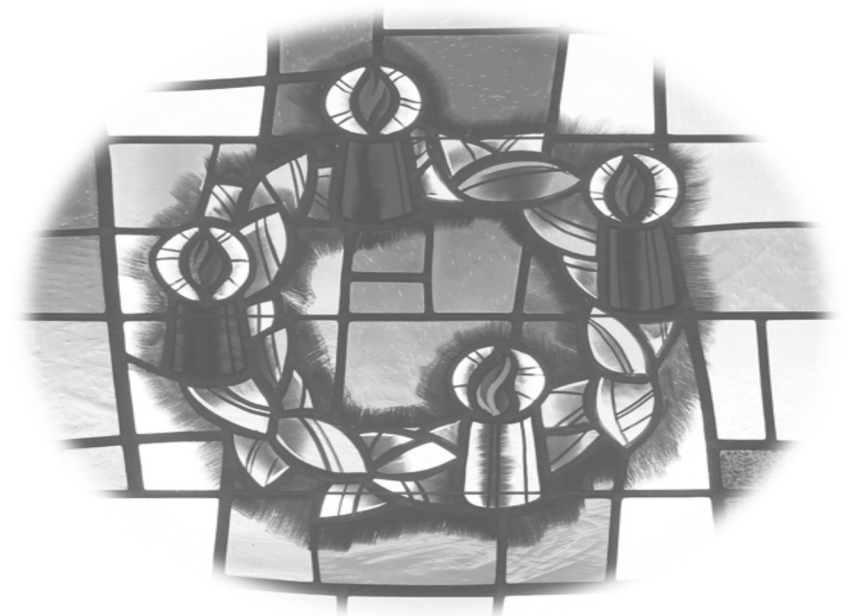


**Readings, Prayers, and Meditations for
ADVENT 2021**

“... a time of waiting...”



Introduction:

“In the time before Christmas, Advent is a period of preparation as we repent and wait in hope for the coming return of Christ.

Advent is a time of waiting in contemplation for the presence of Christ within us; we are called to hear Christ, to live Christ for others. We, too, are invited to live that same spirit of poverty, of humility and joy.”

*from Praise in all our Days
Taizé Community*

A time of waiting ...

So what then of this birth?

As Advent comes once more.

We pause to think,

To watch and pray.

Reflect upon the nature of the child we celebrate.

For those who seek, this is a time of waiting,

Preparation

Listening for the voice of God

Which speaks within the silence.

For with the coming of the Christ Child

We must undergo a new birth

Which means a turning, an acknowledging,

A recognition of the hand of the Divine,

Shaping our lives.

For we who come to Him

Must offer up ourselves in all humility,

Inviting Him to dwell within our hearts.

Transforming all the dross therein to gold.

Helping us to grow a little more like Him,

And in the growing, find fulfilment, holy rest.

The love for which we yearn deep in our hearts –

The peace so needed by our broken world,

Find embodied here within a crib.

As God, Lord of all being, enters our world anew

And dwells with us – the Incarnate Word.

Christmas Meditation:

And is it true, and is it true

This most tremendous tale of all

Seen in a stained glass windows hue

A baby in an oxen stall?

The maker of the stars and sea

Became a child on earth for me.

And is it true? For if it is

No loving fingers tying strings

Around those tissueed fripperies

The sweet and silly Christmas things

Bath salts and inexpensive scent

And hideous ties, so kindly meant.

No love that in a family dwells

No carolling in frosty air,

Nor all the steeple shaking bells

Can with this single truth compare

That God was man in Palestine

And lives today in bread and wine.

John Betjeman

Saturday 25 December

CHRISTMAS DAY

Isaiah 9: 6

For unto us a child is born – unto us a Son is given.

The Collect:

Almighty God,
you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin;
grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit,
through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen

Hymn:

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him
Born, the King of angels:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Advent Calendar

He will come like last leaf's fall
one night, when the November wind
has flayed the trees to bone and earth
wakes choking on the mould.
the soft shrouds, folding.

