

**Prayers, liturgies and meditations  
based on the Lectionary Readings for Advent-Christmas YEAR A,  
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**ADVENT ONE November 28 2010**

Call to worship

Romans 13: 11-14 and Matthew 24: 36-44

We are called to wake from sleep,  
to wake up and hear,  
to wake up and see.

What has the Lord to show to us?

A new life,  
a new world,  
a different set of priorities,  
freedom from the tyranny  
of desiring and acquiring.

Wake up,  
wake up!

Hear the invitation  
that echoes down the centuries.

Welcome the Way of Christ  
and find freedom.

Prayer

Not when the mountains shake,  
or the seas roar,  
or the clouds part to reveal You,  
Holy One,  
but here and now,  
on this one ordinary day,  
we will wait and watch  
for You will surely come to us.  
Amen.

## Meditation based on Matthew 24: 36-44 A disciple reflects

(The story is read from Scripture first, followed by the meditation).

We had wanted to have the facts, to know what to look out for. And as usual he spoke in riddles, confusing us even further. Why is it so hard to understand the ways of God?

By this stage of the journey we were pretty tired, a bit like you feel at the end of the year; ready to take a break from all that is going on but with a sense it's not over yet and you have to keep going. As we'd neared Jerusalem Jesus had become more enigmatic, speaking of things that sounded urgent but which felt like they were hard to grasp hold of.

He seemed different now, from the Jesus who'd taken us round the Galilean countryside, teaching and healing. There'd been a turning point and he'd brought us to Jerusalem to face goodness knows what. He'd already stirred up the authorities and for all the lips that praised him there were others that whispered threats and warnings.

So we weren't too pleased when he didn't seem interested in us showing him the various parts of the Temple, but muttered something about stones being thrown down. It was a relief when we had dragged ourselves up the Mount of Olives and found a private moment to put our own questions to him.

We wanted some clarity. *When* would the Temple tumble down, and what signs would indicate the end of the age to us?

Perhaps we hoped it would soon all be over, all the tiredness and our anxieties about the tensions that were building. We wanted him to sort out Jerusalem, ensure peaceful times for Israel, bring an end to the current age. And what we do get, "You will hear of wars ... they will hand you over to be tortured ... false messiahs and false prophets will arise ... And, oh yes, do not be alarmed." (Where have we heard that before, "Be alert, but not alarmed!")

Just as we hoped he was getting to the point he said that no-one knew the day or the hour when the Son of Man would come with power and glory. No details, no timelines, no plan for us to follow. Just "stay awake."

When you feel tired after a long journey, or a long year, and someone tells you to stay awake – and he said it several times – it leaves you feeling a bit flat.

So, I ask you, you who have also tried to follow Him, how do *you* understand His call to stay awake, to watch, to be alert, to read the signs of the times?

## Prayers of intercession

Preceded by the reading of Psalm 122

We pray, O God,  
along with the Psalmist,  
for peace in Jerusalem  
and in the Middle East.

For the joy  
experienced by so many  
when their feet finally  
stand within the gates  
of the Old City  
there is all the pain  
of those who cannot any longer  
stand on the land that once was their home.

For the joy  
of entering sacred sites  
and being filled with awe  
that Jesus was in this place,  
there is all the turmoil  
of walls and fences,  
security checks, armed soldiers,  
bomb threats  
and stone throwing.

We pray, O God,  
along with the Psalmist  
for the peace of Jerusalem.  
May this apex of religious fervour,  
this ancient land so many have claimed,  
be turned from a cauldron of hatred  
into a place of peace and community.

In the name of Christ,  
in the name of Christ,  
AMEN.

### Benediction

In the name of the One who created and stands by the Earth and its people;  
in the name of the One who walked its roads and embodied Good News;  
in the name of the One who descended with gifts and with power –  
go out into this coming week to know and love God,  
to learn from and follow Jesus,  
and to feel in the depths of your being the movements of the Spirit.  
AMEN

## ADVENT TWO

### Call to worship

Romans 15: 4-13

Gather around,  
you are welcome here,  
and you will hear Good News.

