The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
29 November 2026
Advent Sunday



Welcome and introduction.

As we prepare to celebrate anew the coming of God's kingdom, we recognise again the mystery of God's loving purpose for us – how that when we were far off, he met us in his Son and brought us home; how he humbled himself to take our human nature, that we might share his divine glory.

Let us then so celebrate this coming that our lives may be charged with his life; that we may bear witness to his glory and so bring light to those who sit in darkness. So first we pray for those among whom the Christ was born: the poor and helpless, the aged and young children; the cold, the hungry and the homeless; the victims of poverty, injustice and oppression, the sick and those who mourn, the lonely and the unloved; those in despair or in the shadow of death.

As we prepare to hear again the message of peace on earth and goodwill among all his people, we pray for the leaders of the nations, that all may be inspired to work together for the establishment of justice, freedom and peace the world over.

And that we may bear true witness to this hope in a divided world, we pray for the peace and unity of Christ's Body, the Church universal, that the whole earth may live to praise his name.

Finally, as we rejoice with the saints in heaven and on earth, we remember all who have gone before us with the sign of faith, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we offer up our prayers for the coming of his kingdom, in the words he himself has taught us, saying:

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 forever. Amen.

Invitation to Confession

When the Lord comes,
he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness,
and will disclose the purposes of the heart.
Therefore in the light of Christ let us confess our sins.

Confession

God, through Jesus Christ,
will judge the secret thoughts of all:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'
will enter the kingdom of heaven:
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Let anyone who has an ear
listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Almighty God,
Who forgives all who truly repent,
Have mercy upon you,
Pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
Confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
And keep you in life eternal
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Liturgy of the Word

First reading: Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed.
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity for ever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his word.

Second reading: Mark 13:24-37

Jesus said: 'In those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.
Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.
'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.
So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Thanks be to God for the gift of his Holy Word.

A Reflection from Daniel

God has a face… but what is a face. Are eyes a face? What about a mouth? We can draw a smiley face without a nose, and we all know it is a face. So, can a person have a face without a nose? What about if someone has one eye… or three eyes. Can you have a face with more parts than necessary or fewer?
And how do we know it is a face. Each part on its own isn't enough, but something happens when they all come together. We have a good English word for this, we call it features. A face is both the parts that make it up and something more than the sum of its parts.

Hewbrew when talking about God's face is similar. It isn't saying face, it is saying features: Panim (פָּנִים). So, when people ask to see God's face, they are asking for him to show them parts of who he is… and when they see these parts together, they give the idea of something more.

At the start of Advent, our passage from Isaiah reminds us of people who may or may not wish to seek God's face, his features; those parts of him that come together to tell us something about what God is like.

We are told some things about God. He is the only one who has been seen, and the only one known to have directly intervened on behalf of his people. We also know that he does not like certain behaviours from his people. These cause anger, but he is also patient to form them and shape their features too.

When we begin to look at God, we begin to look like God… this is why idol worship was such a big deal in the Bible. They knew that you begin to look like what you spend your time worshipping. You begin to reflect that which you think about, dwell on, spend your resources towards. Now days, we might not spend too much time in idol worship, but we don't half get bombarded by adverts, TV, magazines and social media. The little things all add up. Just like a mouth and two eyes magically becomes a face, sooner or later, the algorithm has led us down a rabbit hole and there is a whole world presented to us for us to absorb. If this happens enough, then it can lead to something called "total model collapse", where the algorithm is only looking at itself… the digital equivalent of staring at your own belly button – and in todays modern age, we get taken along for the ride.

Isaiah is worried about similar. He says no one is looking for God. No one is striving after him. Now, it is important to remember that all generalisations are false, and he may be applying poetic license, but it can often feel like that. Yet, Advent, inevitably followed by Christmas, is a fantastic opportunity for us to turn back and try to discover God's features, and in turn have our own selves shaped by him. This Advent, before worrying about the state of the world, and how everyone else is doing their Christmas, let's remind ourselves to seek God's features, and so discover something magical that appears like a face when we put all of those parts together.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.
We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.
We believe in one God;
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers with Astrid

Almighty God grant us the grace to hope in you with unwavering trust. As we begin this season of Advent, may our hearts be filled with the hope that comes from knowing your promises are true.
We look towards the Christmas celebration of your coming among us as a helpless baby and the promised light of the world, and we look in awe and wonder towards your promise that you will come again.

Lord, in our Advent hope we pray for needs of the world.

As we hear so much of wars and threats of wars around the world, let us pray for those leaders of nations, whose words and decisions reach beyond their national boundaries. Lead them to speak and act with honour and courage, coupled with wisdom and care.
Lord, we hold before you countries where repressive regimes, war and greed bring so much misery – for the people of Ukraine, Russia, Sudan, Israel, Palestine and all that troubled area of the Middle East. Lord, bring peace and hope and better times to these and other areas of suffering that seldom reach our news reports.

For our own country, let us pray for political leaders, councillors and Members of Parliament of all parties, for wisdom in the face of so many problems in national and international affairs.

Lord, we pray for our own communities, our villages, for friends and neighbours, those with their own anxieties about their families or their health, people in hospital or waiting for treatment, the lonely, those adjusting to the loss of someone dear. We hold before you those among us whose needs we know and those we may not know, though none are unknown to you, confident that your loving arms are wide enough to embrace us all.
Trusting in your promises we bring our prayers to you.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen

The Advent Prose

Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.

Turn your fierce anger from us, O Lord,
and remember not our sins for ever.
Your holy cities have become a desert,
Zion a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation;
our holy and beautiful house,
where our ancestors praised you.
Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.

We have sinned and become like one who is unclean;
we have all withered like a leaf,
and our iniquities like the wind have swept us away.
You have hidden your face from us,
and abandoned us to our iniquities.
Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.
You are my witnesses, says the Lord,
and my servant whom I have chosen,
that you may know me and believe me.
I myself am the Lord, and none but I can deliver;
what my hand holds, none can snatch away.
Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.

Comfort my people, comfort them;
my salvation shall not be delayed.
I have swept your offences away like a cloud;
fear not, for I will save you.
I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your redeemer.
Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.

Closing prayer

We pray now that the Spirit of God
will empower, equip, and embolden us
to be God's great invitation,
just as we are invited to draw near to Christ
in this season of waiting, may we invite others
to know that goodness of God
which we have received. **Amen.**

Advent Acclamation

With love and compassion: **Come, Lord Jesus.**
With judgement and mercy: **Come, Lord Jesus.**
In power and glory: **Come, Lord Jesus.**
In wisdom and truth: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Blessing

May God the Father, judge all-merciful,
make us worthy of a place in his kingdom. **Amen.**
May God the Son, coming among us in power,
reveal in our midst the promise of his glory. **Amen.**
May God the Holy Spirit make us steadfast in faith,
joyful in hope and constant in love. **Amen.**
And the blessing of God Almighty,
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Be upon you now and remain with you always. **Amen.**