



The Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit

Sunday 21st December 2025: Advent 4

Theme for today is "The struggles of Christmas"

Prepared by Aileen Fox – Local Preacher



Opening Prayer: Loving God be with us wherever we are today, at home, away, in Church, in care or in hospital. May we feel you close beside us helping and enabling us to worship and adore you.

Hymn169: Come thou long expected Jesus https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBGx_4PxO3g

1. Come thou Long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free, from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
2. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art, dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
3. Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king, born to reign in us for ever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
4. By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all-sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley

Prayers: Gracious and merciful Lord we come to you with longing to praise and worship you. You are mighty and we are in awe of your majesty. We understand that you love us, sinners that we are, that Jesus came into the world to save each one of us. We come now to say sorry for our wrong doings, the missed opportunities and the times when we have fallen short of serving you and have not shown love or kindness to others. We ask for forgiveness though we know you have already assured us of that through Jesus.

Thank you for the greatest gift of Jesus, and for your everlasting love. **Amen**

The Lord's prayer

Hymn 706: Longing for light, we wait in darkness <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt3Qc04ulOM>

1. 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 come.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your Church gathered today.

2. 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! Shine in our hearts...

3. 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! Shine in our hearts...

4. 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! Shine in our hearts...

5. 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...

Bernadette Farrell

We make our offering to God in the gift of money, time, and thankfulness. We thank you for all your good gifts to us and we ask your blessing on all that we offer. **Amen**

Readings set for today:

Isaiah ch.7 v10-16; Psalm 80; Matthew 1: 18-25

Thoughts for the week

In the rush of preparation have we stopped to think of Mary and Joseph and those around them how the birth of Jesus would affect them? Have we really taken on board that the future was unknown? What faith to trust when so much was unknown!

Hymn 178: Long ago, prophets knew <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S63rjDtYRYg>

Long ago prophets knew Christ would come, born a Jew, come to make all things new; bear his people's burden, freely love and pardon:

Ring bells ring, ring, ring! Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing! When he comes, when he comes, who will make him welcome?

God in time, God in man, this is God's timeless plan: he will come, as a man, born himself of woman, God divinely human.

Ring bells ring, ...

Mary hail! Though afraid, she believed, she obeyed. In her womb, God is laid; till the time expected, nurtured and protected:

Ring bells ring, ...

Journey ends! Where afar Bethlehem shines, like a star, stable door stands ajar. Unborn Son of Mary, Saviour do not tarry!

Ring bells ring, ring, ring! Sing choirs, sing, sing, sing! Jesus comes! Jesus comes! We will make him welcome!

Fred Pratt Green

Reflection

The 4th Sunday in Advent as we prepare for the birth of Jesus. Just four more days until Christmas day. Are you excited or is it just another day and one which feels difficult. Perhaps you are facing loneliness, memories of different times, sadness. Let's think for a moment of someone who had every right to feel out of their depth, to feel sad and hurt, these might have been the thoughts that were concerning Joseph. To be told that his fiancée was pregnant, and he knew it wasn't his child! All thoughts of a future together were gone, and how could he walk away quietly and try and avoid the possible repercussions for Mary having a child before marriage. She could face stoning.

Yet he was a man who wanted to do the decent thing, not make a fuss. An angel visited him in a dream and told him not to fear but to take Mary as his wife, as she had conceived by the Holy Spirit. We know the rest; of the census, the birth in a cave or stable. But what if Joseph hadn't been that decent caring man, what if he'd said no and walked away?

The festive season is upon us, we sing our carols and observe our own traditions, perhaps just for a day or so. We might put a brave face on and try and look cheerful, responding to good wishes. However you are feeling, Jesus is with you walking alongside you, sharing with you, He cares and remember he didn't stay in the manger, he grew up led an earthly life amongst people sharing in joys and sorrows. Learning from Mary and initially also from Joseph. Joseph said yes to the angel's request to take Mary as his wife. I'm sure God would have found another way to protect Mary and Jesus, if necessary, but in Joseph so often forgotten, was a man of decency, respect, obedience and care. Isn't he a role model? He agonized and had almost decided to quietly break off the engagement, but when he heard the angel, he knew the way forward, though it would not be easy. Just as Mary also obeyed so did Joseph.

Sometimes we too wonder about the way forward, it might not be what we planned but God has plans for us even if there are some twists and turns along the way. Sometimes we say no, avoid the request but God will find a way to encourage us, choosing perhaps a different route for us to do the work he knows we can do for him. Are we willing to listen this Advent time and trust in God for the future just as Joseph did.

Hymn 193: Born in the night <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hyj1Sk1RpBg>

1. Born in the night, Mary's Child, a long way from your home; coming in need, Mary's Child, born in a borrowed room.

2. Clear shining light, Mary's Child, your face lights up our way; light of the world, Mary's Child, dawn on our darkened day.

3. Truth of our life, Mary's Child, you tell us God is good; prove it is true, Mary's Child, go to your cross of wood.

4. Hope of the world, Mary's Child, you're coming soon to reign; King of the earth, Mary's Child, walk in our streets again.

Geoffrey Ainger

Prayers for the World, for others and for ourselves:

Loving God we look out at a world in darkness, we see violence and hatred everywhere, even in our own towns and villages. We pray for peace where people of all races, genders, faiths and non-faiths can live alongside each other and learn to work together. For the people of the Middle East, that a peaceful time may come where there is no longer violence, fear and hatred and all may be able to live together in harmony. In Sudan, Ukraine, Russia, Pakistan, DRC, Yemen and so many other places where there is war, fear, turmoil, we pray for peace, and hope. For those today facing a lonely Christmas, those who are sick, grieving, fearful and without hope, may they find hope in you. Lord, we think of all in need, those who are homeless, hungry, worried about their future, we ask your blessing on them that they may know they are worthy, special and a gift. Finally, Lord, we bring ourselves to you that we may do your work here on earth, we look to you for energy, direction knowing you love us. Thank you, Loving Lord. Amen

Hymn 217: Silent night https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePmp_fba-tI

1. Silent night, holy night: sleeps the world; hid from sight, Mary and Joseph in stable bare watch o'er the child beloved and fair sleeping in heavenly rest.
2. Silent night, holy night: shepherds first saw the light, heard resounding clear and long, far and near, the angel-song: 'Christ the Redeemer is here!'
3. Silent night, holy night: Son of God, O how bright love is smiling from your face! Strikes for us now the hour of grace, Jesus, Lord at your birth.

Joseph Mohr

Blessing:

May you know the love of God this Christmas time and face the new year with hope and joy in the knowledge that you are a gift and are truly loved by him. Amen