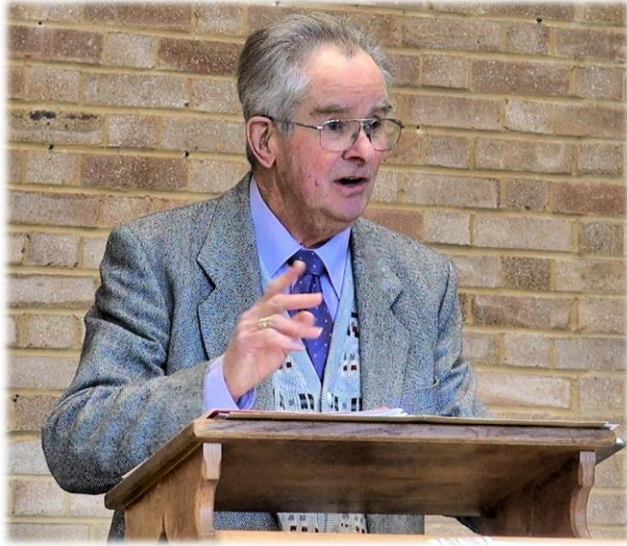


Morning Service Sunday 30th November – led by Pastor Peter Gooch



Moving to light the first Advent Candle, Peter gave us his own description of the meaning of the candles. The first candle represented the patriarchs. The second stood for the prophets. The third candle symbolised John the Baptist, the fourth for Mary, and the fifth on Christmas Day represented Jesus, the light of the world.

Lighting the first candle took us to God's Promises, through the Patriarchs, about the Messiah who was to come: Abraham was promised that through his descendants, all the world would be blessed. God's promises were kept, and Jesus came through Abraham's line. Isaac was told not to fear, for

God would be with him—a promise extended to all of God's people. Moses looked forward to the one whom God would raise up as a leader, fulfilled in Jesus born in Bethlehem. King David was assured that a king from his line would reign forever, a promise realised in Christ.

Peter had been reading the autobiography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a notable Baptist preacher born in 1834 who'd been pastor of New Park Street Chapel in Southwark from before the age of 20 and served for 38 years until his death in 1892. At just 18 or 19, he'd preached "Jesus Saves from Sin" (sermon 365). The sermon centred on Matthew 1:21: "You will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Spurgeon had divided his message into three parts:

The Glorious Name: "You will name him Jesus"—meaning Redeemer, Saviour, because he would save his people from their sins. Two Old Testament figures with similar names, Joshua son of Nun and Joshua son of Jehozadak, had foreshadowed Christ. Yet, what they did paled in comparison to what Jesus, the Son of God, had accomplished.

The Wondrous Salvation: "He will save his people from their sins." Titus 2 declared that God's grace brought salvation to all people, though few accepted it. Jesus himself had taught about the narrow gate leading to everlasting life with Christ in heaven - a way that was compressed and hard and found by only a few.

The Blessed People: "His people." Spurgeon noted that Christ's people were not always obvious—they came from all nations, ranks, and backgrounds. The angels would gather these chosen ones from all corners of the earth, as described in Matthew 24. John 1:12 said that those who received Jesus became children of God, possessing both a physical and spiritual birth. Spurgeon had emphasised that not everyone was included; as with Noah's Ark, some would be left behind. Jesus had urged us to be prepared for His return, which would come suddenly and without warning - a definite future happening, and not a maybe. The choices we made in life would determine our eternal destiny.

Spurgeon had described the distinguishing characteristics of those whom the angels would gather:

A Sincere Desire for Heaven: Christians eagerly awaited the return of Christ, their Saviour, as Paul had written in Philippians. We were reminded not to be so attached to this life that we would regret Christ's coming. Choosing the narrow way was essential.

A Devout Seeking for God: Jesus had instructed us to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. We should fill our lives with God's desires, making Him our priority over all other ambitions and possessions, any of which could quickly push God out of first place. Seeking after God and His ways and truth should become the most desirable aspect of our lives. The psalmist had described longing for God as a deer longs for water—our lives depended on closeness to God.

A Diligent Pursuit of Salvation: Like a train ready at the station, the Gospel invited all aboard—rich and poor alike. Salvation required repentance and faith in Jesus; everyone needed salvation to be restored to God. Hebrews 2 warned against neglecting such a great salvation, confirmed by Jesus' miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

A Great Hatred of Sin: Sin was fundamentally a wrong relationship with God, expressed through wrongful attitudes and actions. Sin was a barrier between a person and God and only God could remove sin's penalty and power. Paul, in 1 Timothy, affirmed that Christ had come to save sinners—no one was beyond his reach. James 4 called us to submit to God, resist



the devil, and purify our hearts, while Romans 8:1 assured believers that there was no condemnation, no guilty verdict, and no punishment for those people who were in Christ Jesus.

A sense of Personal Nothingness: Jesus was our Redeemer, Saviour, Lord, and friend—the one in whom we could put our complete trust.

A Humble Reliance upon Jesus: Galatians 2:20 expressed dependence on Christ, who lived within those who trusted Him. Hymns such as "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" and "In Christ Alone" beautifully summarised these themes: our need for Jesus, His saving power, and the assurance and hope we could find in Him.

As we recalled Christ's birth in Bethlehem—where there was no room for Him—we should each ask, "Is there room in *my* heart for Christ? "

And it was a joy to have Jenny Blumsen back in church looking well recovered from her time in hospital.

