

**Bulletin for Sunday 28th November 2021**

Good Morning, Friends. This is the first Sunday in Advent, as we start looking forwards to the celebration of the birth of Christ, and the signs of hope which it brings...

We pause as we prepare to worship..... and then praise God as we sing:

Hymn: Morning has broken (R&S 45)

Prayer: God of love and life, you are always ahead of us;  
as we step into this Advent season,  
lead us safely through short winter days  
and long, cold, dark nights  
towards the hope of that starlit stable.....  
We ask your blessing on everything that we do,  
and everything that we give, in your service,  
now and always. In Jesus' name. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Luke chapter 21 verses 25 to 36

Reflection:

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves..." Luke 21: 25

Reading this today it's difficult not to hear echoes of the warnings from the recent COP26 discussions. Certainly there has recently been more "fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world" than usual. In Jesus' time seeing signs in the sun, moon and stars was a common feature of prophecy - and especially of apocalyptic predictions regarding the end of the world as we know it. All the same, this is perhaps a slightly unexpected passage to be coming from the lips of Jesus in what we call Holy Week - the week before his arrest in Jerusalem. He obviously wanted to warn his followers that they would experience difficult and distressing times... but he also wanted to give them hope to hold onto when he was no longer with them.

Notice that rather than just warning of the end of life on earth, in Jesus teaching these signs are turned on their head, so that they announce not destruction but a new beginning, literally an advent - the arrival of the kingdom of God with "the Son of Man coming in a cloud". The buds of the fig tree opening into tiny bright green leaves herald summer and new life, small but vital signs of hope. Jesus bade us to look out for them, and for other hopeful signs, and to raise our heads

(verse 28) as we do so. So let's be aware, this Advent, of the signs of life and seeds of hope around us.....

Hymn: I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship (R&S 265)

Prayer: God of all time - the beginning and the end of everything -  
we pray for people making new starts, by choice or necessity,  
and for those who are entering a new stage in their lives;  
we pray for those who are anxious about the way ahead...  
may they find hope, and know that you hold them safely.  
We cannot know the future: so may we wait patiently for you.  
We hold before you those in need, or bereaved, or overlooked;  
and we pray for our own communities and neighbours,  
as well as our friends and families, wherever they may be.  
Loving God, hear all our prayers,  
spoken and unspoken, in Jesus' name. Amen

Hymn: Come, thou long-expected Jesus (R&S 138)

Blessing: May we live in hope, and be signs of hope for others;  
and may the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us and with all those we love  
now and always. Amen

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There will be a ' Sunday at Six 'service on Zoom at 6pm - all welcome.

Please continue to remember that we all have a part to play in caring for each other and doing what we can to keep everyone safe from Covid, which includes letting us know if you have a positive Covid test after recently being in church. Sadly it's impossible to make our churches completely risk-free.

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