Cheshire South Methodist Circuit

Worship at Home – Sunday 29th November 2026
The First Sunday in Advent

Call to worship

Bright, shining God, shimmering in the darkness of winter, we approach you today with your light in our hearts. We wait for you, we watch for you, just as the watchmen await the first signs of morning. Walk with us throughout Advent, and light our feet as we walk, perhaps a little unsteadily, towards the birth of the 'Light of the world'. **Amen.**

StF no. 169 *Come, thou long-expected Jesus*

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 for ever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring

4 By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley

Prayers of adoration and confession

God of urgency and truth, at this darkest time of year we thank you for your light shown in Scripture, shown in those who seek not their own glory but who point to you; shown in the ways you bless us in the ordinariness of our lives, and in the big moments. You are the light that no darkness can overcome, and we thank you for inviting us to share your flame of love. **Amen**

God of humility, we are sorry for times when we behave as if life was all about us, when we show off all we do and hide all that we neglect, when we put others down instead of building them up, when we dwell on what others have done wrong, with hardly a thought to our own mistakes. Forgive us, we pray, and grant us the will to change, and the courage to act after the example of those who live out their calling with faithfulness and courage, always pointing to your Son Jesus, in whom they trust. In His name we pray. **Amen.**

Assurance of forgiveness

Loving God, you promise us healing when we turn away from the things that harm us; you promise us a welcome when we leave behind the things that separate us from you; and you promise us forgiveness when we find the courage to name our sins; for you are full of love and long to see us whole, living life to the full, generously and compassionately. **Amen.**

Readings: ***Mark 13: 24 – 37***

24 "But in those days, following that distress, "'the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' 26 "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

28 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it[b] is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The Day and Hour Unknown

32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert[c]! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. 35 "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

1 Corinthians 1: 3 - 9

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge - 6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8 He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reflection

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.
(Isaiah 2: 1-5)

What (or who) comes into your mind when you hear the word "hero"? A footballer, a music legend, a "green" campaigner? We all look for different things in our heroes, and sometimes find it hard to agree with others in their choices. And as time goes by, some of the glitter fades, our tastes change and the hero or heroine is superseded by a new fascination, a different appreciation. Have you ever thought of the Jesus as a hero? Jesus' hearers did not *want* to hear His message "Go, and do likewise (love your neighbour as yourself)." Some years ago, songwriter Noel Richards wrote *"The world is looking for a hero; we know the greatest One of all: the mighty Ruler of the nations, King of Kings and Lord of lords; who took the nature of a servant, and gave His life to save us all. We will raise a shout, we will shout it out, He is the Champion of the world."* The joyous and wonderful thing about our Hero is that, of course, He doesn't change. We can look back on our admiration and love for Him over the years without ever feeling we have "grown out of Him", or that He has "lost His appeal". That is because although, in His very nature and being, He is unchangeable, nevertheless he does change, according to our need. When we are young, He is the loving heavenly Father for whom nothing is impossible. As we mature, He is still as He was, but we understand more as He reveals more of Himself to us. He is always at our side in time of trouble; He always comes to our rescue and helps us to make great good out of anxiety, pain and distress as we experience His comfort and peace. More than that, though, and one of the things that makes Him unique and wonderful, is His forgiveness. We

may feel defeated and beaten, but God will never throw us out, and He does not seek us out to wreak vengeance upon us, if we are truly sorry for what we do to grieve Him. Instead He comes to us, seeking to wash us clean, and help us to start again, not just once, but as many times as it takes. *"The Lord Almighty is our Hero, He breaks the stranglehold of sin. Through Jesus' love we fear no evil; powers of darkness flee from Him. We will raise a shout, we will shout it out, He is the Champion of the world.* He is our King, the one who even now rules the earth, and watches over his faithful ones. At this time of Advent, we watch and remember in wonder how God's beloved Son began to work His Father's plan for His people. We celebrate again his birth into our world, and feel again the joy of knowing that he willingly left his glory and majesty behind, in order to become a human baby, and to grow into a man, setting an example and pattern for us all of a life lived in the will of God, pure and sinless.

