

Prayers and liturgies for Advent and Christmas Year C of the Lectionary

**Let us make this years
Advent journey
with imagination,
courage and hope!**



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Advent one

Jeremiah 33: 14-16, Psalm 25: 1-10, 1 Thess 3: 9-13, Luke 21: 25-36

Call to worship and lighting of the Advent wreath/candle

It is a very long time since a young Jewish woman
was surprised by a heavenly visitation,
and three wise men set off into the night
to follow a star and look for a child.

But these are the stories that shape our faith,
and we turn to them once again
to prepare for our annual pilgrimage
through Advent to Christmas.

So as we set our feet on the journey
we light a candle to honour their stories, (first candle is lit)
and to guide us along the path
of our heart's deepest longings.

Let us make this year's journey
with courage and with hope,
for the One who waits on the horizon
is calling our name.

A prayer about promises (Jeremiah 33)

God of truth and justice, it seems that the world is full of promises.
As soon as we switch on the television the deluge begins:
"buy this product and look 10 years younger,"
"eat this food and lower your cholesterol,"
"place your insurance with us and be safe for ever!"

And when we open our newspapers
the hollow promises of our political leaders
seek to persuade us that if we vote for them
all our troubles will be over, and a new era
of justice and mercy will prevail.

Even our own promises ring hollow in our ears,
promises we make at the turning of the year,
or in our prayers, or to our family and friends:
all the good things we say we want to do,
but then, amidst the pressure, allow to slide away.

So in the light of humankind's tendency
to make claims to ensure popularity and profit,
or to try to appear better than we are,
we turn to you, God of life, and remember your promises,
and place our hope and faith in you. Amen.

A meditation on portions of Psalm 25 for two voices

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust:
do not let me be put to shame:
do not let my enemies exult over me.
Do not let those who wait for you
be put to shame.

*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
Against all that undermines my faith,
and all those who cannot understand
why I keep coming to church,
I will stand strong,
and place my trust in you*

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation
for you I wait all day long.

*Complex paths and choices
lie open before me!
I am constantly diverted and distracted.
Help me in all the small daily decisions
to be flowing with the Spirit that shapes my life..*

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord,
and of your steadfast love
for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth,
or my transgressions,
according to your steadfast love, remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

*There are many things in my life I regret,
and sometimes memories of the past
prevent me living fully in the present.
But when you, God of my life, look at me,
you see my potential for goodness, and forget the past.
So I will hold the knowledge of your grace before me,
and go confidently into this new week.*

I wait for you, O God.
I wait for you.

I wait for you (both voices)

Advent two

Malachi 3: 1-4, Luke 1: 68-79, Phil 1: 3-11, Luke 3: 1-6

Call to worship and lighting of the Advent candle

There is a pathway to God
that has been trodden by countless pilgrims,
and it is the path that opens up
when we dare to know and follow
the deepest longings of our hearts
to be at one with the living God.

Since the dawn of time,
when the planets were flung across the sky;
since the earth cooled, mountains and rivers formed,
and the first life forms began to emerge,
all creation has looked hopefully to God.

In this season of Advent, we remember again
where we came from and who we belong to:
we join with the cry of all on the earth (Second candle is lit)
to be united with the God of life,
the God who comes in Christ
to fulfill creation's truest longings.

Reflection: voices in the wilderness

Listen, there are voices crying out in the wilderness,
crying out for a change of heart, for a new world order:
crying out for justice and peace, food and shelter,
crying out that we cannot continue as we are.

What wild prophets are crying out to us?
What words are being shaped by wilderness?
Who waits on the edge of the desolate places,
and cries out for our attention?

From the margins of human experience,
prophetic voices are crying out to us:
asking us to emerge from our places of security,
and to risk a new way of seeing and living.

Let the rough places of our hearts become tender;
let the twisted ways of running our world be straightened out.
Listen, the voices from the wilderness
are calling us to prepare the Way of the Christ.

Advent three

Zephaniah 3: 14-20, Isaiah 12: 2-6, Philippians 4: 4-7, Luke 3 7-18

Call to worship and lighting of the Advent wreath

Rejoice, lift up your hearts,
let go of fear and anxiety,
silence your inner critics,
for God comes to set us free.

As the year draws to an end,
and tiredness and timetables
sap our energy for celebration,
hear the Good News, you are free!

Today we continue the journey
through the words and music of Advent,
and gather to light a flame of hope, (Third candle is lit)
a beacon of light in our neighbourhood.

Christ has come,
Christ is coming,
Christ will come again!

A prayer of confession

Holy One, forgive us when we forget who we are,
and act as if we were totally separate from you.

Forgive us when our religious activities
become dull repetition that keeps you at arm's length.

Forgive us when we keep our world so small
that we cannot see who is shut out of it.

Forgive us when our images of you are too small,
too inadequate or too immature.

Forgive us when we keep ourselves busy
and put service above prayer.

Forgive us when small irritations with each other
restrict us from growing in love for each other.

Forgive us and renew our faith and love
that we might more faithfully live out the Way of Jesus. AMEN.

Assurance of forgiveness

Be at peace. We are forgiven.
But may we also be disturbed
by the Spirit who calls us
to enlarge our vision
and stretch our capacity to love.

