



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on December 3rd 2023, the first Sunday of Advent, at 10:45, meeting at Bethesda Chapel.

Whilst some are able to meet in person, others we know are still at home. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Our Advent Communion service today is being led by Colin, whom together with Joy, we are pleased to welcome back!

The service begins with an Opening Hymn: played by Trevor, Kate and Paul W

Hills of the North, rejoice, river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice; valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love, he brings salvation from above.

Isles of the Southern seas, sing to the listening earth,
carry on every breeze hope of a world's new birth:
In Christ shall all be made anew, his word is sure, his promise true.

Lands of the East, arise, he is your brightest morn,
greet him with joyous eyes, praise shall his path adorn:
your seers have longed to know their Lord; to you he comes, the final word.

Shores of the utmost West, lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest in whom the dawn has come:
he brings a never-ending light who triumphed o'er our darkest night.

Shout, as you journey home, songs be in every mouth,
lo, from the North they come, from East and West and South:
in Jesus all shall find their rest, in him the universe be blest

Authors: Charles Ernest Oakley, Martin Shaw CCL Song No CCLI SONG 2873330 Copyrights, Words and Music Public Domain CCL No 5664

Colin leads an Opening Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, make this season of Advent real to us. Fill our hearts with a desire for your presence. Never have we needed your hope, peace, joy and love more than now. You have promised rest for the weary, forgiveness for those burdened with sin, and victory for those who struggle with life's trials. Your name is still Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. The power of the cross has not been exhausted. May we find eternal rest under its shadow. We know that peace on earth can only come when hearts find peace with you. Thank you for the gift of Jesus, your Son, our Saviour. Jesus is no longer a babe in a manger, but one who is exalted at your right hand as Lord of lords and King of kings. Be close to us, we pray, this Advent and Christmas that we may know deep within our hearts the joy of the Lord as our strength and supreme delight. We ask all this for Jesus's sake, Amen.

Notices were shared:

Time for another Advent hymn:

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

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

He comes, from thickest films of vice to clear the mental ray,
and on the eyeballs of the blind to pour celestial day.

He comes the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace, thy welcome shall proclaim,
and Heaven's eternal arches ring with thy beloved Name.

Authors: Philip Doddridge CCLI SONG # 1748391 Copyrights Words and Music Public Domain, CCL No 5664

Colin introduced the lighting of the Advent Wreath:

- 'Advent' means coming or arrival - Isaiah 40.3-5,10-11
- Circular to represent God's infinite love
 - Evergreen leaves of pine or fir represent the hope of eternal life through the coming of Jesus Christ
 - Red berries represent the death of Jesus on the cross, shedding his blood for sins.
 - Pinecones symbolise the new life that Jesus brings through his resurrection.
- Four red candles represent the four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas and the testimony of the Four Gospels about the coming of Jesus
 - They stand for Hope Peace, Joy (Gaudete Sunday) and Love
- The white candle in the centre represents Jesus Christ as the Light of the World and the source of all goodness and purity.
 - Twenty-Four titles of Jesus to reflect upon are engraved on the white candle we have .

Shown on the screen was a Video about Hope: 4 candles were talking quietly in a farmhouse. The first said it was the candle of peace, but people didn't value peace anymore, there were so many wars in the world, and slowly went out. The second candle said it was the candle of faith, but people no longer have any faith in God, and slowly flickered and went out. The third candle said it was the candle of love, but people were now only concerned with themselves, and again, the light disappeared. Then a child entered and asked why the candles were no longer burning, to which the fourth candle replied: "Don't be afraid. As long as I am alight, the others can be rekindled, I am the candle of hope." Whereupon the child used this candle to relight the candles of peace, faith and love.

As long as we have hope, we have a future.

<https://youtu.be/6UicZ-D6VRo?si=iiNEzeoO73kt8vvE>

We sang again:

Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness, opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore you, hope of a life spent with you.

**Here I am to worship, here I am to bow down, here I am to say that you're my God.
You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy, altogether wonderful to me.**

King of all days, oh so highly exalted, glorious in heaven above;
humbly you came to the earth you created, all for love's sake became poor.

Here I am to worship...

I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross...

I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross...

Here I am to worship...

Authors: Tim Hughes, Chris Tomlin CCL Song CCLI SONG # 3266032 Copyright@2000 Kingsway Music CCL no 5664

Colin led in Communion - first reading from Psalm 103

"We come before this communion table today with the words of the Psalmist: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him' and 'Blessed is the person whose transgressions have been forgiven, and whose sin is covered.'