In a world  
where there are so many  
discouraging and negative voices

it is the God of encouragement  
who will speak to you today.  
The God of Jesus Christ.

So come in, relax,  
let your tiredness roll away.  
Lift up your hearts, and listen.

### Prose – John emerges from the Judean desert

(May be useful to read in conjunction with Matthew 3: 1-12)

Out of the Judean desert he came,  
wild man of God,  
with uncombed hair,  
matted beard,  
unwashed feet.

Out of the hot, dry desert,  
where the wind whistles  
between the mountains,  
and sand blasts the rocks,  
he came with fire in his belly.

In the wilderness  
he discovered the power of his voice,  
crying out to God  
above the cries of falcons and eagles,  
above his own inner resistance.

“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight”:  
and though they did away with him  
his cry still rings out  
from the pages of Scripture.

As Christmas approaches,  
and we enter our own hot, dry season,  
may the words of John  
still claim our attention  
and call us to put our house in order.

For Christ comes,  
entering our lives again  
as the year draws to an end,  
and if you will not hear his prophets  
at least be quiet enough to hear a baby's cry.

Meditation: Based on Matthew 3: 1-12

John emerges from the desert ( meditation to follow the reading of the Scripture passage.)

I don't go into the wilderness very often, but occasionally I need to travel that way for trade and I usually try to skirt around the edges. It's a fearsome region, especially for those of us more used to the cities. The Judean desert is hot and dry, a great mountainous, barren wilderness. No wonder the vultures circle overhead, anticipating food!

On this occasion I took plenty of fresh water and a handful of dates and went by my usual route, which in the early stages passed by the Jordan River. I was expecting to see very few people. But before I'd gone more than a few steps I came upon a small crowd, and heard such a commotion going on!

Apparently this fellow had just wandered out of the wilderness, wild-eyed and scruffy, shouting about preparing a way. If I'm honest it spooked me, because it was like something straight out of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Only I was more used to hearing the words of Isaiah in the Temple, read from a carefully unfolded scroll, and read in a reverent tone of voice.

I had to join the crowd and listen, just for a few moments. I'm not usually side-tracked so easily, and I don't really like crowds. I like to get on with my business. But I welcomed a diversion that day.

The man wore clothing made from camel's hair with a leather belt around the waist. People were saying that he'd only eaten insects and wild honey, and he looked like it! He wouldn't have got through the door of a Temple looking like that, and making such a noise!

When I saw the Sadducees and Pharisees arriving (later I was told they came to be baptized by the man) I took off. No point in getting caught up in trouble. And I had trade matters to attend to.

In the following days I have found this man, and his words, playing on my mind. A bit of the wildness of God has come into my life and upset my routine, and I can't ignore it. God comes in unexpected ways. I urge you to watch, pray and be ready.

Benediction (using the words of Romans 15:13)

May the God of hope  
fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that you may abound in hope  
by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And may the blessing of God,  
Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier,  
be with us all this day and always. AMEN

**ADVENT THREE**

Call to worship, or ...

Friends, I am here to tell you  
that we have received a request to prepare  
a place for the Christ-child to be born.

This request is not from Church Council,  
or even from Presbytery, Synod or Assembly,  
it appears to come from much higher.

And it will either alarm or relieve you  
to know that we do not have to establish  
a special Birthing Committee to do the planning!

The request, however, is couched in humble terms.  
It asks us to simply create space and time  
and to watch and wait for signs that the time has come.

It asks that each member, between now and Christmas Day,  
set aside a few minutes every day to reflect and pray,  
and ready themselves for the moment.

It also asks that, as a congregation, we take care  
not to over-clutter our days with frantic preparation,  
and to focus on renewing our spirits.

Needless to say it is a great honour,  
and a task we should well be able to accomplish,  
but it will require courage to let go of over-busyness.

May God be with us today  
as we continue to celebrate Advent  
and set our faces towards a Christmas birth.