The way we conduct ourselves as the people of God, in good times or bad, is very important. The world can often be a threatening place, and there may be times when we are at the mercy of events outside our control. We are confused and distressed when we see those who should lead wisely speaking and acting in ways The Scriptures encourage us to look beyond immediate circumstances towards an inspired vision of how things could be, and then to live as people who are on the journey towards God's alternative reality. If the author of Isaiah 2:1-5 were to speak to the Church in Britain today, perhaps he would say something like this:
In days to come, the way of the cross will be seen as the highest expression of what it means to be human, so that all kinds of people will be drawn to this way of life. Religious hatred and oppression will cease. Everywhere people will be intrigued and will want to learn more about the teachings that lie at the heart of the life of the Church. The communities of the faithful will provide a blueprint for all human society. So come, let us live each day as true followers of Christ.

Prayers of intercession

God of hope, though the night seems very long, and though cold winds blow, light fades and spring seems a distant dream; you will never leave us. Give us faith to watch for the morning. *We wait for you, O God.*

God of hope, though the poor are so often denied justice, and the needy are without relief from their distress, though we often have different priorities to those of your kingdom, turn our hearts again to you and renew our trust. Give us faith to watch for the morning. *We wait for you, O God.*

God of hope, though politics sometimes does not connect with our daily lives, when leaders fail us, prioritising the rich over the poor and leaving inequalities unaddressed, may we believe that a new world is possible. Give us faith to watch for the morning. *We wait for you, O God.*

God of hope, though we are far off our climate targets, and though there are many who do not recognise that we are approaching a crisis, and we have failed to protect this fragile earth, its peoples and all its creatures… Give us faith to watch for the morning. *We wait for you, O God.*

God of hope, though we live in such troubled times when so many parts of the world are at war or in conflict, the suffering of Ukraine continues as the weather gets harsher, and no peaceful outcome seems close in Israel, Palestine, and other places where terrorism and street violence are rife.
Give us faith to watch for the morning. **We wait for you, O God.**

God of hope, though life is a daily struggle for many, choosing between heating and eating, constantly worrying about debt and rising prices and feeling overwhelmed by worry, may they find rest in you.
Give us faith to watch for the morning. **We wait for you, O God.**

God of hope, though many are lonely and in distress, persecuted or in danger, some are sick or far from home, bring your healing to all who are in need today, remembering those known to us, and close to our hearts. Give us faith to watch for the morning. **We wait for you, O God.**

God of hope, you come to us as a child and reveal to us the wisdom of the powerless. Teach us to walk more humbly with you. Give us faith to watch for the morning. **We wait for you, O God Amen**.

The Lord's Prayer

StF no. 171 *Hark the glad sound*

1 Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long;
Let every heart prepare a throne,
And every voice a song.

2 He comes the prisoners to release,
In Satan's bondage held;
The gates of brass before him burst,
The iron fetters yield.

3 He comes the broken hearts to bind,
The bleeding soul to cure,
And with the treasures of his grace
To enrich the humble poor.

4 Our glad hosannas, Prince of Pease,
Your welcome shall proclaim,
And heaven's eternal arches ring
With your beloved name.

CCL 821965 Philip Doddridge

Benediction

Lord, we begin our time of Advent, waiting for you with love and patience. Help us to remember that you will return for us and for those yet to know you. Help us to be patient and alert, but help us also to be working and serving and building your kingdom. Your kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven. **Amen.**

This worship service has been prepared by Sue Taylor

Candlelight Promise

A single flame flickers,
in the cold of winter's night.
Advent's first candle lit,
its glow warm and bright.
It's not just wax and wick,
or the match's fiery flare,
but a promise made long ago,
of a love that all can share.