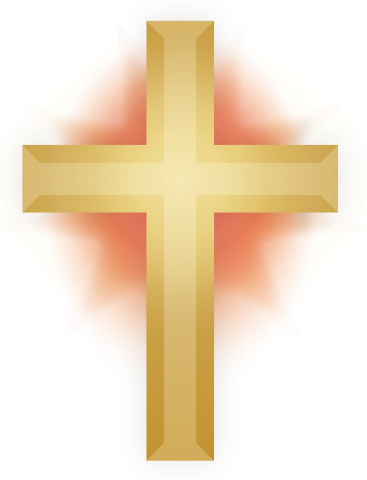
**ADVENT SUNDAY 2020**







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**THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST**

**“Jesus said ‘Keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back’”**

*Mark 13: v26.*

**Welcome to our Sunday Service today. Today is Advent Sunday. We focus our hearts and minds on the glorious and awesome truth that Jesus will return as King and Judge at a time we do not expect.**

**HYMN:** Our first hymn is a great Advent hymn: 480 O come, O come, Emmanuel.

**We light the first candle of the Advent wreath and join together in the Advent prayer**

**Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light,**

**now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;**

**that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the**

**dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns with you,**

**in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.**

**A time now to say sorry to God:**

Jesus says, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.

’ *A short time of silence*

**All:** **Heavenly Father, have mercy upon us, forgive us where we have gone wrong and sinned, and help us to walk from now on in your way. Amen.**

May our Father God, the God of love and power, bring you back to Himself, forgive you through the death of His Son Jesus, free you from your sins, and restore you to newness of life by His Spirit

**READING Mark 13: v 24-37. (The Day and Hour Unknown)**

‘But in those days, following that distress,

‘“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;  
 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

‘At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 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.

‘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. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

‘But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert[c! You do not know when that time will come. 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.

‘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 cock crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!”’

**SERMON**

**LET US PRAY**

Lord Jesus show us today how to prepare for your great return at the end of time. Amen

One unexpected bonus of Lockdown for Peter and me is that we have been able to explore the stunning countryside round here. We have had the opportunity to learn more about the natural world about which we were both shamefully ignorant. In these last 3 weeks we have watched all the migrating birds, thousands of them, flying in strict V formation wave after wave of them like the pictures of the bombing raids in WW2 as they make their way to the coast and sunnier climes.

And then we noticed that invariably there were latecomers, a group of 2 or 3 who quite literally were left behind - they didn't make it to join their friends and family in their great escape from winter cold. They were not ready for their great adventure

It’s an illustration, a frightening picture of how we ignore Jesus words here in Mark 13 at our peril.

This is Advent Sunday . Advent is Latin for coming or arrival. Yes, we are looking forward to celebrating the first coming of Jesus Christ incognito into our world at Christmas, however strange this year's festivities might be , but the real point of Advent is not countdown to Christmas; Advent is a time to remind ourselves about the inescapable certainty of Jesus’ glorious public second coming at the end of time when He comes in power and judgement. At that moment the time for decision will be over.

So let’s look closely at Jesus’ teaching in this difficult chapter Mark 13. Jesus is in Jerusalem with His disciples in the courtyard of the great magnificent 3rd Temple in Jerusalem which was still unfinished. Jesus tells them that one day the great white stones which were covered in gold would be pulled down. The disciples ask when this will happen and Jesus then launches into the difficult teaching of this chapter. It is difficult because some of it foretells the terrible destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 which happened some 37 years after this conversation whilst the rest gives us glimpses of the cataclysmic event at the end of time when Jesus the King will come again as our judge. The hard part is knowing which verses refer to which event . There is fortunately a really helpful clue. When Jesus talks about this and these, ‘**this** generation and ‘**these’** stones He is talking about the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. When He is talking about ‘**that’** time and ‘**that’** day He is talking about the Second Coming – the parousia.

The verses we are looking at this morning all focus on Jesus’ second coming. The only exception to that is verse 30 and that little paragraph where He is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem which really did happen in the lifetime of his hearers in AD 70.

