

## Service to share - 1<sup>ST</sup> Sunday in ADVENT

### ORDER of SERVICE

*Welcome and Intimations*

*Call to Worship*

**PRAISE** Hymn 273: O Come, O come, Emmanuel

*Advent Candle Lighting Ceremony*

*Song:* Hymn 282: Christmas is coming! (Verse 1).

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Introduction/Children's Address

**PRAISE** Hymn 279: 'Make way! make way, for Christ the King...

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 2:1 - 5

Matthew 24:36-44

**PRAISE** Anthem: 'O Holy Night' (join in verses 2 and 3)

Prayers of Intercession

**PRAISE** Hymn 277: Hark the glad sound! the Saviour comes...

Sermon: "*Being Prepared: Keeping The Vision Alive*"

Offering and Dedication

**PRAISE** Hymn 286: Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord.

*Blessing and Benediction*

*Choral Amen*

**ADVENT 1**

**FULL ORDER of SERVICE**

## *Welcome and Intimations*

### ***Call to Worship***

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the Earth. Worship the Lord with Gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God.

***So, LET US COME and WORSHIP GOD -***

**PRAISE** Hymn 273: O Come, O come, Emmanuel

### ***Advent Candle Lighting Ceremony***

**VOICE 1** - Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Hope

**VOICE 2** - Our hope is in God, and in his son Jesus Christ. He is the one appointed by God to be judge of all things. He is the one through whom God has promised to save and redeem his people.

**VOICE 1** - We light this candle today to remind us that he is our hope and the hope of the world. We thank God for the promises he has made to us and for the light he has brought into the world.

### ***Light the First Candle***

**VOICE 2- Let us pray:**

O God of Hope, Emmanuel, God with Us – we pray you to send your light into our hearts. Help us to be ready for the day and the hour of Christ's appearing. Live in us and help us to live in you. By the power of the Holy Spirit, touch us. Transform us so that our worship, our celebration, our time of preparation, may be pleasing unto you - both now - and forevermore. **Amen.**

**SONG:** Hymn 282: 'Christmas is Coming!' (v.1)

### ***Prayer and Lord's Prayer***

***LET US PRAY -***

Loving God, through Jesus Christ you call us to be your holy people; gather us now from our own concerns, from the busyness of our lives; and draw us together into your larger peace.

Loving God, through Jesus Christ you call us to stream towards you; gather us now and pour your Holy Spirit upon us, draw us together into your Holy Light, open our hearts and our minds to your Word and your Will, for we are your people in this place.

Lord of all that is, Creator, Friend and Inspiration: you are the Light that shines through all light, the life of all that lives. We stand before you as your children with no words fierce enough to speak your glory, no words strong enough to tell your love, no words great enough to give our thanks.

Accept then, the wordless pictures of our hearts, the loving music of our souls; for you are beyond the reach of our descriptions and the glory of your holy hill is beyond our imagining.

Merciful God, you love all that you have made and will not turn your face away from your children; we come before you now knowing that we have put our own will before yours, and our own selfishness before the good of others: **we are sorry and ashamed.**

Merciful God, you made us to be one family yet everywhere we turn our backs on one another. You made us for peace and we have learned war: **we are sorry and ashamed.**

In our hearts we harbour anger and mistrust when Christ calls us to love and generosity. When you need us to speak for peace, we stand in silence; when you need us to stand alongside Christ, we step aside: **we are sorry and ashamed.**

Merciful God, forgive us, and hear us as we pray together, saying -

**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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

**And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil**

**For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power,**

**and the Glory. Forever. Amen.**

## **Introduction/Children's Address**

Theme: Preparing For Christ's Coming

Object: Alarm Clock

Sources: Based on Children's Sermon Service Plus (Dec 95, Jan-Feb 96)

Good morning... Who can tell me what is special about this day???

We have begun the countdown for Christmas - anyone know how many days are left till Christmas Day???

Are there any special things that you are doing to get ready for Christmas???

There are a lot of things that people do to get ready for Christmas Day - special things that will help us all celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ - the first time he came into the world. The Bible tells us that he is going to come again to our world - and that there are some special things we should do to get ready for his second coming - can any of you think of some of the special things we might do???

Those are all very good things to do.

But first of all - Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans that we should wake up and remember that he is coming. When he comes he will judge all the countries and all the people in the world - to see if they in fact love him and each other. If we love him and are really trying to love each other - he will reward us beyond anything anyone ever dreamed about - and if we are asleep - if we don't show our love for him and others - that we will miss out on all the good things that he will do.

That is why I brought an alarm clock today - to remind me - and you - that if we fall asleep - if we forget that Jesus is coming again - and forget to do the things he commanded us to do - the things that make us shine - that we will miss all the joy he has made ready for us.

I know that none of you will sleep through Christmas Day - that you will be very busy from now until then getting ready for it.

I hope that all of you will awake for his second coming as well.