He will come like frost
one morning when the shrinking earth
opens on mist to find itself
arrested in the net
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark
one evening when the bursting red
December sun draws up the sheet
and penny-masks its eye to yield
the star-snow fields of sky.

He will come like crying in the night
Will come, like blood, like breaking
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.

Rowan Williams

28 November ADVENT SUNDAY

The Collect for Advent:

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.

Hymn:

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us;
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver;
born a child and yet a king;
born to reign in us for ever;
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

Charles Wesley, 3 NEH

Friday 24 December Christmas Eve

St Luke 2: 15

Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass which the Lord has made known to us.

Have you been working very hard to get ready for Christmas? Have family responsibilities and commercial demands made you feel pressurised and worried? Now is the time to stop and remind ourselves of God's message to the shepherds. They were in the fields doing their normal job, when the glory of the Lord burst over them. The angel calmed their fears and gave them the "good news of great joy" – the birth of Christ the Saviour. When they had seen Jesus they "spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed."

Prayer:

Dear Lord,
help us to be heralds of your word this Christmas,
focused on the good news of great joy that will be for all people.
Let us, like the shepherds, glorify and praise God
for all we have heard and seen. Amen.

Wednesday 22 December

St John 1: 10

*He was in the world that had its being through Him,
and the world did not know Him.* (Jerusalem Bible)

John's gospel tells us that Jesus was part of the divine Godhead since the beginning of time, and certainly before this world was created. His own creation failed to recognise or understand his message to them AND THAT IS STILL HAPPENING TODAY. We constantly fail to see Christ in each other and in the world – we constantly fail to live up to our Christian values – we are in constant need of God's loving forgiveness.

Prayer:

Dear God, please forgive my constant failings, my constant moaning and groaning. Help me to be quiet within and to listen to your still small voice – that voice which calms the stormy waters and brings peace to our hearts. Amen.

Thursday 23 December

St John 1: 13

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us – full of grace and truth

In this most famous of Christmas verses, God simply "gives us his Word". To give one's word is to make a promise. To be as good as one's word is to be faithful in keeping a promise – as God is.

When God's Word becomes flesh, God is acting on his promise of redemption, that he may have the last word. The grace and truth of God incarnate is revealed among us and we have seen his glory.

God's Word – then as now – is active in our world.

Hymn:

Sacred infant, all divine
What a tender love was thine,
Thus to come from highest bliss
Down to such a world as this.

Monday 29 November

Hosea 6: 3

Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord – his going forth is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the Spring rains that water the earth.

We may have been on our Christian journey for many years or we may be making the first tentative steps this Advent to know more about the love of the Lord Jesus. What is important is that our desire should always be to know the Lord more deeply.

Just as light and rain are given to allow the earth to flourish, so the Lord gave us everything we need to enable us to have a relationship with Him. He gave Himself.

Prayer:

May I see Thee more clearly,
love Thee more dearly,
and follow Thee more nearly,
day by day. Amen.

Tuesday 30 November

Psalm 106: 6

*Both we and our fathers have sinned.
We have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.*

How wonderful it is that God forgives us each time that we sin. But this is no excuse to go gaily on sinning time after time. In all honesty none of us can claim to be free from sin in our lives, but what a goal to aim for. Pure and sinless, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Prayer:

From father to son, mother to daughter, we inherit certain traits. In our family life help us to live by good and holy standards that our parents and families can see holiness in our lives. Of God, you sent your Son to earth to live sinless and holy amongst people. Help us to live our lives by your example. Amen.

Wednesday 1 December

Isaiah 33: 2

*O Lord be gracious to us; we wait for thee;
be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble.*

How reassuring and comforting this verse is, applying as it does so meaningfully to both our individual lives and the world in general.