So let us think more about this crucial teaching about Jesus coming again which we don’t spend enough time talking and thinking about. Jesus will come again. That great truth is there in all the creeds- it is there at the heart of the Communion service, ‘Christ died, Christ is risen Christ will come again, past, present and future –it's the very centre of our faith - Christ will come again. One of our daughters and her husband in their wedding vows made their promises ‘till death us do part or till Christ comes again’. Jesus’ return is real; it is a future certainty.

It sounds terrifying and it will be but wonderful at the same time. Our passage describes it in incredibly graphic terms. Jesus is describing the aweful in its true sense full of awe- an event we can’t begin to imagine

But notice no one knows when this will happen . There have been countless attempts to put a date on the Second Coming.They have all been wrong, usually disastrously wrong. The Gospel has not been well served by speculation about the date of Jesus’ coming again. Jesus himself is quite clear; no one not even He at that time knew.

Nor do we know much about the exact manner of His returning. The most important fact we do know is that it will be very public; there will be no room for doubt and the time for repentance will be over

For us as Christians we are called to live in the light, in the certainty that Jesus’ return will happen and at a time we don’t expect. Our job is to be ready as the servants who wait their master's return are to be ready at all times of the day and night. We are to be on guard, be alert, keep watch, stay alert, Watch. Jesus couldn’t be more emphatic- he says it 4 times in as many verses -eternity is at stake.

So what does it mean to be ready? In our Bible studies on the 10 commandments we have been looking at Do not murder and Jesus’ interpretation of that commandment - Do not be angry. We easily thought of situations where people get angry like road rage and the language we often use to one another-‘I wish you were dead’.

If you harbour resentment against someone – you are not ready – go and make it up if you possibly can

If you are angry with someone – you are not ready – you need to put it right

If you are not talking to someone- you are not ready- you need to try your utmost to heal the rift.

It has been said we should aim to live our lives as if Christ died yesterday, rose again this morning and will come again tomorrow. If you knew for definite that you would die tomorrow what would you do today? Some of you may know the Simpsons cartoon ‘Blue fish, blow fish' where Homer Simpson thinks he has only 24hrs to live as he has just eaten a poisonous Japanese fish. He rushes madly round trying to fit into 24hrs, 6 months worth of altruistic activity.

Contrast that with the answer of the faithful Christian minister who was asked what he would do if he was told that Jesus would return the next day ; he simply got out his diary and showed it to his questioner. What would your reaction be? Are you ready?

Advent is a time to get ready, to ask God’s forgiveness and to deal with what's wrong in our lives.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus we pray that this Advent you will help us to live as if you died yesterday , rose again this morning and will come again tomorrow. Amen

**Hymn:** We will sing the hymn In Christ Alone; look especially at verse 4 ‘Till Christ returns or calls me home, Here in the power of Christ I stand’

**PRAYERS**

Dear Lord, we thank you for our spiritual leaders, our bishops, our clergy and our church wardens. At this difficult and stressful time, please guide us as we worship with one another with the help of modern technology and we are grateful that next week, it will be possible to be together in church

Lord in Advent….. **we await your coming**

At the beginning of Advent please guide us, as we look forward to the coming of Christ to Earth, the first Christmas gift, the greatest gift ever, as we celebrate the dawn of a new era.

In this Advent of 2020, we look forward with optimism, but please guide us to observe safe and sensible family reunions and may the true meaning of Christmas be celebrated and we pray that people today will welcome you into their lives.

Lord in Advent….. **we await your coming**

Dear Lord we thank you for world leaders and scientists working together to share their scientific findings to best overcome this pandemic. We particularly pray for the volunteers who have enabled the testing of the vaccine. May it be used safely and quickly and any surplus be donated to nations in need.

Lord please watch over these countries as International Aid and charity contributions are reduced

Lord in Advent….. **we await your coming**

We thank you Lord for our youth worker and young families at St. Michael’s, who represent the future of our parish. Please watch over the children in school as they prepare for Your coming. We are grateful that they can take part in our Toy and Christingle service

Lord in Advent**….. we await your coming**

We thank you Lord for our NHS staff who show such dedication to care, healing and mental wellbeing, sometimes putting themselves at risk to save others. Gracious God, give skill, sympathy and resilience to all who are caring for the sick,  
and your wisdom to those searching for a cure, that through their work many will be restored to health.