***Let us pray...***

"Lord Jesus - Help us be prepared - for the day of your coming. Help us to be alert and ready - so that we may not miss the good things you will do. - **Amen**"

**PRAISE** Hymn 279: 'Make way! make way, for Christ the King.

**Scripture Readings:** Isaiah 2:15  
Matthew 24:36-44

**PRAISE** TS 322: Like a Candle Flame **OR** 'O Holy Night'

**Prayers of Intercession: LET US PRAY -**

We thank you, O God, that you have given us an enduring hope - one which cannot disappoint us or mislead us. We thank you, that through our faith in you and in your Son Jesus Christ, you enter into every believing heart and make new lives that have been torn asunder by the darkness of this world - by the darkness of human sin.

We pray today O God that those believers who are asleep may awake and know that salvation is nearer now than when they first believed. Help them, and us, to lay aside the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light that you bestow upon those who actively seek you day by day. Grant that their faith and ours may be fully alive so that the joy of Christmas which so many seek in the giving of gifts and the gathering of family and friends may be ours all the year round.  
Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We ask today, O God, for those whose hope rests in Christmas, rather than in Christ. We pray for those who teach their children that Santa Claus is the giver of all good gifts and that **their** family and **their** friends are the most important things in life, as if they were all that mattered, instead of teaching them about the things that endure - the gifts we give to strangers - the love we shower upon our enemies - the compassion we show to those in need - the obedience we render unto your will.  
Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We ask also, O God, that you might give to those who place their hope in economic recovery, in constitutional reform, in better jobs, or bigger homes, or in anything else that is human rather than divine - the vision to see you working in the lives of others and the ears to hear your gentle voice calling them to rest themselves in your grace and to trust in your saving power.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

And we come, today, O God, asking for ourselves - for all the changes happening around us in our individual lives, and in the life of our Church.

We pray for our Church here, and for ourselves, as we also pray for the people of our parishes. Grant us, we pray, your peace, the assurance of your leading and guiding hand, and a sure vision for the future as we all step out with you.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, we thank you for your Son Jesus, he who is the true light of the world - and the real reason for this season. We thank you for the mercies you have shown us in him and for the promises you have made through him - the promises that we have experienced the truth and fulfilment of already - and the promises which we know will be fulfilled on the day of his return. Help us ready ourselves for that time by being children of light in this time - we ask it in his name. **Amen.**

**PRAISE** Hymn 277: Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes.

**Sermon:** *"Being Prepared: Keeping the Vision Alive"*

**Offering and Dedication:** **LET US PRAY -**

Gracious God, we bring you now this money as a token of our love, a sign of our worship, and a symbol of our discipleship, offered to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in joyful and grateful praise. **Amen.**

**PRAISE** Hymn 286: Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord.

## ***Blessing and Benediction***

Go now in peace.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you, and remain with you all, now and for evermore. . . .

*Choral Amen*

**SERMON:**    *"Being Prepared: Keeping The Vision Alive"*    **ADVENT 1**

### ***Prayer for Illumination:***

Lord, quieten our hearts that we may listen to Your still small voice,  
so that in hearing Your Word we may respond in fervent faith.  
As Jesus led disciples of old, so lead us your children today.  
We ask it his name. **Amen.**

## ***INTRODUCTION***

Throughout all of the scriptures there is one common refrain, a refrain echoed over and over again - the refrain that says that the final act of God's salvation of the world is coming,  
- that time when the lion will lie down with lamb,  
and nations shall be beat their swords in ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks  
and God himself will judge between the nations.

This idea is expressed in many ways:

- it is expressed by the prophets who speak throughout the old testament of the coming day of the Lord - that day which brings the destruction of the evil and the vindication of the good,
- it is expressed by Jesus who speaks in each gospel of the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds with power and many signs to bring peace to the earth and to separate out the sheep from the goats

- and it is expressed by the Apostles, who speak of the day of the Messiah's return and the triumph of the righteous.

Today - this time that we are in - is further represented by almost all of the prophets, and by Jesus and the apostles, as a time of darkness:

- a time in which we must wait for the day to come,
- a time in which we must nourish the vision we have been given
- a time in which we must stand by faith on the promises of God and be prepared for them to be suddenly brought to fulfilment.

### **THE THEME of ADVENT**

Indeed this is the theme of Advent - being prepared for the coming to pass of all of God's promises - being prepared for the time of peace, the

time of justice, the time when none shall hunger or thirst anymore.

It is about being prepared and about the vision of the prophets and the apostles, and of Jesus himself, that we start to think about today, as we begin our Advent journey this year.

### **RABBI ILLUSTRATION**

Many centuries ago a rabbi once asked his students how they could tell when the night was passed and the day was on its way back again.

**One suggested** - *"when you see an animal in the distance and you can tell if it is a sheep or a goat."*

**Another said:** *"When you can see a tree in the distance and you can tell whether it is a fig tree or a peach tree."*



**But the rabbi was not impressed with these answers.** He finally told his students - it is when you can look at the face of any human being and see there the face your brother or sister - because if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is - for you it is still night."

