

When The Time Comes



Canonbie United & Liddesdale 15th December 2013

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Call to worship Children Of The Promise

Children of the Promise, the Lord is faithful
And he calls us to gather in faith
Children of the Promise, the Lord is true
Let us open our hearts to him in prayer
Children of the Promise, the Lord is love
Let us lift up our hearts in worship
Allelujah! Let us praise the Lord

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Approach

Hope

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

For you there is no darkness, only eternal day.

You are the flash of crimson on the Eastern horizon

And the scent of Summer flowers on Winter's frozen breath

You are the first smile, the first laugh, of a new-born child;

Hope distilled and purified and shining in the darkness.

The certainty of your love is a compass-North in uncertain seas

A pole-star when coastlines and landmarks are gone.

For your truth is perfect, your promises sure, your strength unassailable.

Why should we fear? Why should we doubt?

We fear because we are cowed by the darkness and disparage the stars

We live through dark times and come to believe that there will never be light.

We see greed so widespread that we think that it is unvanquishable

And so we justify our own greed

We see anger permeating our society and think it cannot be addressed

And so we explain away our own unforgiving anger

We see poverty so overwhelming and intractable that it seems invincible

So we hold it at a distance from our comfortable lives

We see injustice and oppression so strong that we feel it is part of life

And get on with being pious in our impotence

Forgive us, Father, for our lack of faith.

Forgive us for our lack of wholehearted commitment to your will

Forgive us our neglect of the needs of our neighbours

Be in our waking and be in our labours.

Be in our homes and in our sleeping.

Put your strength in our hearts. Put your love in our hearts.

Above all, put hope in our hearts

So that we know that there is nothing that cannot be done if you will it.

That no darkness is complete because you illuminate it.

That you sent your son into the world to bless us with the gift of hope

To show in his sacrifice and resurrection that evil cannot be triumphant

That even in death there is hope.

We, the children of your blessing honour his life, his sacrifice

Address

Invites To The Party

Some come on cards of inlaid gold
Some come with but a smile
Some come on Facebook, or the phone
Some cross a thousand miles
Invites to a party
Come all sorts of ways
But mean that we get ready
Start counting down the days
See, every invitation
Says something loud and clear
Someone out there knows you
Someone holds you dear
There is a party coming
God's own and special day
You are the invitation
Be Blest - prepare the way

Address

Sleeps Until Christmas

Do you - or did you - ever do that thing of counting the sleeps left until Christmas? I know my son did it when he was little. He's 20 now, so maybe not. But we do still get ready for Christmas - do any of you have advent calendars. Same thin as "sleeps until Christmas", isn't it? Apart from the chocolates. But we can get ready for Christmas by making a special effort to be that little bit kinder to people - even people we don't get on with. We could be more generous - even to those we don't especially like. And we can make sure that everyone - as far as we can - gets included when we plan our parties and send our cards and the like. Let's call that the "spirit of Christmas". It's part of preparing for the coming of Jesus by showing folk what Jesus was all about.

*“Christmas is coming” the Church is glad to sing
And let the advent candles brightly burn in a ring.*

The first is for God’s promise to put the wrong things right,
And bring to earth’s darkness the hope of love and light.

The second for the prophets, who said that Christ would come
With good news for many and angry words for some.

The third is for the Baptist, who cried, “Prepare the way.
Be ready for Jesus, both this and every day.”

The fourth is for the Virgin, who mothered God’s own son
And sang how God’s justice was meant for everyone.

At last we light the candle kept new for Christmas day.
This shines bright for Jesus, new-born, and here to stay.

Christ is among us. The candles in the ring
Remind us that our Saviour will light up everything

Reading(s): Psalm 146:5-10

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; he LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

James 5:7-10

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then 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, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Hymn

CH4 273 O Come! O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel 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 over the grave.

O come, Thou Day-spring, 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.

Sermon

When The Time Comes

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. (James 5:7)

There's a bit at the end of "The Restaurant At The End of the Universe", which is the sequel to "A Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy". The Universe is about to end and representatives of all the remaining peoples of the Galaxy have gathered to see it off. Among them are a sect awaiting the promised return of the great prophet Zarquon. The host of the event is commiserating with them on their millions of years of hoping and waiting when - at the last moment, before the Universe ends - the great prophet Zarquon does indeed make his appearance and apologises for being held up a bit. Sometimes, maybe, we feel that way about the Second Coming of Christ. Sometimes, maybe, we find ourselves thinking, "Come on God! It's been 2000 years already." And yet we continue to wait in hope.

