

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Tim Swindell. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.

As we begin the season of Advent, our time of preparation for Christmas, so we think about the coming of light into the world. This is a thought that may be on our minds at the moment as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect the world. It does seem for many of us to be a season of darkness, and we pray for each other, that with the possibility of vaccines on the horizon, we may feel encouraged and able in the foreseeable future to venture once more into a period of optimism and openness.

**Call to Worship:**

People of God,  
let us draw near to our Sovereign Lord.  
As a people who sometimes do not listen,  
let us listen to God  
and allow ourselves to be renewed by her,  
our creator, the one who made us, and who shapes us  
to be people of light in waiting times.  
Come, let us worship.  
Let us worship our God. **Amen.**



**Advent Candle Liturgy: First Candle –  
The Candle of Hope  
The Patriarchs, Abraham, the Old  
Testament Ancestors of Jesus**

Light and peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord  
**Thanks be to God**

Today is the First Sunday of Advent, in which we recall the hope we have in Christ.

God told Abraham that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed, because he trusted and put his hope in God. The Old Testament spoke of the coming of Christ, of how a Saviour would be born, a king in the line of King David. He would rule the world wisely and bless all the nations. We too believe in God's promise to send Jesus again to this world to establish his kingdom upon the earth.

**(The candle is lit)**

Hope is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at the light of this candle, we celebrate the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

**God of Abraham and Sarah and all the Patriarchs of old, you are our Father too. Your love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Son of David. Help us in preparing to celebrate his birth, to make our hearts ready and to place our hope in you. Help us today and every day to worship you, to hear your word, and to do your will by sharing your hope with others. We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem. Amen.**

**Hymn: Come, thou long-expected Jesus (Singing the Faith 169)**

*Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEEduWnDGs>

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.

Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art,  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,  
born a child and yet a king,  
born to reign in us forever,  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit,  
rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all-sufficient merit  
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

**Prayers of Adoration and Confession:**

Let us pray together  
**God of all, you embody all that is love,  
and in your great love  
you have called us into community with each other.  
With you and in you and because of you,  
we are nurtured in love.  
You are the one that lasts for ever.  
Your love reaches into all corners,  
encouraging those who wait for you –  
that they wait in the hope and in love.**

In all that, we recognise that in our lives  
we have turned our face from you, O God,  
whose face is always turned towards us.

We have sacrificed what we know is just.  
We have ignored what we understand is true.  
We have refused to believe what should be believed.  
We have deceived ourselves in word and deed.  
For this, we humbly repent,  
and we turn our face towards you –  
who waits for us, and makes us ever new.  
Make us ever new now, O restoring God.

Let's spend a moment in quiet, reflecting on our lives.

We hear the words of grace

**Our sins are forgiven**  
**Thanks be to God**  
**Amen.**

**Today's readings:**

**Genesis 1: 1-5 New Revised Standard Version**

### **The First Day of Creation**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, "Let there be light"; and

there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

**John 1: 1-9 New Revised Standard Version**

### **The Word Became Flesh**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

### **Reflection**

Today I'm using some of the resources prepared by the Enfield Circuit Staff Team so that, if you wish and are able, you can continue to reflect on the same reading sometime during the

week with the short booklet that has been prepared, and which you can find online, or by contacting the Circuit Office.

When I hear the words “Once upon a time...”, I get transported to a special place. I settle down and prepare myself to hear a story; a special story, a familiar one, hopefully with a moral and a great truth. Such stories, fables, are familiar in all cultures and begin in familiar ways; some of the stories are very old, but they don’t need to be. Don McLean’s “American Pie” begins with the phrase “A long, long time ago...” and if, like me, you can already hear the music in your head, then you will recognise the power of words. Many languages and cultures have similar phrases, and you may think of particular ones from your childhood. Jesus would have been familiar with such verbal cues too. In Hebrew there is such a phrase of preparation – it’s “Once there was...”; in Greek “Once and a time...”; and in Persian “Someday, sometime...”. In times when the main way of passing on stories was through an oral culture rather than a written one, we can imagine the power of familiar words.

Today’s bible readings contain perhaps some of the most well-known phrases to start biblical stories, biblical accounts. “In the beginning...”. I’m sure it is of no coincidence that John begins his Gospel with those same words as the Book of Genesis. It was his way of pointing out, from his very first

words, his intentions. It was his way of preparing his listeners for what was to come – putting them in a familiar place. But then, having settled them in, he injects a plot twist, a bit of a mystery that quickly unfolds. His story is a familiar one of creation, but one in which the central figure is Jesus. Through careful and poetic words, he explains just who Jesus is, and his purpose.

So, John is preparing us – as is the writer of Genesis – preparing us to hear a fundamental truth.

What is that truth? As we begin the season of Advent, a season of waiting, we are aware that we live in a world that doesn’t want to wait. The commercial world wants gratification, and it wants it NOW! So ‘truth’ can be difficult to discern. We even live in a world where our leaders like to blur the lines of truth, and where truth becomes whatever we want to believe, however wrong it might be.

