

Welshpool & Bro Hafren Methodist Circuit

Home Worship Sheet – 29th November

This short act of worship has been prepared and written for you by John Harbron.

**'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but to save the world through him.'**

**Ring bells ring, ring, ring.
Sing choirs sing, sing, sing.
When he comes, when he comes
Who will make him welcome?**

Welcome to this Time of Worship on the first Sunday in Advent. A period when we prepare ourselves to celebrate the greatest gift God has given his children of this world. Unfortunately there is dark side to this.

Just how many will celebrate this gift from God?

But let's look on the bright side. Maybe we can't join together singing out loud, but we can sing lustily in our hearts while keeping our distance!

Our opening hymn entices us to open our hearts and voices of the joy God brings to us all, each and everyone of us. Joy to the World.

Hymn: Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

To listen to the hymn in a new tab: press Shift and Ctrl together and click [here](#). Close the tab after the hymn.

- 1 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.**

- 2 Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let them their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
- 3 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.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Prayers:- Praise, Thanksgiving and Confession

Lord, we have come to worship you in this glad season of Advent.
A season of expectation, of celebration, and above all, a season of preparation.

We come now, because we want to be ready – ready to give thanks for your coming, to recognise the ways you come to us now, and to welcome you when you come again.

Open our hearts as we worship you, so that all we share may give us a deeper understanding of this season and a fuller experience of your love.

Lord Jesus Christ, we remember today that though your people longed for your coming, many were not prepared to welcome you, failing to recognise you when you came.

Forgive us that we can be equally closed to your coming into our lives, forcing you into a mould we have made for you, presuming our thoughts and our ways are the same as yours.

Forgive us that our expectations are small and limited, shaped by looking at life from a human rather than eternal perspective.

Forgive us and help us to be prepared.

Help each of us to examine ourselves - our words and deeds, thoughts and attitudes – and so live each day open to what you would do in us and through us, to the glory of your name. Amen

Psalm 119:41 - 56

To listen to this reading, by Kelly Ryan Dolan from BibleGateway in a new tab press Shift and Ctrl together and click [here](#). Close the tab after the reading.

Let your love, God, shape my life with salvation, exactly as you promised; then I'll be able to stand up to mockery because I trusted your Word.

Don't ever deprive me of truth, not ever - your commandments are what I depend on.

Oh, I'll guard with my life what you've revealed to me, guard it now, guard it ever; and I'll stride freely through wide open spaces as I look for your truth and your wisdom; then I'll tell the world what I find, speak out boldly in public, unembarrassed.

I cherish your commandments - oh, how I love them! - relishing every fragment of your counsel.

Remember what you said to me, your servant - I hang on to these words for dear life!

These words hold me up in bad times; yes, your promises rejuvenate me. The insolent ridicule me without mercy, but I don't budge from your revelation.

I watch for your ancient landmark words, and know I'm on the right track. But when I see the wicked ignore your directions, I'm beside myself with anger.

I set your instructions to music and sing them as I walk this pilgrim way.

I meditate on your name all night, God, treasuring your revelation, O God.

Still, I walk through a rain of derision because I live by your Word and counsel.

The Gospel reading set for today, the 1st Sunday in Advent, finds Jesus warning his disciples and his followers to watch out for those who are out to destroy the Word of God. So in turn, a warning for us.

Mark 13:24-37

To listen to this reading, by Kelly Ryan Dolan from BibleGateway in a new tab press Shift and Ctrl together and click [here](#). Close the tab after the reading.

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! 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!”

New International Version

Reflection

The words from Psalm 119 should give us the reassurance that God is with us, and we are with him even in difficult situations.

A good feeling as we enter this time of Advent.

Then the Gospel passage set for today hits us between the eyes.

If we are going to follow Jesus be prepared to face opposition, devious and belligerent opposition at that.

Last September, I was reading a Questionnaire which was asking the Scottish novelist Andrew O'Hagan which books had influenced him in his writing.

One question was:- Which book is most overrated?

Answer:- The Bible. There are some nice sentences, each of them tangled in a thicket of abject baloney.

It stopped me in my tracks.

So, this “thicket of abject baloney” has influenced the likes of William Wilberforce, Nelson Mandela and Mother Theresa to change the lives of so many people? And so many, many more throughout the centuries. Many we have met in our lives.

The bible does not pretend to be a literary masterpiece, just as a recipe book isn't but both can change people's lives for the good.