It is our joy this morning and every time we take communion to join with the hosts of heaven and sing: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!' Why? Because he has redeemed us to God by his blood and has made us kings and priests to our God and we shall reign on the earth. We are told that John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and had a vision of the risen and exalted Christ. May this be our vision as by faith we take these emblems of bread and wine as if from the risen Lord himself, from his own pierced hands, for he declares to his people, in the words of Isaiah, 'See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.' And so the Lord says: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.'

And so, we come to the Lord's supper together as children of our Saviour God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus makes the guest list, not us, and he invites us to this feast of love. We come humbly, knowing that we have not earned our way here through our own goodness, but because Jesus first loved us and gave himself for us. The Church family throughout the world is chosen by the Lord, is gathered from north and south, west and east, and includes everyone, even the lowest and the least. When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, he revealed himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread around a table. May we through the Spirit of the Living God have a fresh vision of our Risen and Exalted Saviour this morning as we come to the Lord's Supper. If you love the Lord, you are invited to participate in this Communion celebration this morning.

Institution (1 Corinthians 11.23-26)

The apostle Paul tells us of the institution of the Lord's Supper:

"For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed Took a loaf of 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'."

Thanksgiving

Loving God, we praise and thank you for your love shown to us in Jesus Christ. We thank you for his life and ministry, announcing the good news of your kingdom and demonstrating its power by lifting up the downtrodden, and healing the sick, and loving the loveless. We thank you for his sacrificial death upon the cross for the salvation of the world, and for raising him to life again, as a foretaste of the glory we will all share. We give you thanks for this bread and wine, symbols of our world and signs of your transforming love. Send your Holy Spirit, we pray, that we may be renewed into the likeness of Jesus Christ and formed into his Body. We pray in his name and for his sake. Amen.

So, as we take this bread, let it be a sign of all that Christ has done for us as the Bread of Life, and who he is for us day by day - the Risen and Exalted Lord. Let us take of this bread with thankful hearts that we have indeed been blessed through his boundless grace towards us."

The Bread was shared.

Sharing the Wine - Colin lifted up the cup, saying

"In the same way he also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Prayer

Your death, O Lord, we commemorate. Your resurrection we celebrate. Your final coming we await with eagerness. Lord, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us and brought us home. Your life and cross-work declare your great love towards us. We thank you that you have opened the gate of glory for us. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup help to bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Please wait until everyone has received the wine, so that we can all drink it together as a mark of our oneness in Christ]"

Jane led our Intercessory prayers.

"A few words from Hebrews, Chapter 10:19-21a 'Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...'

Let us pray to the living God:

Our Father God, Almighty God, you who are so great, All-powerful, All-knowing, and yet you listen to the prayers of your people because of the sacrifice of Your only Son, Jesus, who was born to die to pay for our sins, we ask this morning that you would hear our prayers.

We thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness to us day by day; even when we don't deserve it, you graciously forgive us when we come to you and say sorry for the things we have done against your will, or when we have neglected to do the things we should. Help us to be obedient to you and to be as forgiving to others as you are to us.

Father, we pray for our world, so desperately in need of forgiveness, restoration and peace between individuals and nations. We think especially of Gaza and Israel at this time: please transform hearts of stone into hearts of flesh once more. We thank you for the recent cease-fire, allowing aid and provisions into Gaza but now the fighting has started again and more innocents are being killed; Lord, please bring your peace to that land.

We look at our own country and see so many in desperate need and so much that doesn't seem to be working any more. Society has turned its back on you, Lord, and we are seeing the results as your rules for life are disregarded more and more. We pray that you would turn the hearts of the people back to you, that you would restore the honour of your name and there would be many who find the new life and fresh hope that only you can provide. Forgive us, Lord, when we don't take the opportunities you give to speak of your love to our friends,

neighbours and even strangers. Help us to realise again that it is in our weakness that you can show your strength, if only we will step out in trust and faith. We pray that during this Christmas season, churches throughout the country would be able to reach out to those beyond their walls and bring the Good News of Christ's coming to those around them; help us to do this too.

We pray for all who are suffering during this very cold weather that they would receive the support they need to keep warm and safe.

We lift before you all our friends and family members who do not yet know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Please help us to love them with the love that you first gave to us.

We pray for those we know who are struggling with health and other problems; Lord, in your mercy, please bring them all your healing, peace and hope.

Finally, Lord, we pray for our pastor, Alec, thanking you for his safe travel. We thank you that his meetings with pastors and elders have been well-received, encouraging but also challenging. We pray for all the people he has spoken to and prayed with; we also pray for Pastor Satesh as he leads on translation. We ask that you go with and before Alec as he travels into the mountains for outreach meetings over the next few days; open the hearts of the people to receive your word, Lord.

We ask all these things in the precious name of Jesus.

Amen"

We lifted our voices in another Advent Hymn:

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.

Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.

Authors: Charles Wesley CCL Song No Copyright Words and MusicPublic Domain CCL No 5664

Sheila read our Bible passage, Luke 2, 25-35

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.'