May who we are in this place,
and in our private lives
reveal Jesus Christ
as the centre of our lives.

Sending out

Today you have been entrusted with words
that have the capacity to change lives:
you now have the imprint of the Gospel of Christ
in your minds and on your hearts.

May God give you the grace and the strength
to live out this calling.
May Christ's way of justice and compassion
flow through your words and actions.
And may the Spirit bring back to mind
the words you have heard today.
The blessing of the Three in One be with you,
this day and always.
AMEN.

Advent four

Micah 5: 2-5a, Luke 1: 46-55 or Psalm 80: 1-7, Luke 1: 39-55, Hebrews 10: 5-10

Call to worship and lighting of the Advent candle

We gather with anticipation in this Advent season.
Yet, like Mary, we confess
that the ways of God sometimes overwhelm us
and leave us feeling inadequate
to be bearers of Good News.

Just as Mary turned to Elizabeth,
so we must turn to one another and share our stories
to find the strength and courage
to bring forth the Christ-life within us,
and fulfil our calling.

So we light a candle today (fourth candle is lit)
for all bearers of the Good News –
saints, prophets, ordinary men and women,
who, down the centuries, have carried the light
and placed it into our hands.

May we who now carry this Sacred Story
- in which Christ is present –
help each other through our worship today
to be faithful
to this holy calling.

A meditation: the pre-birthing season

Some of us long for birth, some of us are not designed to give birth;
some of us think our birthing days are long gone, and others
despair that their lives will ever be fruitful.

But Advent tells a different story. Advent is the pre-birthing season,
when God asks us to look deep within and see the presence of new life;
to see on the periphery of our conscious vision the visitation of angels.

We do not celebrate a season whose fruitfulness is long past,
or look at a story wreathed in cobwebs;
God's comings are not finished yet; and we are more fertile than we realize!

So come, let us nurture that which lies deep within us
and be bearers of the sacred, witnesses of the Christ-presence:
let us open ourselves to the mystery of this holy season.

Prayers of intercession

Loving God, who called an uncertain young woman
to be the Mother of Jesus Christ,
we ask your blessing today
on all who are parents.

Bless those who long to be parents,
and whose hopes seem to be impossible:
may they be comforted by you,
and may their gift of nurturing find expression.

Bless those who were surprised by parenthood
and who find it a great burden;
may they be strengthened and may we provide
caring relationships to support them.

Bless those who rejoice in their children,
whose pride and joy
continually celebrates the lives
that they have brought into the world.

Bless those who are hurt by their children;
those who are disappointed, abandoned,
exploited or unappreciated.
May they be comforted.

Bless those whose children
require extra-ordinary care and attention:
those who are tired and without support.
May they find help and strength.

Loving God,
bless all parents. May they, like Mary,
find the God of life is on their side,
and that Christ is their comforter.

AMEN.

Sending out

People of God. The end of our preparation is in sight.
The season of celebration is about to begin.
Once more our God comes to us
in the stories of Christ's birth.
Once more we are invited
to let those stories come alive for us.

Go out into this week
as those who have heard astonishing news.
Go out as those who have seen
that God is present in this world.
Go out as those who are deeply loved
and have the gift of love to share

And may the blessing ...

CHRISTMAS

Call to worship

Sunlight tipping over the horizon,
dispelling the darkness of night,
opening up a new day, a new season.

Christ-light dawning on the world:
recognized or not,
the Presence comes to us.

Here and now,
in our remembering, our re-telling of the story,
the Presence arrives again.

Let us lift our eyes above gifts and gatherings,
and see on the rim of the day
the arrival of *The Gift*.

Thanks be to God!

The arrival

He could have come with battle lines drawn,
an army of trumpeting archangels,
and a legion of patriarchs.

But he came in vulnerability,
a baby without a home,
asking to be given a place in the world.

We expect a stern appraisal
of our living and our praying,
but a tiny hand reaches out towards us.

Nothing has changed.
To find the Christ in our world now,
we must leave home and follow a star;

must still look past the obvious,
explore the unexpected,
be open to a gift wrapped in mystery.

In faith, in hope, in love,
let us welcome again
God's coming to us in Christ.
AMEN.

Christmas Beatitudes

Blessed are they
who arrive at the door of Christmas
with aching hearts and empty hopes,
for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are they who weep
for families that are broken,
and dreams that are shattered:
for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are they who struggle
to put food on the table,
and gifts under the tree,
for they shall evoke our generosity.

Blessed are they who grieve,
whose Christmas holds an empty place
at a table, a greeting not received:
for they shall be deeply loved.

Blessed are you,
when you hold out for the real meaning
of this season, and refuse to buy
into an empty performance:

Blessed are you for coming today,
to honour an older, deeper meaning,
and to celebrate with this community,
for you shall be called the children of God.

Sending out and Benediction

Go out in joy,
not because you have gifts
and people to eat lunch with,
but because the Living God
has come to you in Christ.

Go out to love,
whether love is reciprocated or not;
and look for those who need your blessing,
who need your generosity,
who need you to understand.

And may the blessing of God
warm your hearts and fill your longings:
may the gift of the Christ-child
awaken you to child-like wonder again.
And may the Spirit
dance through your celebrations,
and take you by the hand
to lead you into a celebration of life.

AMEN