Prayer:

Father, we place into your hands:

- ◆ the things that we can't do;
- ◆ the times that we've been through;
- ◆ the way that we should go;

For we know we always can trust you. Amen

Thursday 2 December

Isaiah 35: 4

*Behold your God will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God, he will come and save you.*

These words of Isaiah seem to be answering those prayers of yesterday's reading. Advent is a time of waiting – a time of hope and longing for God; a time when we cry out to Him to forgive us, help us and save us. Here we are being assured that God will indeed come to right all that is wrong in us, and in the world; that He will save us all by turning the old order upside-down.

Prayer:

Dear Lord,
as we prepare to meet you once again in the Christ-child,
help us to put right all that is wrong in our lives by turning to you,
and following your loving example. Amen.

Monday 20 December

Isaiah 9: 2

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
Those who dwell in the land of deep darkness
on them has the light shined.*

Did Isaiah get this prophecy wrong or were the people he talks about not the Jews at all? Perhaps Isaiah was looking even further into the future and talking about the gentiles as the people walking in darkness – they would know nothing of God at all. Maybe the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled at all. The previous verse talks about honour spreading eastward through the Mediterranean to beyond the Jordan, and subsequent verses tell of victories over invading armies. Should we still be seriously studying Isaiah and looking for the signs he is giving us?

Prayer:

O Lord, we all walk in darkness for so much of the time.
We pray that we too will see a great light.
Help us, as we read the scriptures, to look for all the signs
and prophecies which are there to guide and help us. Amen

Tuesday 21 December

St John 1: 9

The true light that lightens everyone was coming into the world.

How can it be that **one** person, throughout the world's history, could be the "true light"? Many have questioned, doubted, discarded and denied this, through thought, discussion, reason. **Why** should we believe this? Firstly, we have the benefit of being able to look **back** through time and see the transforming effect Jesus has had on so many people's lives – from his days of teaching amongst his own people, and from the testimony of people around the world since. And secondly, Jesus is **still** changing people's lives **today**. And this is our hope – when we cross from the edge of doubt to a personal experience of Jesus, he does indeed lighten our lives and we do not have to walk in darkness.
Take the step of faith... and see!

A MEDITATION: The Spotlight

A spotlight shone onto the earth
Illuminating the darkness,
Revealing crevices and corners, no-one had ever seen before.
Combing the world in search of cobwebs
Zooming in on specks of dust
But the people were angry,
Angry and frightened.
“Give us back our darkness”, they said
“In the darkness we didn’t see the dust, we want no light.
So they destroyed that spotlight.
Snuffed it out as one would a candle.
Darkness once more.

But it was darkness with a difference.
For everywhere, on the edge of the world
Appeared lights, tiny lights.
Miniature copies of the spotlight and nearly as strong.
But each shedding tiny beams of light on the dust.
They began to multiply slowly
Then faster and faster
They were the spotlight’s hope
And the spotlight was their reason for existence
And they waited for the light.

And the light looked down upon the globe
And saw the tiny specks of light.
Some were flickering
Some were dim.
Some were bright as the North Star.
And in between, there was darkness.

And the Light prepared to shatter the darkness
FOR EVER.

Friday 3 December

St Matthew 3: 2

Repent – for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ is referring to Advent – Jesus’ birth, and we should be prepared. Isaiah includes many prophecies which are relevant to the present day. Sometimes ‘the kingdom of heaven being near’ sounds like an empty phrase in today’s world. However, we must never underestimate God – ‘He is working his purpose out’.

Prayer:

‘Lo, the Lamb, so long expected
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all to be forgiven;’

from 24 AM

Saturday 4 December

Jeremiah 33: 14 & 16

Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise that I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will cause a righteous branch to spring forth from David.

Advent is a time of promises made and fulfilled to every person for whom the dark days of winter are brightened by the Holy Birth in Bethlehem. I always feel strengthened and blessed by the angels’ Advent hymns and messages that tell of glorious days to come for all mankind.

5 December

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Collect:

O lord, raise up, we pray,
your power and come among us,
and with great might succour us,
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us,
your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us,
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever.
Amen

Hymn:

The Lord will come and not be slow,
his footsteps cannot err;
before him righteousness shall go,
his royal harbinger.

Truth from the earth, like to a flower,
shall bud and blossom then;
and justice, from her heavenly bower,
look down on mortal men.