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Colin shared his message: Hope - Simeon's Story - firstly reading Romans 8.24-25:

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

"Our story this morning is a great story of hope and patient waiting. We all do it. We spend half of our lives waiting and hoping. We sit in waiting rooms and wait in queues. We wait what seems like forever on our phones or mobiles, while listening to some awful music, in order to speak to someone at BT or some energy provider. It seems like all we do is wait. It has been calculated that, on average, we spend six months of our lives sitting at traffic lights, and over 5 years waiting in queues. That's five years of our lives - waiting!

Then there are the sayings which I'm sure we've all heard: 'Good things come to those who wait' and 'Some things are worth waiting for.' If good things come to those who wait, is there anything you'd be willing to wait a long time for? It'd have to be something amazing, wouldn't it? What about if someone offered you a million pounds sometime in the future? How long would you be prepared to wait without giving up hope? Would you even have the patience to wait your entire life in the hope that the million pounds would still come your way? I'm not sure I would be willing to wait that long, for what good is a million-pound windfall if you only get it shortly before you pass away? It won't be much good for you by then, would it?

This morning I want us to look at the story of Simeon who waited his entire life for something. But this 'something' was definitely worth waiting for. In a way, Simeon is an odd addition to the Christmas story. Like Anna in the next episode in Luke's Gospel, he's not related to any of the central characters, such as Mary and Joseph. Nor was he an important person like a chief priest or ruler. But it is still a great episode because this is an example of how God is willing to reach out to everyone through the birth of Jesus.

So, who was Simeon?

His Three Credentials. He was an elderly man at this point in his life. Tradition has him over a hundred years old. Secondly, he was living in Jerusalem, which was the political and religious centre of Israel at the time - and still is today. Simeon was where all the action took place. We also learn that his name was Simeon which means 'God has heard'. And we will see this morning that God did hear Simeon's prayer and was sending him the greatest answer to prayer ever seen.

His Three (Spiritual) Characteristics. The first spiritual characteristic was that he was a righteous and devout man. The word 'righteous' shows his willingness to obey the Scriptures towards God and other people. He knew what the Bible said, and he did it. Again, such obedience is a prerequisite for being used greatly by God.

Secondly, we are told that he was waiting for the Consolation of Israel. 'Consolation' is a word that means 'comfort'. He longed for Israel's deliverance and revival. He was not content with where Israel was in her current state. He longed for more. He yearned for her salvation. The Consolation of Israel is a reference in the prophets for the coming of the Messiah. The Hebrew Scriptures tell us that the Messiah will come and so Simeon was waiting for him.

The third spiritual characteristic of Simeon was that the Holy Spirit was upon him. This is significant because at that time in history not all believers had the Holy Spirit. He only came upon a few for a specific purpose, and sometimes, only for a short time. God's Spirit could come upon a person for a while, and then could leave later. So, this must mean that Simeon was specially chosen by God to do something special for him. However, all this changed with the coming of Jesus, for today, following his Resurrection and that amazing event at

Pentecost, the Holy Spirit dwells within all believers. If you are a Christian, you have been blessed with Holy Spirit. And you are also called to do something special for God, to witness to the glories of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

So, Simeon had been told by God that he would not die until the Messiah or Christ came. This is quite a promise of God to Simeon! We are not told how Simeon knew that this particular baby was the long-awaited Messiah - God's Great King. Surely the child didn't look special - he didn't have a halo, as we see in Christmas cards - and neither did his parents. More than likely, the Spirit also revealed to Simeon that this was the one he had been waiting for.

His Three Claims - I've no doubt Simeon's heart must have skipped a beat. The long days of waiting are now over. The Christ-child is before him. In his excitement, he walks over, introduces himself, and says, 'May I hold your child?' As Mary gives the infant Jesus to Simeon, I'm sure the thought hits him, 'I'm holding the salvation of the world in my arms.'

Immediately, Simeon breaks out into a song of praise that has come down to us as one of the first great Christmas songs, called the Nunc Dimittis, the title being taken from the first two words of the Latin translation of Simeon's words 'Now dismiss'. It expresses exactly how Simeon feels. He won't live to see Jesus grow up. He won't witness any of his great miracles or hear any of his great sermons. Simeon will be long gone when Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate. The crucifixion is hidden to him, as is the resurrection. But it doesn't matter that he won't see the end because Simeon has seen the beginning, and that is enough. Simeon tells us three important things about Jesus.

First, Simeon calls him 'the glory of Israel.' In this baby, Simeon sees the fulfilment of all the hopes of the Jewish people across the centuries. To call Jesus 'the glory of Israel' takes us back to the promises that God gave to Abraham, Moses, David, and the later prophets like Isaiah, about the coming of a great King and Saviour-figure. For generations these promises were repeated and Jewish children were taught to pray for the coming of this Messiah. Now after all those years, all God's promises are coming true. That's what Simeon means when he calls Jesus 'the glory of Israel'.

