com/StJamesBolton

We are looking forward to running this family event on the 4th December.

We are looking for helpers to come on the morning – both for crafts and the kitchen, but also and importantly, we need folks to be praying for the team running the event, and the connections we make during it. If coming along is not your thing – please do be praying for us at home whilst its ongoing.

Sunday 5 December after church:

Jimmy's Christmas buffet!

Please stay on for a Christmas celebratory buffet.
Cold buffet items very welcome: savoury or sweet.



Coming Up!



will be leading our worship on

Sunday 12th December.

This will also be a parade service for the uniformed organisations.



Christmas at St James Bolton

Sunday 19th December 6.00pm

Carols by Candlelight



Christmas Eve 6.00pm

Christingle Service



Christmas Day 10.00am

Family Worship