Lord please give those in need of support the strength to ask for help. Lord, may we find meaning and joy in whatever life looks like, because we trust in Jesus. Help us to realise that your healing comes in different forms, stages and ways. God of peace, you know the needs of our hearts and in a quiet moment we pray for ourselves, who we often forget to include in our prayers. In the silence, Lord please stay with us until we know we have been heard……….

Lord in Advent….. **we await your coming**

Lord we rejoice each of your blessings: new life; new love; a home; a job; new opportunities; second chances and friendship. We pray for those who are experiencing loss, dealing with unemployment, financial difficulties, poverty and for those facing loneliness, discrimination or abuse

We ask you Lord to watch over anyone having to deal with chronic sickness or constant pain

Today we particularly pray for: Jock and Rita and Angela, Bill and Beryl Carr, for Emma Broadhurst, for Michael Pulvermacher, Baby Erica Ivy, Bob Maxfield and the residents of Winton House……we also ask for your healing power for Tom Parkinson, Ian Wilkinson and the Tolley family ..

God of compassion, be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.  
In their loneliness, be their consolation; in their anxiety, be their hope;  
in their darkness, be their light

We give thanks for the lives of those who have died recently. We thank you for the life of Neil Heywood and we pray for his family and friends. We particularly ask for your love for the families and friends of those who have lost their lives to the Corona Virus, who have been unable to spend their last days and hours with their loved ones. May they find comfort in you.

Finally Lord, we ask You to grant us peace. Peace in our homes, our churches and our hearts  
Merciful Father, a**ccept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.**  
**Amen.**

**We join now in the Family prayer Jesus taught His followers to pray:**

**Our Father who art in heaven**

**Hallowed be thy name**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done**

**On earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses**

**As we forgive those who trespass against us**

**Lead us not into temptation**

**But deliver us from evil;**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen**

**NOTICES**

**The exciting news is that from next Sunday 6th December we are able to hold services again in church. There will be Holy Communion at 9.00am and 10.30am. At 3.45pm we are holding our annual Toy and Christingle service. Gifts of new Toys for the Women’s Refuge and Rainbow Hub all greatly appreciated.**

**St Michael’s church is open for private prayer from 9.30 – 4.30 every day. Prayer materials are in the church for use inside the church and to take away. And please look at the prayer resources issued by the Church of England for these 4 weeks of Lockdown- #Prayer for the Nation/Thy Kingdom Come**

**HYMN; Our final hymn celebrate again the greatness of our Saviour God 511 O Lord my God – How Great Thou Art**. **and the joy for Christians of His glorious return**

**BLESSING**

May the Love of the Lord Jesus the King of Kings draw you to Himself

May the Power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you to serve Him

And may the Joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts

And so may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and all those whom you love, now and for ever more. Amen

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**Suggested Bible Readings this week:**

Mon Nov 30th. Matthew 4: v 18-22. Tues Dec 1st. Luke 10: v 21-24.

Wed Dec 2nd. Matthew 15: v 29-37. Thurs Dec 3rd. Matthew 7: v 21 & 24-27.

Fri Dec 4th. Matthew 9: v 27-31. Sat Dec 5th. Matthew 9: v 35 to Ch 10: v 1 & 6-8.

Rev Ann Templeman 01772 448515 or 07877659156, [anntempleman@live.co.uk](about:blank)

**PARISH DIARY**

**Tuesday 1st December 7.30pm Zoom Bible Study – Just 10 : Honour Your Father and Mother**

**Sunday 6th December ADVENT SUNDAY (LIVE SERVICES)**

**09.00am Holy Communion**

**10.30 Parish Communion**

**3.45pm TOY AND CHRISTINGLE SERVICE in Church**

**Monday 7th December 7.30pm Bible Study/Growth Group – Just 10 : Honour Your Father and Mother**

**Sunday 13th December 09.00am Holy Communion**

**10.30am Morning Worship with Sunday School**

**Tuesday 15th December Bible Study Christmas Social on Zoom**

**Sunday 20th December 09.00am Holy Communion**

**10.30am Parish Communion with Sunday School**

**6.00pm CAROLS BY CANDLIGHT**

**CHRISTMAS EVE 4.00pm CRIB SERVICE**

**11.30pm MIDNIGHT COMMUNION**

**CHRISTMAS DAY 10.30am FAMILY SERVICE WITH CAROLS AND COMMUNION**