## Wilderness

We have wilderness and dry land  
at the heart of Australia.  
We may not venture into it very often  
but we know it is there,  
it has its place on our maps.

More familiar to us, however,  
is the wilderness in our own hearts,  
the empty spaces in our own lives,  
the desert of longings  
that engulf us at Christmas.

Wilderness is a hard place,  
but also a place of beauty and grace,  
revealed by its sunsets and sunrises,  
the glow of ancient rocks,  
the moon shining on the sand.

Do not be afraid  
of the desert places in your life,  
for it is here  
that the Good News  
may be heard most profoundly.

May it be so.

## Prayers of petition

Preceded by the reading of James 5: 7-10

God, help us to be patient,  
when we feel disappointed  
or frustrated about our lives.

You call us beloved,  
and remind us to wait  
as farmers wait for crops to grow.

Strengthen our hearts,  
through the presence of Your Spirit,  
and help us to wait and to hold on.

Save us from grumbling  
about each other's faults and failings,  
and help us to be compassionate.

May we who read  
the letter of James,  
find its words full of encouragement.  
AMEN.

Statement of faith  
(May be used following the reading, or sermon)

Luke 1: 46-55

Our souls magnify the Lord,  
and our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour,  
for he looks with favour upon us  
and sees our unrealized potential.

In the tradition of Mary,  
and all who have said “yes” to God,  
we stand here today,  
to add our assent to theirs.

Like Mary, we feel overwhelmed;  
we wonder if we are worthy,  
or capable, of following the calling.  
Like Mary, we have our questions  
and we will not be afraid to ask them.  
Like Mary, we will hear and ponder  
the assurance that God will empower us.  
Like Mary we will strive to say -  
“Let it be with us according to your will.”

To whatever God is inviting of us  
at this time in our lives,  
and relying on God’s grace,  
we say “yes.”

## **ADVENT FOUR**

A prayer of confession and petition

The response is: *Restore us, O God:  
let your face shine,  
that we may be saved. (Psalm 80:3)*

In a few days’ time

we will be celebrating  
the birth of Christ,  
so let us restore our souls,  
and refresh our spirits.

*Restore us, O God,  
let your face shine  
that we may be saved.*

Though we are complicit  
in the frenzy of consumerism,  
the unreality of expectations,  
the tension of gift giving,  
and the pressure to attend gatherings:

*Restore us, O God,  
let your face shine  
that we may be saved.*

Though we would like  
to be more Christ-centred  
in our daily lives,  
we know we can turn to God,  
and be restored. So, we ask:

*Restore us, O God,  
let your face shine  
that we may be saved.*  
AMEN.

## **CHRISTMAS DAY**

### **The spirit of Christmas**

I looked for the spirit of Christmas,  
thinking there might be a place  
where I would feel a deep sense  
of the holiness of the occasion.

I looked in the shops,  
drawn in by bright decorations  
but I found that I couldn't afford  
this brand of Christmas.

I slipped into a church,  
attracted by their cheerful poster,  
but a group of people were arguing  
about where to place the chairs.

The advertisements told me  
that Christmas was all about family,  
but mine always argue at Christmas,  
and then fall asleep straight after lunch.

I even went overseas to Bethlehem,  
but there were soldiers with guns,  
and a very long queue waiting  
to get through the checkpoint.

So I came home and on the plane,  
a mother and her baby sat next to me,  
and suddenly the baby looked right at me,  
and smiled. And it was Christmas!

I'll never go to so much trouble again,  
spending and cooking and shopping,  
or expecting too much from people.  
The spirit of Christmas is in simple things.

#### Call to worship

This is a moment  
to find within us  
the true spirit of Christmas.

This is a moment  
to calm and quiet our souls  
and find true joy.

This is a moment  
to insist that, despite everything,  
God is with us.

This is a moment  
to dig deep and find love  
is born again within us.

This is a moment  
when the outer gifts  
matter less than the inner one.

So, let us celebrate!