We continue to prepare to welcome Christ into the world each Christmas. We continue to re-enact the story of his birth in our Nativity plays, merrily blending up the narratives in Matthew and in Luke to the point where we have the shepherds and the Magi sharing the same stage, along with the innkeeper who doesn't actually appear in either Gospel. That doesn't matter. What matters is that we continue to tell the story - the fantastic and wonderful story - that one day, long ago, God entered his Creation through the normal birth of a child to an unnoticed woman of a poor family from then back of beyond - a town so small that it was spoken of either with contempt or not at all. What matters is that we continue to welcome Christ in the world and that we live in hope.

There was a time - not that long ago against the great sweep of historical time - that the Church of Scotland didn't really do Christmas. We held that holding particular days in the year to be "holy" was a bit idolatrous, preferring to emphasise the importance of preparing for the coming of Christ every day - not just December 25th. And besides which, to some people it may seem a little odd to talk so much about preparing for the birth of Christ in Advent, doing all the big build-up, then just putting all the decorations away, along with the empty crib and saying "OK then! Same time next year?" And yet there is hope in such things - and sometimes hope is what makes us human.

The ancient Greeks told a story of the first woman - a woman they called Pandora. Pandora, it is said, had a box and was told that she must never open it. One day, though, temptation got the better of her and she opened the box and from its interior came forth all the evils that humanity falls victim to - came hunger and greed, came war and hatred, came sickness and want, came bigotry and selfishness, came poverty and want. Distraught, Pandora lay clutching what she thought was an empty box and wept at what she had unleashed. Then, looking into the box, she found that something remained - hope.

When the time comes - the time we say we are hoping for at this time of year - Christ will come again. What kind of world are we preparing for him to come into? When he came the first time he was born into a world of poverty and hunger, of bloodshed and bigotry, of greed and selfishness, where there was no room for the likes of him to be born. Is that the world we would like to prepare for him to be born into when he comes again? Do we just shrug our shoulders and say that that is the way of the world - it's the way human beings behave? Do we succumb to that kind of fatalism, or do we keep alive the hope that is part and parcel of this time of year?

Is there hope for humanity. Yes. Yes there is. I think though, that it means taking on some - just some - of the wisdom of our ancestors who didn't "do Christmas"; on preparing for the coming of Christ each and every day. When the time comes, will we welcome him? I ask, because according to Matthew Jesus's last parable to his followers before he went to the Cross told them where they might find him - "When did we see you hungry and feed you, Lord?" they asked him, "or thirsty and gave you a drink? When were you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you. When were you sick or in prison and come to visit you?" In the parable the King answered, "In as much as you did this for the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it for me." There, I tell you, lies hope for humanity - suppose we really believed that in those who come to us in need we have the chance to welcome Christ.

When the time comes when we may find Christ in the need of someone who is hungry - be it a face on a screen in Syria or the Philippines, or the faceless figure trying not to be noticed going to a food bank - will we feed him? Will we make him welcome? If we can say yes to that, then maybe there is hope in the face of

hunger and greed.

When the time comes when we may find Christ in the folk that society wants to forget - the drug addict or the alcoholic; the strange or the different - the asylum seeker or the refugee; will we welcome him? Will we forget, for a moment at least, about our own cosy, secure lives and make him welcome? If we can say yes to that then maybe there is hope in the face of bigotry and selfishness.

When the time comes when we may find Christ in the face of those we are taught to think of as our enemies - in those we have to deprive of faces as we unleash shock and awe on their homes and lands, in those we have to reduce to numbers and ciphers as we build weapons of mass destruction - will we learn how to love our enemies? Will we welcome him? If we can say yes to that then maybe there is hope in the face of war and hatred.

When the time comes when we may find Christ in someone who is sick, will we set aside the fear that comes with mortality and take time to tend them? When we think of those who are in prison will we remember that they have taken a wrong turn on the road - and that we may have made the same mis-step in different circumstances? If we can say yes to that then maybe there is hope in the face of sickness and crime.

And so let us prepare for the coming of Christ by making this the kind of world we would want to welcome him into. Just as we tidy the house and clean the place up a bit before welcoming our guests for Christmas, let us prepare to welcome Christ by putting our lives our order and by cleaning our hearts a bit. But above all, let us be hope for the world - carrying the hope that is alive in the story of Christmas; a hope that humanity so desperately needs. May Christ come to those who are hungry and in want; May Christ come to those who are scared and lost; May Christ come to those who are sick and broken. May he come to all who need hope in dark places and may they find that hope - may they meet Christ - in those who call themselves the children of God. In you and me.

