



**Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on December 10th 2023 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 service today, the second Sunday in Advent, is being led by Colin. We are again pleased to see both Colin and Joy, who is playing the piano for us today, and together with Paul W, Kate and Judith is leading the singing.**

**Colin welcomes everyone, and invites all to sing:**

Lo he comes, with clouds descending, once for sinners crucified:  
thousand, thousand saints attending sing with triumph at his side.  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah,  
Jesus now shall ever reign.

Every eye shall now behold him, robed in awesome majesty,  
those who set at nought and sold Him, pierced and nailed him to the tree,  
deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,  
shall the true Messiah see.

Every island, sea, and mountain, heaven and earth, shall flee away;  
all who hate him, must, defeated, hear his voice proclaim the day.  
Come to judgment, come to judgment, come to judgment,  
Come to judgment! come away.

Yea, amen! Let all adore thee, high on thine eternal throne!  
Saviour, take the power and glory; claim the kingdom for thine own.  
O come quickly, O come quickly, O come quickly,  
Hallelujah! Come Lord, come.

Authors: Charles Wesley, CCLI SONG # 2873086 Copyrights: Words and Music: Public Domain CCL No 5664

**Colin leads in prayer:**

"Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for this season of Advent, when we prepare for the coming of Christmas and commemorate the time when Jesus came to us in great humility. But we also eagerly await his Second Advent, when he will come as King of kings to judge the living and the dead. Lord, we look forward to his coming and the peace that it will bring to this troubled world! Just as you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, help us to clear the path in our hearts and lives as well, so that we long for the day when we will see you face to face. Help us not to be so distracted by the material preparations for Christmas that we lose sight of the true reason for the season - a time for hoping and longing for the greatest and the best, the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. So, be with us this morning in this time of worship that we may rejoice in your Spirit for all the blessings that are ours in Christ. Make your presence real to us, we pray, not forgetting those who cannot be with us

here this morning, whether because of age or illness, or even bereavement: may they at this difficult time find comfort in the knowledge that you have not forgotten them and that your love for them is beyond measure. Bless Pastor Alec in India as he continues to serve you there among people who long to know more about Jesus. Grant him journeying mercies as he flies back home this coming week. All this we ask for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen."

**Tony shares our Notices:**the Ladies Bible Study group meets on Tuesday morning at 10.30am, followed by a Christmas lunch; Tiddlywinks takes place on Wednesday, Saturday we are encouraged to join in "Shine a light" at 12 noon with our Christmas party at 2pm. Next Sunday there will be no morning service as our Candlelit Carol service will be held at 4pm.

**Colin then moves to the Advent wreath:**

- 'Advent' means coming or arrival - **reading from Isaiah 40.3-5,10-11**

'A voice of one calling:

"In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm.

See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms

and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.'

- 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.

**As Colin lights the first candle he prays:**

"Loving God, as we light the first Advent candle of hope, we ask for your presence to fill our hearts and homes. May the hope of Christ's coming bring light to our darkness and renew our spirits. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."

**John 14.27**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

**The Second Candle of Peace – the Bethlehem Candle. Colin strikes a match, then extinguishes the flame, saying:**

"In solidarity with churches in the Holy Land, and all who are suffering there because of the current conflict, as well as for the people of Ukraine, we have been invited to do something 'out of the ordinary' this Advent by not lighting the second candle and pray for a lasting

peace. Churches in Bethlehem tell us that this Advent and Christmas, the lights in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, will remain unlit in memory of the many thousands who have died in the Gaza-Israel conflict. By leaving our second candle unlit, we reflect the unlit lights of Bethlehem and will serve as a reminder that we stand in solidarity with all who are suffering there at this time. We do this knowing the fifth and central candle will soon be lit, giving us hope that Christ's light shines eternally in the darkness that surrounds the human world."

**He then leads in Prayer**

"God of peace and bearer of hope, we seek your help at this time for the troubled regions of the Middle East and the Ukraine. Quiet the clamour of war, we pray, and guide the leaders towards a lasting peace. Where there is hatred and division sow seeds of calm and reconciliation. Where there is destruction, help them to rebuild. Where children are crying bring comfort and an end to tears. Shelter your people who are living and serving in these regions; guide them and keep them from harm. Show us all how to break down the barriers of history and fear and breathe whispers of hope, for the sake of you Son, our King of Peace. Amen."

**We lift our voices in song again:**

Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you.  
Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.

**Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.**

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us. Make us your living voice.

**Christ, be our light! ..**

Longing for food, many are hungry. Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed.

**Christ, be our light! ...**

Longing for shelter, many are homeless. Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone.

**Christ, be our light! ....**

Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another, making your kingdom come.

**Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.**

**Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.**

Author: Bernadette Farrell, CCL NO 5664

**Colin shares some thoughts on 'War and Peace', with some pictures to illustrate his thoughts shown on the screen, before inviting the congregation to sing:**

O come, O come, Immanuel, and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you, 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.

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you, O Israel.**

O come, thou rod of Jesse's stem, free thine own and rescue them!  
From depths of hell thy people save, and give them victory o'er the grave.

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you, O Israel.**

O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight.

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you, O Israel.**

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.

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you, O Israel.**

Translated from Latin by JM Neale, music T Helmore CCLI SONG # 31982 words and music Public Domain CCL No 5664

**Colin then invited all to watch a short video entitled Peace on Earth, which can be found on Youtube; <https://youtu.be/URLsFIH7Vxo>**

**before Brenda led our Intercessory Prayers.**

"Let us bring our prayers before God.

We thank You again, our Heavenly Father, that You have assured us of Your peace when we believe and trust in Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has brought us reconciliation with You by His death on the cross. You tell us through words in the Bible to not let our hearts be troubled and to not be afraid, but even so, Lord, many things do trouble us.

So we pray for peace - peace in our hearts and homes, in our nations and our world, the peace which is Your will, the peace which we so badly need.

We bring before You this world, where war is still a grim reality and very many are suffering so much. At this time we bring before You especially Israel, Gaza and Ukraine. We see the heartbreak and trauma of those in Israel following the abductions and traumatic treatment of hostages and the horrific killing of so many others. We see the destruction of homes and lives in Gaza and so much suffering and our hearts are broken to see it all. We see the suffering of people in Ukraine where many are fighting aggression still and the threat that is still hovering over all.

We ask You to change the hearts of men to think of peace and reconciliation rather than conflict. In the words of the hymn we say - "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be. With God as our Father, brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony."

So we pray for comfort for those bereaved, and protection and freedom for the abducted. Heavenly Father, may more essential supplies reach those in need, the necessary medical care be available for the injured and support and shelter for those whose homes and hospitals have been destroyed. We also ask for many of the same things for other places in the world where there is war, persecution and terrible suffering.

Lord God, we pray for the many leaders of the nations at this time, and ask that You will speak to all those who have responsibility for the peace and the future of the world - Your world. We ask You to give Your guidance to the leaders of our own nation and our town as they struggle with issues at this time affecting the lives of many. We bring before You

people who have financial problems and cannot pay the rent and struggle to have enough food to eat and thank you for help given where needed.

We pray also for the Christian Church as its members shine the light for You this Christmas - the light of Your love for the world - the light of peace, harmony and understanding.

Our Heavenly Father, some of us and those we know have difficulties in our personal lives with physical and mental problems and other different needs. We pray for those in hospital or unwell at home, asking You for relief from pain and for healing. We remember those in care homes or needing care at home, asking that they may be at peace and their needs be supplied. We ask for early responses for those awaiting appointments and treatment and for peace in our hearts and homes and with our families this Christmas.

We again bring Alec our pastor before You and ask that You will be beside him in all he does in this last day in India. Keep him well and bring him back with safe and easy travel.

We pray that You will continue to guide us here at Blackburn Baptist Church and be with us especially for our Christmas 'shine the light' outreach outside next Saturday and for our carol service and other planned services and activities. May we have a time of fun together at our hoped-for party.

We ask that You will be close to and uphold our Pastor and Deacons and all of us, as we move towards another year. We give thanks for our leaders and all who serve here in whatever way and all those who come along whenever they can.

As we close our prayer, we give You our thanks for Your love for us and for all You have given us and for Your presence with us this morning, and we pray You will forgive all our mistakes as we say sorry for them now. May we go through this week in peace, knowing that You are beside us in all we say and do.

We ask all these prayers in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

### **We sang again:**

Christ, whose glory fills the skies, Christ, the true and only Light,  
Sun of righteousness, arise, triumph o'er the shade of night;  
Day-spring from on high, be near; Day-star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn unaccompanied by Thee;  
joyless is the day's return, till Thy mercy's beams I see,  
till they inward light impart, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine, pierce the gloom of sin and grief;  
fill me, radiancy divine, scatter all my unbelief;  
more and more Thyself display, shining to the perfect day.

Author C Wesley, Music Werner, arranged WH Havergal CCL No 5664

### **Shirley moved to the pulpit to read for us: firstly Isaiah 9.6-7**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,

and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,

establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

### **And secondly Luke 2.8-20 'The Message of the Angels'**

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

### **Colin shared his sermon:**

'Peace on Earth' (10/12/23) – Luke 2.8-20; Isaiah 9.6-7

My message this morning is about 'peace'. We have been singing about peace in our hymns. We have heard about peace in our Bible readings. Peace is heavenly and angelic. The message of the angels at the birth of Jesus was '*Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, and good will towards all men!*' This morning, I would like us to look, briefly, at what the Bible has to say about peace. Using the word PEACE as an acronym, we learn the following things about this important quality.