Second, Jesus is the Saviour of the world, for Simeon calls him 'a light for the gentiles.' Simeon clearly says that this baby will not only be the glory of his own people Israel; he will also be the light of life for the gentiles. He came to shine the gospel light into every nation and people. During his ministry, Jesus met a Samaritan woman at the well and forgave her many sins; he met a Roman centurion and healed his servant. The Jews couldn't say, 'He belongs to us and you can't have him!' Nor could they say, 'You have to become a Jew to enjoy God's blessings.' No! Doubtless that's the Jewish leaders thought. But Simeon's words explode that nationalistic view of God's saving love. He's the Saviour of the whole world. Young and old, rich and poor, black and white, Jew and gentile, healthy and handicapped. All people are included in his coming. He came for you and he came for me. Isn't that wonderful! What an incredible Christmas gift!

That means there is hope for you at Christmas time. If you are lonely this year, Simeon's promise includes you. If you feel forgotten, discouraged, and down on your luck, be of good cheer, Christmas is for you! Whatever sins are holding you back at the moment, Christmas means that you can be forgiven, because Jesus came for you.

There is yet a third thing that Simeon says: Jesus is the great divider of mankind. Mary and Joseph marvelled at what was said about him. You see, Jesus was born to die. It all happened exactly as Simeon had predicted. When Mary watched her son die, a sword pierced her heart. Above the cradle stands the cross. The joy of Christmas leads on to the agony of

Good Friday. He was born to end up that way. Jesus could say: 'I have not come to be served, but to serve and give my life a ransom for many.' That's why with Jesus there can be no 'take it or leave it' response. No one can ever come face to face with Jesus and stay the same. That's what Simeon means when he says that Jesus will cause the rising and falling of many. You either go closer to God when you meet Jesus or you turn around and go the other way. It's either up or down, heaven or hell. There is no middle ground; no fence to sit on. It's popular these days to call Jesus a good person, or a great moral example, and so on. Simeon is saying you can't do that. Either he is who he says he was, or he's not! He's either the Son of God, or he's not. If he's not, then he is the greatest fraud in history. But if he is the Son of God, then this Christmastime you have only two choices regarding Jesus. Either you join Herod in trying to dispose of him or you join the Wise Men in bowing down and worshipping him. You have to make up your mind about Jesus.

So, what is Jesus to you this morning? The way you respond to Jesus reveals not only what is in your heart, but also, more importantly, where you are going to spend eternity. When Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms, he said, 'Lord, I'm ready to go home now. I can die in peace.' You see, no one is ready to die until they have seen Jesus Christ with the eyes of faith and trusted him as their Saviour and Lord. Once you have trusted him with your heart, death is no longer an enemy. It's true that you may come to the end of your life feeling a bit of a failure in worldly terms. You may feel frustrated because you have not been successful and you have not achieved your goals. But if you come to the end of your life and can say, 'I have seen Jesus Christ...I have received him unto myself' then indeed you have had a good life.

And as Christians, there is something we are all waiting for in eager anticipation. And I'm sure you know what this is, for this is what the Bible calls our 'Blessed Hope'. We are eagerly looking for the Lord's soon return, for his Second Coming or Advent. And we will do everything we can to speed his coming. In the Gospels, it says that the end will come only after the whole world has heard the Gospel of the Kingdom. Waiting for Jesus should cause us to be witnesses for the Lord just as Simeon's waiting for Jesus caused him to be a witness. I hope this Christmas you will continue to be as excited by the gift of Jesus Christ as Simeon was all those years ago."

We joined in singing our final Hymn:

Holy Spirit, living breath of God, breathe new life into my willing soul.

Let the presence of the risen Lord, come renew my heart and make me whole.

Cause Your Word to come alive in me; give me faith for what I cannot see,
give me passion for Your purity; Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.

Holy Spirit, come abide within, may Your joy be seen in all I do.

Love enough to cover every sin, in each thought and deed and attitude.

Kindness to the greatest and the least, gentleness that sows the path of peace.

Turn my strivings into works of grace; Breath of God show Christ in all I do.

Holy Spirit, from creation's birth, giving life to all that God has made,

Show Your power once again on earth, cause Your church to hunger for your ways.

Let the fragrance of our prayers arise; lead us on the road of sacrifice,

that in unity the face of Christ may be clear for all the world to see.

Authors: Keith Getty & Stuart Townend CCLI SONG # 4779872 Copyright © 2005 Thankyou Music (Adm. by CapitolCMGPublishing.com
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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.