## ***A VISION of SALVATION***

The vision of salvation that we have is very important: without an adequate vision, we are inadequately prepared to live this life as God wants us to live, without an adequate hope, we are inadequately prepared to deal with the world.

Even today's industries recognizes this principle - and most of them now have extensive orientation programs for new employees:

- in addition to the usual lectures on safety in the work site, they give tours of the entire operation to the new worker
- they show films on how the product they are making is designed and used, - they speak of the firm's philosophy and market strategy
- they stress the care and attention that the firm pays to all its people - they attempt, in one way or another, to show where all the efforts made by the workers fit in and just how important they are within the total plan of the company.

The theory is that if the employee feels that what they are doing makes a difference, - if they feel that is important and that they, as persons, are truly valued in it, - if they catch hold of the company's vision then they will work harder, be more committed, happier, and ultimately more productive.

Vision is important in every area of our life, not just in our workplaces.

## **ILLUSTRATION -**

A couple of years back I was preparing a young man and woman for their wedding. I asked them, as I usually do, what kind of gifts they brought to each other.

The young man looked at his fiancée and said - she brings me a sense of meaning and purpose.

I was struck by his response and asked him to say more.

He told me that before he had met her he had kind of drifted along: he had worked hard - but could not really see any purpose in it, but now - with a wife, and hopefully children entering his life, he had a reason to live - he had someone to care for and someone who would care for him.

What had happened to this young man happens to many people when they come to love someone and are loved in return by them - they catch hold of vision - and that vision feeds their lives and brings light to every step they make.

## **WHAT VISION DO WE HAVE AS CHRISTIANS?**

What vision sustains us in our Christian walk?

What helps us face the darkness: - the times when we are hurt by others, the times when we and those around us suffer, the times when peace seems so far off and justice seems to be just a dream?

What vision of God and of God's salvation do we have?

To many, the world has become a terrible place, an awful void, an appalling wilderness. Yet many Christians, if they do not actually join in the chorus of complaints that are heard all round, remain silent, passive, and apathetic. They do not nurture the vision of the

prophets and the apostles within them. They do not - it seems - believe in the promises made through them anymore.

And so they - with all who dwell in darkness - suffer without hope. Indeed they add to the suffering of the world by denying that world the hope that God intends it to have.

Why is this? Why have people let go of the vision that God gives to us in virtually every page of the bible?

Some would say that it is because the promises of God are nothing but dreams. Others would say it is because - even if those promises are true their fulfilment is too far in the future to make any difference.

I know that many of us are tired of promises that have no substance to them. We have come to realize that buying a new car does not make us happier; that the new brand of soap does not really bring us a brighter bright; and that the deodorant that promises us confidence all day, does not really make a difference when we have to speak in public or meet someone who is important to our future.

### ***GOD'S PROMISES ARE DIFFERENT:***

The promises of God are not empty however, - nor are they without substance. In fact many of them have already come to pass, - they have already been fulfilled.

Remember the question the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus? "Are you the one who is to come - or should we wait for another?"

Jesus answered them this way:

*"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear,*

*the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them".*

Someone once estimated that over 150 separate prophecies or promises of God came true with the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

### **God has kept his promises**

- those made for days of old,
- those made to Abraham concerning the creation of a mighty nation from his seed,
- those made later on concerning the rise and fall of Jerusalem as his chosen city, - and those made concerning the birth of the Messiah in the line of David.

### **God has kept his promises made for days of old.**

### **And God keeps his promises**

- those meant for today
- those which concern his presence among those who believe,
- those which concern peace and comfort and support to those who have faith,
- those which concern strength
- even in weakness
- to meet all adversity,
- those which concern forgiveness and healing of the soul.

### **God has kept his promises, God keeps his promises - And God will keep his promises**

- those meant for that day which will surprise us in the future
- the day of Christ's return:
- the day of peace for all nations and peoples, the day of judgement and of vindication.

## **CONCLUSION**

Vision is essential to our life.

Without it, and without the hope that vision provides, we turn as black as the night around us - we begin to die.

**But vision needs to be nurtured** if it is to be kept alive. It needs to be clung to, especially when the darkness threatens us. It needs to be used - to be used as the filter through which we see all of life.

**We can keep the vision alive**, - by remembering - all that God has done - and by thinking of what God is doing, - and out of this foundation, by believing that God will indeed bring to pass all that he has promised.

**Martin Luther King** - once said "**I have a dream**" and he shared that dream with others. And though he is now gone - the world has changed because of that dream, and it continues to change because of those who hold onto it.

We too have a dream - a promise - a vision - and if we choose to hold on to it, if we proclaim it to ourselves and to others, without ever letting go of it, the world will also change around us -

The light will come and we will see the face of our brothers and sisters. Our lives will have purpose and meaning, and we will see what God has promised come to pass - in this life - and in the next.

Praise be to God - **Amen**.