The **first** letter 'P' stands for 'PRECIOUS'. Peace is priceless; peace, like love and happiness, is a quality we think is important to us. We can't do without peace. You see, peace is not some trivial thing; it is critical to the health and well-being of every person and society. As someone has rightly pointed out: 'When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace.' Without love and peace we are lost in trouble and strife. Peace of mind; peace in our homes and families; peace in our communities and work-places; peace between the nations. Peace is what the world desperately craves, not least because prosperity is the peace-dividend of the nations. In contrast, war is the impoverishment of countries; civil war, even more so!

The United Nations was set up shortly after the end of the Second World War to ensure a world war will never happen again and to broker peace between warring countries. Inscribed on a plaque on one of the walls of the UN headquarters in New York is a quote from Isaiah 2: '*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*' It is a prophecy of the reign of the Messiah, which will be marked by world-peace. Yet since 1948 there have been dozens, if not hundreds of wars around the world, which show that humans in themselves are incapable of creating the conditions for long-lasting peace. Why? Because ultimately 'peace' is a spiritual quality, which can only be established by spiritual renewal and a true relationship with our Loving Heavenly Father.

The Old Testament Hebrew word for 'peace' is shalom. This is a beautiful word. Shalom means both the absence of conflict and the presence of friendship and partnership, love and kindness, justice and respect. It is peace in the fullest sense of the word. It's not just the end of hatred and hostility. It's actually the idea of flourishing, of wholeness and well-being. It is the peace that comes from living under the gracious smile of God, whose name is the Prince of Peace, Jehovah Shalom, the 'LORD our peace'. Remember the blessing of Aaron in Numbers chapter 6: *'The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you, and be gracious to you. The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.'* As any parent knows, true peace is not simply when two children are no longer fighting and cursing each other, but when they are friends again and on speaking terms, when they have forgiven each other, and the cause of the quarrel has been forgotten about; they've moved on! They are no longer hostile towards each other; no longer in a 'cold war' or a frosty relationship.

The **second** letter of the word PEACE is the letter 'E' and this stands for ELUSIVE. Peace is not easily come by. We live in a restless world. Certainly, this year will not go down in the history books as a peaceful year! The Ukraine War with Russia and Israel's War against Hamas, and the explosion of antisemitism around the world show only too clearly that the world is still a long way from a state of peace between the nations.

I remember at the dawn of the new millennium, nearly 23 years ago now, people expressed their desire that this new century would be marked by peace. After all, the twentieth-century was easily the bloodiest on record, with millions upon millions perishing in the two world wars alone. In fact, experts tell us that more people died in wars last century than in all the other previous centuries put together. But no sooner had we broken into this new millennium than we had the Al-Qaeda atrocities of 9-11, and later the rise of ISIS, with its mass-killings. So, this century is fast becoming the century of Islamic or Jihadi terrorism. And there doesn't seem to be any end in sight.

No, peace is elusive; peace is hard to find. Even on a personal level, peace of mind can be very difficult to achieve if we are going through a trying time. Doctors tell us that this is the age of anxiety, that a lot of medical conditions are being caused by mental stress and strain, by a deep sense of restlessness and dissatisfaction, leading to serious depression. Fame and fortune are presented to us from the television screen as the 'be all and end all' of life, the route to personal fulfilment and happiness. Consumerism is rife – and so is debt, and all the problems associated with it. Christmas is supposed to be about peace and yet we are being bombarded constantly to spend and be spent.

The Bible teaches that the absence of peace in the world and in our lives is ultimately caused by the absence of peace with God, the source of true life – or life with a capital 'L'. What the Bible means by 'sin' is the state of separation from God our Creator. Sin is caused by rebellion; our refusal to live by God's laws; our desire to live life as we want and not as God wills. Its DIY motto is 'I'll do it my way'. There cannot be peace while we are in conflict with God, while we refuse to acknowledge his place in our lives. Death and destruction are the fruits of sin. That is the meaning of the Garden of Eden story about Adam and Eve and the Serpent. Muslim terrorists talk a lot about God, but it is not the God of the Bible. It is what the Apostle Paul calls the 'god of this world', the ruler of the kingdom of darkness, a god that will take them to Hell, not to Heaven or Paradise.