I'm reminded of a story about a monastery where the monks were very poor singers. You may have heard of Sister Act, this was Brother Act!

They enjoyed singing their praises to the Lord. It was good providing you didn't have to listen to it!

One year, as Christmas approached and they were preparing for their Christmas Eve Worship, they heard that a wonderful Singer had moved into the area. His reputation was that he was a Pavarotti, Bryn Terfel and Elvis Presley all rolled into one.

They hit on the idea of seeing if he would lead their Christmas Eve Worship to celebrate the coming of God's own Son into this world.

To their delight, and slight surprise he accepted their invitation to join them. He said he wouldn't be charging them as this was his opportunity to worship the Lord, sing his praises with the monks, servants of Christ.

Christmas Eve arrived and the monks were very excited to meet the Singer in person and to worship with him.

Needless to say the Worship was wonderful. For the first time for many years the beauty of the singing could be heard in the chapel. After the service, very happy and joyful monks went to their rooms knowing they had given the baby Christ a wonderful welcome.

The Abbot made his customary visit to the chapel to spend a few moments with their Lord before going to his room.

He thanked God for such a powerful time together, especially for the guest Singer who would have graced any large cathedral.

It was wonderful!

It was then God spoke. “I listen out for you every evening because I so enjoy your Worship, but tonight I heard nothing.” This roused the Abbot who tore a strip of God for not listening to them after all the effort they made to give God the best Worship possible.

God remained calm. “My child, you didn’t listen to what I said. I listened but I heard nothing. You base your joy on earthly standards, I look for heavenly ideals. Your singer was excellent, but he sang for himself. He sang for your adoration, I was left as an onlooker, not at the centre of his worship.

Now you monks, you are rubbish singers, but you give of yourselves to me. You sing with sincerity, conviction, joy, grace and love. It is one of the highlights each evening to witness your Worship. Give the brothers a Christmas present tomorrow – tell them to keep worshipping in the same way. If they try to sing to meet earthly standards, they will lose the heavenly ideals which they have in abundance.”

A Methodist minister found himself stationed at a church in an affluent area in the south east of England. As with all moves, it takes a bit of time getting to know the area.

As Christmas approached in his first year, the manager from a supermarket contacted him to say they had a Giant Christmas Hamper filled with everything you could need at Christmas. They thought he would be in a good position for it to be passed onto to someone who was really in need of it.

Being new to the area though, he didn’t know of anyone personally. He asked the Stewards if they knew of any such deserving family - but they didn’t. He asked the various active groups in the church if they knew of any such deserving family - but they didn’t.

After the Sunday service immediately before Christmas, he asked members of the congregation if they knew of any such deserving family - but they didn’t either.

So, on the Monday morning the minister contacted the Salvation Army.

They took him to an area of the town where most of the people living there had for one reason or another, hit difficult times.

Families which were struggling to survive - and for most of them it was out of their control how they got there.

They took the minister, along with the hamper to a first floor flat where there was a Living Room / Kitchen, one bedroom and a bathroom.

Living there was a young woman in her late 20's and two children aged 4 and 2. They were sat in their coats because they couldn't afford to put the heating on until evening.

She told her story to him.

She went to university when she was 18 where she met this young West Indian man who was in his first year as well.

He came from a poor family but he was well educated and bright. He had been given this opportunity to further his education in this country.

They got on well and planned when they left university to find jobs, marry and settle down together.

They did this but her family disowned her because she married someone who was black.

They ploughed their money into buying a house and started a family. One day when her husband was cycling to work, he was knocked off his bike by a car and later died from his injuries. The driver of the car had no insurance.

She was left with no alternative but to leave the house and move into this flat, with hardly any money coming in and dependant on the Food Bank.

Imagine the joy she felt when being given this Giant Christmas Hamper. Tears of joy must have flowed down her cheeks.

She had been facing a Christmas of having nothing.

No husband, no father for the children. Little food, few presents, no family.

The minister was not too concerned the congregation didn't know anyone personally who was in need of the hamper but he was troubled by the fact that everyone was oblivious to there being people in their own town, their own community, who were struggling to live, often depending on Food Banks.

AH their cry goes up. Food Banks are used by scroungers, the lazy and the parasites of society!!!

When looking at the church, it was very active and vibrant with large congregations on Sundays.

