

## **Advent Sunday 2019 – 8am**

It is the count- down to Christmas – and the beginning of the Church Year

Advent is a time of waiting, preparing and lighting a candle each week to remember parts of God's story of love for us – of salvation – that came to us and entered our lives on earth with the birth of Jesus – the incarnation.

Each candle remembers the promise of hope peace joy and love and each week we see how the story has unfolded through the patriarchs – the early people – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses – the prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah – Ezekiel – and others – bearers of God's words – calling the people to account and calling them to turn back – and to take hope that someone was coming to show them the way – to be a light to show everyone the way – and we look to

John the Baptist who was the voice in the wilderness, calls everyone to get ready for the coming of the Holy One – and Mary the mother of Jesus – the first disciple

Then the final candle of Christmas day – the birth of Jesus – the incarnation of God – meeting us on earth in the person of Jesus – fully human and fully divine...

This Advent Sunday is inviting us to think about the signs of the coming of God's kingdom – the peaceable and loving kingdom

Matthew will be our Gospel writer and teacher for this coming year as we explore the Jesus that Matthew proclaimed to his people.

A little bit of background:

Matthew was a devout Jew who wanted to bring his Jewish community along with him to follow Jesus the Messiah – he didn't want to sever his ties – but to embrace Jesus and what we know as Christianity within it – but some weren't having any of it.

Matthew writes the gospel in five chunks of Jesus' teaching – just like Moses wrote in the five books of Jewish Scriptures – the Pentateuch.

This week's passage is from the fifth block (24.1–25.46),

At the end of the teachings Matthew says: 'When Jesus had finished saying all these things' (26.1), echoing the conclusion of the Pentateuch, 'When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel' (Deuteronomy 31.1; 32.45).

**THE READING TODAY IS ABOUT THE SUDDENESS OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN**

The angels are not forewarned when they will gather the Son of Man's elect (24.30-31).

The striking pairs of images – male and female, one taken and another left – suggest these separations are based on choices already made. We are asked to think about choices...

So, Jesus' fifth discourse in Matthew continues to urge his followers to make the choice for life, obeying all that he has taught them (28.20) and remaining ready to be received at his coming.

Above all they must recognise 'the sign of the Son of Man', who set his mind on 'divine things', losing his life to find it. His is the final judgement that really matters (see also 16.21-28).

At the end of this fifth discourse, Jesus tells his disciples that after two days it will be Passover, when the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified (26.1-2). So, this fifth block of teaching sets the imminent death and resurrection of Jesus in the great context. The writers of the New Testament expected Jesus to return in their lifetime, but in this message, Jesus talks of the past, the present and the future.

This can help us think about how we can learn from the past and our choices; and live hopefully in the present – making wiser choices than before...

And how we can live securely – trusting in the not knowing – but knowing and trusting it will be so – Jesus will return – and is returning with every act of good will and every heart that turns to him to live out god's love and all that it means....

WE might have made choices in the past – but not always the best ones perhaps – we tend to select things we want to remember. It is good to be comforted and inspired by happy times and good outcomes of good choices.

But what about times that we don't want to remember, or mistakes we'd rather forget – do we share pictures of those? Probably not! And also things we'd rather forget that were not our making even...

We are more likely to hide those memories away. Yet the difficult and bad times can be a valuable part of the bigger picture of our lives – where we turn to faith – faith in a comforting and hopeful God because there is nothing else that can explain and comfort.

REMEMBER THAT GOD IS WITH US EVEN WHEN WORLDLY THINGS CRASH – AND TO CLING ON TO THE HOPE AND PROMISE OF A NEVER-ENDING SPIRITUAL LIFE - we can live with hope and move on.

So let's step into this Advent and make an active choice to have a heart for Christmas prep that holds Jesus at the centre and spiritualise all that we do in the tinsel and turkey fun of Christmas – knowing what it isn't and enjoying what all that it is...

So we journey on....

Amen