Indeed, these days in our secular age there is a tendency to cast all religions and all gods in the same boat, as the cause of hatred and violence. But the reason why we can trust the Bible's

portrait of God is because it tells us that just over 2000 years ago the Incarnation happened: that God became man in order to be our Saviour. That is what the name 'Jesus' means. If you want to know what God is like, read the Gospels and look at the life of Jesus. He could say: *'He who has seen me has seen the Father'*. There is no discrepancy between God and Jesus. And what is precious here is that Jesus was not a man of violence but the Prince of Peace, a man who suffered at the hands of violent religious men in order to redeem us from evil.

The **third** letter in the word 'peace' is the letter 'A', which stands for ACCOUNTABLE. You see, peace comes at a price. It requires agreement and atonement. We talk about peace-treaties and peace-deals, about the need for accord between warring factions and nations. We use big words like 'reconciliation' to describe the restoration of peace. Mediators and a process of mediation are used to try to restore peace, even in industrial disputes, and we've seen plenty of those recently.

The Bible states that we 'all have sinned and fall short of God's standard of righteousness'. As a result, our natural state, since the Fall of Adam and Eve, is one of spiritual separation from our Creator God. But the Bible is not only about the history of paradise lost, but also about the history of paradise regained – about God's plan of salvation or rescue. It tells us about many covenants or agreements that God has made with his people. The main promise of these covenants is about the coming of a great king or Messiah, who will rescue people from sin and its consequences. In other words, the prophets tell us that God will come in person to save this sinful world, for *'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself'*. Jesus came into the world just over 2000 years ago in order to be our Saviour.

The **fourth** letter is the letter 'C', which stands for CHRIST. Yes, peace is costly. It involves sacrifice. Millions gave their lives in the Two World Wars in order to achieve peace and freedom. That is why cenotaphs in our towns and cities often recall the words of Jesus: *'Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'*. But the true meaning of this verse points to a greater sacrifice: when Jesus laid down his life and died on the cross to redeem us from sin and to restore us back to God. You see, peace with God is costly: it cost the death of Christ to save us from the eternal consequences of sin and our warring with God. Christ is the supreme peace-maker because through him we can have peace with God and the peace of God in our hearts as the result of giving our lives to him. The coming of Christ is the coming of heavenly peace. The greatest gift that God has given to the world, and the greatest gift that we can ever receive in this life, is the gift of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ. For John 3.16 tells us that *'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.'*

And, **finally**, the last letter of 'peace' is the letter 'E', which stands for ETERNAL. Peace is eternal, because peace is the hallmark of eternal life. To know Christ is to be blessed with true peace, and to have Christ in your lives is to possess eternal life, for *'he became as we are that we may become as he is'*. Peace is a heavenly gift and blessing; it involves the work of God's Spirit. That is why peace is one of the nine fruits of the Spirit, second only to love. The Bible tells us that God is the God of peace, that the Gospel is the Gospel of peace, and that the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Do you have this heavenly peace in your heart and life? Do you know what it means to have a deep rest and contentment within your soul – your innermost self. You see, to have true peace in your heart, you must know Christ, the Prince of Peace, who told his disciples that *'I have come that you*



*may have abundant life*'. To have this fulness of life, you must allow the Spirit of the Risen Christ to come into you heart and to cleanse you from sin, from all that would separate you from God and from his Peace. This doesn't mean to say that you will never experience any trouble again, that your life afterwards will be one continuous stream of happiness. No, but what it does mean is that you will experience a deep sense of contentment in knowing God and knowing that, like his Son, you are the centre of his eternal love and affection. You may not win the lottery with its multi-million pounds of anxiety and strife, but you will be blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. And when we depart this life we can truly Rest In Peace knowing that 'to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord'. For as the Apostle Paul wrote to Christians in the great city of Philippi: *'To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'* And in a world that is desperately searching for peace, whether peace in the world or peace of mind, that means a tremendous amount.

As the Apostle Paul told the Christians in Rome: May 'the God of peace be with you all.' May this be your experience this Christmas and beyond, for his name's sake. Amen

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for Jesus and the message of hope and peace in him and through his death on the cross for our salvation. Your Word tells us that to know Jesus is to know real peace – peace with yourself – a peace that is beyond human understanding, for it is based on your eternal love for us. May this Christmas be a time when we will either discover this peace for the first time or rediscover this peace in all its fulness of joy and delight, for Christ's sake, Amen.

**Our final song: which included Hywel taking our offerings:**

When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll;  
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."

**It is well with my soul; it is well, it is well with my soul.**

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control:  
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and has shed his own blood for my soul.

**It is well with my soul...**

My sin oh, the bliss of this glorious thought! my sin, not in part, but the whole,  
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more; praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

**It is well with my soul....**

O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend; even so, it is well with my soul.

**It is well with my soul;...**

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**After Colin gave a short prayer of thanks, we shared the grace together:**

**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.**

