

Shortwood Methodist Church

Main Road, Shortwood, Mangotsfield. BS16 9NQ

10:30am Sunday 30 November 2025 (Advent 1)

Lectionary:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalms 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

A lot of our time in advent can get caught up with shopping – presents, writing cards, buying and preparing food. The pressure is on to make “the day” perfect.

Come Christmas day, we might have managed a quick trip to church for the Christmas Eve communion, and then on the day we rush around getting everything ready for dinner, maybe opening some presents, then we squeeze in a quick service at Church before rushing home to enjoy all the festivities of the day.

Within all of this, we rather squeeze Jesus out of Christmas – we run the risk of forgetting why we’re doing what we’re doing. We focus on the commercialism.

Advent is easy – we know when Christmas will be, we have a month to prepare (yet still manage to be running around late on Christmas Eve because we forgot something or put it off). It’s easy to mark, maybe even celebrate, Jesus’ coming because we know when it will happen and it will all be over and done with by Boxing Day in time for the sales and more consumerism!

But today’s readings remind us of another truth – Jesus is coming again – and we won’t know when. There will be no prior warning, but it is going to happen.

I love that Paul in Romans actually makes one of my favourite jokes – we don’t know when the second coming will be, but it’s closer now than it’s ever been before!!! OK, he doesn’t phrase it like that, but that is the gist when he writes “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers” (Romans 13:11).

In the gospel we are reminded that no one knows when Jesus will return. It will be sudden and people will be unprepared.

Just as everyone was going about life as normal when Noah entered the ark and they were all swept away, so it will be on that day.

Jesus gives us the imagery of two people together in daily activity – preparing meal, or working in the field – one will be taken and one will be left behind.

The singer/songwriter Larry Norman phrased it;

A man and wife asleep in bed

She hears a noise and turns her head
He's gone
I wish we'd all been ready

Two men walking up a hill
One disappears and one's left standing still
I wish we'd all been ready

There's no time to change your mind
The Son has come and you've been left behind

Jesus' message is that we should live in expectation – ready at all times for his return. Paul spells this out by telling us to reject anything that is 'works of darkness' – then in typical Pauline fashion goes on to warn about drinking, sex and quarrels! However you might take this, there is something about what we used to call "holiness" as a way of life that prepares us for Jesus.

But all of this focuses on an individualistic view of the second coming.

There is something precious about Isaiah's view. Yes, God's presence will result in judgement – between nations (well we really need that today as you look around and see so much conflict, war and disputes) and between peoples (yep – imagine settling those party political disputes, those differences of opinion that cause so much distress and conflict). We are promised instead a divine peace – swords beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks. Note the materials hitherto used for war are repurposed to provide means of feeding people (as Revelation says, an end to hunger and disease). An end to conflict so thorough that people will no longer even learn how to wage war.

So if this second coming is so perfect, how might we bring it into completeness sooner rather than later?

Dare I say we might do so by living it in advance.

Rather than sitting and praying for an end to war, why not actively work for it? Challenge our leaders, tell them what we want, hold our elected representatives to account.

Peace is not simply an absence of conflict, it is the presence of justice. How then can we, as a justice seeking church, work to see justice done? Again, we need to advocate for fairer treatment of all in our society – this has to include a redistribution of wealth to ensure that the wealthy pay their fair share.

We need to challenge the attempts by the far right to spread a false gospel of Christian Nationalism whereby they pervert the gospel of Jesus to try to emphasise 'Britishness' as the 'Christian' way to be – thus their determination to exclude those 'not of this country' – forgetting that Jesus was a middle Eastern, homeless, brown man – and that St George was Turkish and never visited this country!

In trying to change our world we need to actively involve ourselves in making that change.

In the film 'Bruce Almighty' – where Morgan Freeman as God temporarily 'lends' his powers to Jim Carey's character Bruce – there is a point where there is a need for more

blood to be donated, and Bruce challenges people to 'be the miracle'. If you want there to be more blood available, start by donating some yourself. If you want to see peace then be a person of peace, if you want to see fairness, then be fair yourself.

While advent is our time to 'prepare' for Christmas, we need to live as if Christmas is here now... and that does not mean that we put everything on hold while we live our time of excess...

It's Christmas – by Gordon Bailey

Even though so many die of curable disease;
Even though there's little hope for homeless refugees;
Even though death stalks and strikes among the Vietnamese
Drape the tinsel, hang the holly, decorate the trees...
IT'S CHRISTMAS

Even though by New Year's Eve the starving might have died;
Even though the lonely may have thoughts of suicide;
Even though from want, or war, a million children hide;
Self-indulgence, gluttony, can both be justified...
IT'S CHRISTMAS

Even though society's engaged in senseless wars;
Even though communities are slaughtered without cause;
Even though humanity's ignoring human laws;
Think of crackers, cakes and custard, cards and Santa Claus...
IT'S CHRISTMAS

Even though I don't believe in greed or selfishness;
Even though I hate to see my fellows in distress;
Even though I normally might think my world a mess!
As usual these next few days, I'll think a little less...
IT'S CHRISTMAS

Loving Lord – as we long for your light, while we live in darkness, remind us that you are always with us and that you live your gospel through us.

AMEN