The nations all whom thou hast made
shall come, and all shall frame
to bow them low before thee, Lord,
and glorify thy name.

John Milton, 15 NEH

19 December

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Collect:

God, our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your son;
grant that as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

Hymn:

Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long:
let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release
in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.

He come, the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace
to bless the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
thy welcome shall proclaim.
And heaven's eternal arches ring
with thy beloved name.

Philip Doddridge, 6 NEH

Saturday 18 December

St Matthew 1: 20–21

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife. For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus – for he will save his people from their sins.”

How does God reveal Himself to His people? Largely through dreams – visions in the night recorded many times throughout the Old and New Testament – and through “day dreams” such as Martin Luther King’s *I have a dream*.

Let us pray that we too may be following St Paul’s advice in Philippians 4: 8:

*“Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, **think on these things**”*

- that we too may be receptive to God’s messages revealed so often through the dictates of our own conscience.

Monday 6 December

St Mark 13: 35

Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house will come ... lest he come suddenly and find you waiting. Therefore I say to you all – WATCH.

Jesus does not give the time of his triumphant return – his Second Coming. Our response should be constant readiness – we must not be found asleep on duty! No-one can live on constant red alert, but while life consists mainly of the ordinary and the humdrum, and whilst the round of work and leisure, waiting and sleeping must go on, we are wise to remember that wherever in that cycle we may be, our stewardship should always be worthy of God’s scrutiny.

“Call to each waking band
Watch, Christians, watch.
Clear is our Lord’s command
Watch, Christians, watch.
Be you as those who wait
Always at the Master’s gate
E’en tho’ he tarry late.
Watch, Christians, watch.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to live day by day as citizens of heaven, alert to your voice and ready for your coming. Amen.

Tuesday 7 December

Psalms 17: 16

*And I, in righteousness, I shall see your face when I awake.
I shall be satisfied with seeing your likeness.*

The word “awake” refers to resurrection. David is reminding us that we shouldn’t lose sight of our long-term goal – that one day we will see God face to face. I hope that in our busyness preparing for Christmas, we don’t lose sight of this. I find it a very comforting thought, that as Christians we will see each other again – and that goes for seeing the characters in the Bible too!

Wednesday 8 December

Romans 13: 11–12

(Besides this) You know what hour it is. How it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand.

We may be physically awake, but are we spiritually awake? Advent is a time to get spiritually fit. We have a 4-week training programme. Time to read, to ponder, to pray and to prepare, so that on Christmas Day we are fully fit to receive the Christ Child afresh into our hearts.

*Improve thy talent with due care
For the great day thyself prepare.*

Thursday 9 December

Psalms 130: 5–7

*I wait for the Lord. My soul waits and in his word I hope.
My soul waits for the Lord.
More than the watchman for the morning –
more than the watchman for the morning.*

God, so much of faith is waiting
Like a pregnant woman waiting in hope.
Like people under siege, holding out till relief comes.
Like the soul lost in the darkness
Unable to see even a glimmer of light,
Yet stumbling through the night because somewhere,
Out ahead, day will surely break.
God be with us in our waiting.

from an Iona Prayer Book.

Thursday 16 December

Isaiah 7: 14

*Therefore the Lord will give you a sign.
Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son,
and shall call his name, Emmanuel – God with us.*

What a lovely phrase “Immaculate Conception” is. As a poetry lover I realise how much I need to remember words and names. Especially people’s names. How friendly and loving it is to honour them thus, and how rewarding to them.

Prayer:

Dear God,
Help us to remember names, as you know all of us by name.
To remember you are always with us in mind, body and spirit.
Amen.

Friday 17 December

St Luke 1: 48–49

*Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. For he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he who is mighty hath done great things and Holy is his name.”*

Mary is talking to Elizabeth, who was a relative and was also pregnant (with John the Baptist). It was not a blessing for Mary to be pregnant. She was only engaged, not married, and her fiancé, Joseph, knew he wasn’t the father. A pregnancy in this situation would bring divorce, scandal and public disgrace. Rather, the blessing was that she was carrying God’s child – the Saviour and Lord. It was for this that she praised God.