But they were all earthly standards. God had been made to suit the congregation, not the congregation being one with God.

We don't need outsiders being hostile to the work of Christ, his own followers are doing the job for them, letting the earthly standards we like take over our lives instead of letting the light of Christ shine through us.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus talks about him returning and watching out for him, because we don't know when that'll be.

In one way or another, God interacts with us everyday.

For the monks it was through a wonderful Singer.

For that congregation it was a Giant Christmas Hamper.

For us – just watch out – stay alert.

For me, it was Andrew O'Hagan, who've I never heard of.

But there is also another person I've never heard of:- Dr Robert Cargill, Assistant Professor of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Iowa.

A few weeks ago on Songs of Praise, there was a hymn Irene and myself had never heard before, but we both were taken by it.

“Ancient Words”.

I did some research on it and made (for me) a fascinating discovery.

Dr Robert Cargill has declared:-

“ ‘Ancient Words’ is the worst Christian song Ever”.

The reason is that it is grammatically a disaster!

Nothing to do with the theology. Yet there are many people saying how it connects them to God and the words written in the bible.

Words which Andrew O'Hagan claims are “abject baloney”.

It's all to do with what dominates our lives. Earthly standards or heavenly ideals?

As we prepare to celebrate God's Son becoming one of us, take heed of Jesus' warning. “I say this to everyone, Be Ready, Watch!”

STAY ALERT! AMEN.

Prayers for Others in Advent

A

We pray for those who are **Angry**, and for those who are **Alone**, for those who have been **Abused** by others, whether it is physical, mentally or emotionally. We bring to you Lord all those who **Ache** to be **Accepted**

May the coming of Jesus fill them with hope.

D

We pray for those who feel **Defeated** by all that they face each day, for those who are sick or **Dying**, and for those who are filled with **Despair**.

May the coming of Jesus fill them with hope.

V

We pray for those with a **Vision** for peace, and for those who are the **Voice** of the poor; for those who teach us to **Value** each other, and for those who work with the **Vulnerable**, the homeless and the lost.

May the coming of Jesus fill them with hope.

E

We pray for planet **Earth** and for those who **Encourage** us to care for it; for those seeking to **Escape** fighting, the war in **Ethiopia**; for those who are working to provide **Essential** food, clothing and warmth for all those who live in poverty.

May the coming of Jesus fill them with hope.

N

We pray for our **Neighbours** – for those who live next door, across the road, or across the other side of the world; for those who are seeking the **Narrow way**, and for those who **Name** the name of Jesus and bring good **News** of him to others.

May the coming of Jesus fill them with hope.

T

We pray for those whose lives have been changed by those who inflict **Terror on others**; for those whose faith has been **Tested** by the things that have happened to them; for those who **Teach** about Jesus and those who should be a **Target** of our love.

May the coming of Jesus fill them with hope.

We ask these ADVENT prayers in the name of Jesus, the one who comes bringing us so much Hope. AMEN

Now, let us pray together in the word our saviour taught us 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.
And 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.

Our closing hymn is “Ancient Words” considered by Dr Robert Cargill to be “the worst Christian song Ever”. It’s about the bible considered by Andrew O’Hagan to be “the most overrated book”. Yet it tells us all about the most influential person this world has ever known! Words from Psalm 119, should give us encouragement.

Hymn: Ancient Words

To listen to the hymn in a new tab: press Shift and Ctrl together and click [here](#). Close the tab after the hymn.

1 **Holy words long preserved
for our walk in this world,
They resound with God's own heart
Oh, let the Ancient words impart.**

2 **Words of Life, words of Hope
Give us strength, help us cope
In this world, where e'er we roam
Ancient words will guide us Home.**

**Ancient words ever true
Changing me, and changing you.
We have come with open hearts
Oh let the ancient words impart.**

3 **Holy words of our Faith
Handed down to this age.
Came to us through sacrifice
Oh heed the faithful words of Christ.**

4 **Holy words long preserved
For our walk in this world.
They resound with God's own heart
Oh let the ancient words impart.**

**Ancient words ever true
Changing me, and changing you.
We have come with open hearts
Oh let the ancient words impart.**

Lynn DeShazo

Dismissal

Ancient words ever true,
Changing me and changing you.

So we go Lord with open hearts to tell the world

“You so loved the world that you gave your one and only Son, not to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him”.

Prepare to welcome Him.

HALLELUIAH! AMEN