Lord, as we prepare for the coming of your Son, may we prepare ourselves to be hope in dark places, to be love where it is needed, to welcome those in need as we would welcome him.

Comfort, comfort now my people;
speak of peace - so says your God.
Comfort those who sit in darkness,
burdened by a heavy load.
To Jerusalem proclaim:
God shall take away your shame.
Now get ready to recover;
guilt and suffering are over

Hear the herald's proclamation
in the desert far and near,
calling all to true repentance,
telling that the Lord is near.
Oh, that warning cry obey!
For your God prepare a way.
Let the valleys rise to greet him
and the hills bow down to meet him.

Straighten out what has been crooked;
make the roughest places plain.
Let your hearts be true and humble,
live as fits God's holy reign.
Soon the glory of the Lord
shall on earth be shed abroad.
Human flesh shall surely see it;
God is ready to decree it.

Intercession

Advent Hope

Lord, while we await your coming

Be at one with us

Bare brown trees,etched dark across a winter sky,
Leaves fallen, rustling, ground hard and cold,
Remind us to prepare for your coming;
Remind us to prepare for the time
When the soles of your feet will touch the ground,
When you will become one of us

Lord, while we await your coming

Be at one with us ; especially in the lives of the grieving and the dying.
Bring comfort, renewed strength and fresh hope through your presence.
Send us: bend our paths to meet theirs, to walk with them through dark places

Lord, while we await your coming

Be at one with us ; especially among the sick of mind or of body
Bring the strength of your arm to support them and a smile for their hearts.
Send us : bend our paths to meet theirs so that they may lean on us as they go
especially those whose needs we bring before you..

Lord, while we await your coming

Be at one with us ; especially among the poor, the homeless, the outcast.
Be wealth to them in poverty, a shelter to them in the cold of the night;
As winter falls most heavily on these, your children, bring light to the world
Send us out onto the roads and streets of this nation to proclaim your justice;
To feed the poor, to house the homeless and to bring the outcast home.

Lord, while we await your coming

Especially among those who are suffering under the hand of tyranny
or who are imprisoned for their beliefs
those who are cowed and broken by the desolation of war

those who need the hope of advent more than we can imagine.

Lord, while we await your coming

We ask your blessing on the Church, Father

In this building, this parish, this presbytery, this nation - throughout the world.

Let it be filled with new hope at this advent season

May it walk with more vitality on the path you direct it to go

To go out into the world to proclaim our joy in your promise

To speak out in joy your promise that one day tyranny will end, sorrow will end

To sing our joy that you came to us and will always be with us

To go with joy along the road that leads to your kingdom

Lord, while we await your coming

Hand in hand with him whose bride the Church is -

Our Lord Jesus Christ

Love incarnate; God with us, always and forever

Offering

Promise Of The Kingdom

Father God,

Thank you for your promise of your kingdom to come,

For the joyful anticipation of your just rule over all that is.

We thank you for the intimations of your kingdom we experience today

For the love we find in family and friendships,

For the provision from your hand of food and shelter

For the days of happiness in our lives which just seem to get brighter in memory

Father we thank you for the intimations of your kingdom we experience today

For the witness of those who have revealed their faith in the world

Who have passed that faith on to us as a wonderful legacy

And for those who are with you in eternal life - your promise fulfilled.

We thank you for the coming of Christ

For the coming we prepare to celebrate at this time of year

These offerings we bring in gratitude

We ask you to bless them and to bless us

That they may be used for the building up of your church

That we may be intimations of your Kingdom

Children of your promise

Hymn

CH4 310 See Him Lying In A Bed Of Straw

See him lying on a bed of straw
A draughty stable with an open door
Mary cradling the babe she bore
The Prince of Glory is his name
O now carry me to Bethlehem
To see the Lord appear to men
Just as poor as was the stable then
The Prince of Glory when he came

Star of silver sweep across the skies
show where Jesus in the manger lies
Shepherds swiftly from your stupor rise
To see the saviour of the world

Angels sing the song that you began
Bring God's glory to the heart of man
Sing that Bethl'hem's little baby can
Be salvation to the soul

Mine are riches from your poverty
From your innocence eternity
Mine forgiveness by your death for me
Child of sorrow for my joy

Benediction

How Christ Comes

Christ comes in every word of kindness for the forgotten
Christ comes in every gift to those in need
Christ comes in every voice raised in the name of peace
Go now, and may those you meet meet Christ in you
Go and offer hope in dark places
Go and show the world what love looks like
The love that has embraced you always
And will hold you through all eternity