Prayer:

Dear Father, in our own difficult times,
help us to recognise your blessings and praise you. Amen.

Wednesday 15 December

Isaiah 11: 1–2

A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse, and a branch grows out of his roots. And the spirit of the Lord shall be upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might. The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

In the middle of December when many trees are completely bare, it might not be easy to identify with this image of a new shoot springing up, bursting with life. Yet this is the image Isaiah is using; one of new life, new birth and new hope. To suggest that such a hope was to come from the stock of Jesse was quite an optimistic assertion! But unlike kings before him, the spirit of the Lord will be the guiding factor in the life of this new king; he will be wise and discerning, understanding and powerful, all in the strength of the spirit.

Looking at Jesus Christ, we can see how this prophecy was perfectly fulfilled in him. God brings hope out of an apparently hopeless situation and new life and inspiration where there had been disappointment and disillusion. These are common ailments in our own time but we are not without hope. The same God who orchestrated hope out of hopelessness in sending Jesus, offers new life to us today, both for ourselves and for our neighbour.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
we thank you that your nature is to bring light into the darkness,
hope out of despair and new life always.
We offer to you any areas of our lives
which are difficult to bear
and about which we feel disappointed or disillusioned,
asking that you might fill us with new hope by your spirit.
Please make us agents of your transforming hope
in our community. Amen.

Friday 10 December

Isaiah 26: 9

My soul yearns for thee in the night. My spirit within me earnestly seeks thee. For when thy judgements are in the earth – the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

O Lord, so often when we can't sleep our minds turn in turmoil of all the jobs undone, all the uncertainties we face. As the clock ticks through the night we worry on earthly things, as we toss and turn. We are restless and can't feel at peace.

If only we remembered to cry out to you and that you would hold us surrounded in your love and care. On the dark black nights when there is no full moon and no light within us, help us to see you as the light shining in hope at the end of the tunnel.

Prayer:

Lord, when we cry unto thee, hear us. Amen.

Saturday 11 December

James 5: 7–8

Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit until it receives the early and late rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

As the garden is put to bed; cutting back all those shrubs and bushes that have given us so much joy in the warm summer months, we look towards the Spring when new life in the garden begins again. We realise winter is needed to give the fields and gardens time to rest and rejuvenate.

Let us be like those who put their fields and gardens to rest. May we prepare ourselves for the glory and the coming of the Lord.

The Collect:

O Lord Jesus Christ,
 who at your first coming sent your messenger
 to prepare your way before you:
 grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
 may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
 by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
 that at your second coming to judge the world
 we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
 for you are alive and reign with the Father
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.
 Amen

Hymn:

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
 announces that the Lord is nigh.
 Awake, and hearken, for he brings
 glad tidings of the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
 make straight the way for God within;
 Prepare we in our hearts a home,
 where such a mighty guest may come.

For thou are our salvation, Lord,
 our refuge, and our great reward;
 without thy grace we waste away,
 Like flowers that wither and decay.

Charles Coffin, 12 NEH

St Luke 1: 68–69

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel
 who has come to his people and set them free.
 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
 born of the house of his servant David.*

Traditional in November, during the Parish Eucharist, we would listen in our Old Testament readings of stories telling of the exodus from slavery in Egypt and how God led his people to freedom in the Promised Land. But the world could not be set free from the slavery of sin until, at the right time in history, God sent His Son, a descendant of King David, to save us.

O what a Saviour!
 Thanks be to God.

St Luke 1: 76–77

*And you child, shall be called the prophet of the most high,
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way.
 To give his people knowledge of salvation
 by the forgiveness of all their sins.*

These are the words of Zacharia's, the father of John the Baptist. He would have been well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures and his eyes were opened to the significance of the role his son would play in preparing the way for the Messiah.

May we, too, play our part in preparing the Lord's way by telling people the real meaning of the Christmas Story.