As for some who take a short-cut past Advent and move directly to Christmas it can be a Christmas without Christ. To many, sadly, it is about a romanticised fairy story, but as Christians we are aware that it isn’t that at all. Rather, it’s the truth that God so loves the world that he gave his only begotten son to save us all. It is the truth that God is light, the true light. God creates the light and shows himself in that

light. God comes into the world through light, and love, to redeem us, to save us from ourselves.

That's the message of Genesis, God, the creator and bringer of light into darkness, the creator of all that is made. That's the message of John, that Jesus, the Word, brings light, knowledge, and hope into our dark world.

With all that is happening in the world this year it can feel as if we are still waiting in the dark. It can feel like a place of concern, of dread, a place of fear where there is little hope. As I write this the Government is announcing how things will develop in the next phase of 'lock-down' and 'tiers' and what we will be allowed to do, or rather not allowed to do, over the Christmas period. This latest period of isolation has been hard for many of us – even harder than the first time, over the summer. The days now are short and the nights dark.

And yet.

And yet, there are signs of light that we begin to cling to. Light that comes in small vials, tiny bottles of liquid containing vaccine. Vessels of hope, ampules of light. There are signs of light in reducing infection rates that we hope will continue.

And yet, we begin to hope that we can see our loved ones for a

while over Christmas. There is light at the end of the tunnel as we meet a friend for a socially distanced walk or a coffee. A glimmer of light that next year we will be able to celebrate together the birthdays, anniversaries, and events that we have not been able to this year.

But Christ has not been absent from our lives and our world over the last few months. The light has not gone out, even if at times it seemed dim. The light is in creation, the light is in the word of God. For me, I have had to search hard for that light at times, and it hasn't always been in the places I used to assume it would always be. It has always been there in my family, with my friends, even when I couldn't see them physically. Sometimes there has been new light as we have struggled together and found new depths of relationship through sharing difficulties. Even in the darkness of bereavement and serious illness there have been small flames burning bright. I have discovered a new light in the fields and woods where I walk and have observed in greater detail the seasons passing. I hope that you have found those new places of light too. Perhaps new light in new hobbies – many people turned to baking or knitting. Perhaps you found new light spiritually by finding a new way to pray or found more time to read. Let's not lose those new sources of light, but rather continue to develop them.

And so, as our thoughts turn towards putting up the Christmas lights, let's take a few moments to think positively about where there have been signs of light for us in the past few months and hopefully where new signs of light are emerging.

As we hear "In the beginning...", let us also remember that all the best stories end with "...and they all lived happily ever-after." Amen.

### **A time of prayer**

Let us remember the Methodist Church throughout our own Circuit in Enfield, but also throughout the United Kingdom and in the wider world. Let us hold in our prayers the many communities of faith that are working and sometimes struggling to find an appropriate way forward during the continuing pandemic.

Let us pray:

Response:

Lord, you call us to respond to their need:

**help us to reach out in love.**

Loving God,  
accept our glad thanksgiving for all you have given us,

and hear now our prayers for your world.

Lord, you call us to respond to their need:

**help us to reach out in love.**

We pray for those for whom there is no celebration -  
the poor and the hungry,  
the homeless and the sick,  
the lonely and the bereaved,  
the oppressed and the persecuted.

Lord, you call us to respond to their need:

**help us to reach out in love.**

We pray for those whose celebration is marred by fear -  
those who are anxious for themselves or a loved one,  
who see no hope in the future,  
or who live under the constant threat of danger.

Lord, you call us to respond to their need:

**help us to reach out in love.**

We pray for all who wrestle with grief -  
those whose lives have been broken by tragedy,  
who live each day in perpetual shadow,  
crushed by the burden of sorrow.

Lord, you call us to respond to their need:

**help us to reach out in love.**

We pray for all who feel isolated -  
those who feel unloved, unwanted,  
who find it hard to show love towards others,  
or whose relationships have been broken  
by cruelty, discord, division.  
Lord, you call us to respond to their need:  
**help us to reach out in love.**

Loving God,  
may your light reach into the darkest places of the world,  
so that there may be hope rather than despair,  
joy rather than sorrow,  
and love rather than hatred.  
Come now to our world through Jesus Christ,  
to bring good news to the poor,  
release to the captives,  
recovery of sight to the blind,  
and let the oppressed go free.  
Lord, you call us to respond to their need:  
**help us to reach out in love.**

In his name we pray. **Amen.**

**The Lord's Prayer:**

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

**Hymn: Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! (STF 186)**

*Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5Y5-fxLDfA>

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;  
tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age to same;  
his holy name--the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;  
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b.1926)

### **A sending out prayer**

We have been called to be renewed  
in the name of the one who is love.  
Even in the darkest night,  
even when there is only one small candle lit,  
your power and love restore us.  
Let your light shine on us through the coming Advent season,  
so that we may be warmed and strengthened  
to light your light all around.

### **A prayer of blessing:**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and  
the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, and  
those that we love, now and for evermore. Amen**

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