# November 8th 2026

# 3rd Sunday before Advent / Remembrance Day

# 10.30am Holy Communion at Langham

*1 Thessalonians 4.13-e, Matthew 25.1-13*

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

We are in the season of the church's year coming up to Advent when the readings that we have set before us take up an apocalyptic and rather uncomfortable theme, with warnings about the "Day of the Lord", the second coming of Jesus, judgement and so on. But in general we don't concentrate on them overmuch – lots of other things are happening – Remembrance Day, the frantic lead up to Christmas and so on – and we don't pause to consider what is after all quite an important part of the Christian message. In the creed that we use very week we say

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,*
*and his kingdom will have no end.*

And the Church of England doesn't help. Next Sunday has been designated as "Safeguarding Sunday" with its own readings, and, important as safeguarding is, it is yet another distraction from the developing pre-advent theme. So today, I want to give a very brief overview of the readings that we will have over the next three weeks, and point out what I think are some major points that we can perhaps latch onto in the business of the coming season.

The Old Testament readings we will see are prophetic warnings about the coming of the "Day of the Lord". Next week for example we have a bit of Zephaniah 1. I remember Shakeel reading this out with great relish from the pulpit three years ago.

*The great day of the Lord is near—*
*near and coming quickly.*
*The cry on the day of the Lord is bitter;*
*the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.*
*That day will be a day of wrath—*
*a day of distress and anguish,*
*a day of trouble and ruin,*
*a day of darkness and gloom,*
*a day of clouds and blackness—*
*a day of trumpet and battle cry*

*against the fortified cities*
*and against the corner towers.*

To which he added "Welcome to church!". A terrifying prospect perhaps, but for all its harshness, it is a prophecy of good news, that all things evil will be swept away in the coming of the Lord and good will prevail. When you hear such rather dreadful words read over the next few weeks, hold onto that truth.

Our New Testament readings take a similar futuristic view over the next three weeks – from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Today we have his words about those who have died, a subject that was clearly of concern to the church in Thessalonica. He reassures them that they are safe with God, and will be raised when Jesus comes in his glory, to meet those who are still living. And that of course is relevant to Remembrance Day, that the grieving should know their loved ones are safe in God's hands. He ends with

*Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

Again this reading, in all its dramatic form, is good news. In next week's reading, Paul continues by talking about Jesus coming suddenly, as a thief in the night, and he writes

*But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.*

A warning to be ready, to be prepared, to live each day with the possibility of the coming of Jesus.

*For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.*

And again he ends with

*Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.*

For all its scariness, the coming of Jesus is good news, something to be welcomed.

Our gospel readings up until advent follow the same theme. They are three enigmatic parables, placed by Matthew towards the end of his gospel just before the passion, and speak again of the day of the Lord. Today's reading is that of the wise and the foolish bridesmaids, the former being prepared for the coming of the bridegroom, with their lamps filled with oil, and the latter being unprepared. And it comes with a warning that there will be a separation, a judgement of some sort. It thus relates to what we find in the Old Testament readings, and in the epistles. Next week we have the parable of the talents – how a master gave money to his servants, that some used to make more money in varying quantities, but that one simply hid and did nothing with. Again it ends on a note of judgement, of separation. The same is true of the last of the three parables in the week before advent- that if the sheep and the goats, where the Son of Man, Jesus, sits in

judgement and the sheep are commended for how they have spent their lives, and the goats condemned. These are difficult parables, that speak of judgement, but again they are in essence good news, that speak of the triumph of good over evil. Indeed the metaphor of the wedding feast in today's reading is one of joy and celebration.

So there are serious themes in the reading for the coming weeks to look out for – that speak of life after death, of resurrection, of judgement of an eternity with God. But we need to remember that they are all, in one way or another, readings in picture form, in poetry and metaphor, and literal interpretation is probably dangerous. How and when "Christ will come again" is unknown and unknowable. But they serve as warnings to live our lives as God would wish – and we have all the guidelines for that I the commandments, and in the teaching of Jesus and his apostles. To live each day as if it were our last, to be prepared for the coming again of Jesus. And for all the stark warnings about judgement we need to remember that God is a God of mercy too, who understands our frailty, who loved us enough to die for us, and his judgements will be merciful.

*There's a wideness in God's mercy*
*like the wideness of the sea;*
*there's a kindness in His justice*
*which is more than liberty.*

But in considering these rather sombre themes, we return to today's other consideration – that of Remembrance. Those whom we have remembered this morning have already experienced their own apocalypse. To quote W B Yeats, in their world

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*
*Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world..*

They faced that world and gave their lives on a stand against that anarchy and chaos, and now await, in the sleep of death, the resurrection from the dead, the fulfilment of all the prophecies, the coming again of Jesus, when the living and the dead will be reunited. We end with the words of hope and of comfort of John of Patmos

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,*
*'See, the home of God is among mortals.*
*He will dwell with them;*
*they will be his peoples,*
*and God himself will be with them;*
*4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes.*
*Death will be no more;*
*mourning and crying and pain will be no more,*
*for the first things have passed away.'*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen