



Bristol  
Cathedral

# Advent 2020

24 days  
of prayer  
and reflection

Comfort  
and Joy



## INTRODUCTION

Advent, like Lent, is a time for reflection, expectation and preparation. We focus on the amazing love of the Trinity revealed and expressed in Christ's birth and look expectantly to the completion of God's loving purposes when one day Christ will return in glory. It is a time of watchfulness and hope as reflected in the ancient Advent prayer: Maranatha – Our Lord, come.

This year the Church of England, Diocesan and Cathedral theme for Advent and Christmas is 'Comfort and Joy'. In a year when all our normal ways of being and relating have been disrupted, perhaps more than ever we need to find comfort and joy in this strange and dislocating time. So, during the coming weeks we turn again to the story of God's people through the ages, and to the events leading up to Christ's birth; seeking to encounter anew God who is with us in the midst of all that we are going through.

We invite you to join us in this corporate act of prayer and reflection as we journey through Advent.

There is a long tradition of praying with and meditating on passages of Scripture. This is different from studying the Bible: the emphasis here is on staying with the passage, listening, letting God speak to us through it and allowing our minds and hearts to be touched. It may involve wrestling with the text or savouring it, all of which will lead us into prayerful response.

Later in this booklet you will find a suggested **Pattern of Prayer**, together with daily readings from the Bible for every day of Advent and for Christmas Day. You will see that there are some questions to ponder or discuss each week which can be used individually or in a group.

You are encouraged to use your own Bible for the readings, if you have one. The version used at the Cathedral is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Anglicized Edition. If you do not have access to a Bible at home, the readings are all available in a separate booklet, as is a supplement containing pictures and poems: see the *Creative Media* section under *Some Ways of Praying*.

Email [tim.popple@bristol-cathedral.co.uk](mailto:tim.popple@bristol-cathedral.co.uk) to receive a copy, for use for private prayer.

## **SOME WAYS OF PRAYING**

There are many ways of praying. We may find ourselves praying differently at different times or in different seasons of our lives. Here are some suggestions which may be of help.

### **Praying with Scripture**

Use the reading meditatively. Read it several times, think what it is about. What does it say or mean to you? What does it say to you about God and about following Jesus? How do you feel moved to respond?

### **Lectio Divina**

This is an ancient practice of reading and praying the Bible. We begin by reading or listening, with openness, to a passage of scripture several times over – paying gentle attention to what strikes us. This leads to meditation on whatever has emerged for us during the reading and to prayer. In a recent book, David Runcorn suggests questions to ponder after each reading when using Lectio Divina.

1. “What word or phrase or image has touched my heart as I have read this passage?”;
2. “In what way am I ‘hearing’ or ‘seeing’ Christ in this passage?”;
3. “In what way is Christ calling me (or us) forth in this passage – to new life, relationships and understanding?”<sup>1</sup> This in turn leads us into contemplation; engagement of the heart with God.

### **Imaginative Contemplation**

Using your imagination: Read the passage and imagine you are present as the event takes place or as you listen to Christ – what do you notice? What is happening? Where do you find yourself within this, are you an observer, a participant, is Jesus addressing you? What are your feelings? Speak to God from your heart, be honest about how you feel, respond to him as you are able and ask for what you need.

### **Being still and attentive**

Read the passage and be silent, attending to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Runcorn, D. (2020) *Love Means Love: Same-sex relationships and the Bible*. London: SPCK, pp 42-43.

## **Being with a passage during the day**

Read the passage in the morning and allow it to “be there” as you go about your daily life – return to it in the quiet moments, let it run through your mind, let the Lord speak in the midst of your busyness, let him deepen his word and increase his love in you and your response.

## **Contemplating particular words**

Focussing on a particular word, e.g. Love, forgiveness, compassion, or praying a well-known prayer, e.g. the Lord’s Prayer, slowly dwelling on each word or phrase.

## **Using our breath in prayer**

This may take a number of forms: being still and focussing on our breath, being attentive to God – “Be still and know that I am God”; imagining God’s filling as we breathe in and releasing what we need to let go of as we breathe out; using a well-known word, phrase of scripture, or prayer rhythmically in tune with our breathing; using a prayer like the Orthodox Jesus Prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner) or other repetitive prayers.

## **Creative Media**

Using music, poetry, or pictures as a starting point to engage with God. A supplement with poetry and pictures is available on request from [tim.popple@bristol-cathedral.co.uk](mailto:tim.popple@bristol-cathedral.co.uk), for use as private prayer.

## **Icons**

Using an icon, object, as another starting point to enable us to engage with God. Focussing on an icon is not an end in itself but rather it acts as a window or doorway that takes us into encounter with God. Similarly being outside in nature may help us enter into prayer.

**Holding** something, again as a way into or an aid to prayer (e.g. holding cross, prayer beads or rosary).

**Walking** while praying – or even **Running** ... and many other ways, this list is not exhaustive.

## PATTERN OF PRAYER

Before beginning decide:

- A time to pray that will work for you (*this may vary for some people*)
- How much time are you going to give to this (*hint: it can be useful to set that time on your phone, this can help focus on prayer*)
- Where the best place to pray will be
- Make sure you have the Bible readings to hand

### Time of Prayer

- **A way to begin:** some people find it helpful to light a candle, or make the sign of the cross, or have something to look at, or listen to some music as a way of marking the beginning of a time of prayer.
- **Settling, becoming still and focussing:** take a moment to become fully present
- **Read the passage for the day** – you may want to do this more than once
- **Pray:** Meditate/Listen/Reflect (see Some Ways of Praying)
- **Respond** to God
- **The Collect** (Prayer for the Week)
- **Close with The Lord's Prayer and The Grace**

#### Our Father,

who art in heaven  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

#### The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus  
Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy  
Spirit,  
be with us all evermore. Amen.

## **FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT**

### **Theme for the week**

*Comfort, joy and hope in difficult times and situations*

### **Collect for the First Sunday of 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.**

### **Advent Sunday 29 November**

Psalm 107

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope*

## **Monday 30 November**

Psalm 30

*You turned my mourning into dancing ... and clothed me with joy*

## **Tuesday 1 December**

Genesis 17.1-8 and 18.9-15

*A seemingly impossible promise of hope*

## **Wednesday 2 December**

Genesis 28.10-17

*... all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you ...*

## **Thursday 3 December**

Genesis 45.1-15

*God brings blessing out of treachery*

## **Friday 4 December**

Exodus 3.1-12

*A seemingly impossible call? Yet, "I will be with you ..."*

## **Saturday 5 December**

Psalm 23

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me.*

### **Questions to ponder or discuss:**

- What struck you as you read and prayed this past week?
- What drew you or moved you?
- Where did you find yourself drawn closer to God?
- Where did you find comfort, or joy, or hope?
- What encouraged you this week?
- What did you find difficult or uncomfortable or unsettling?
- What is your prayer at the end of this week? What do you desire and seek?

## **SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT**

### **Theme for the week**

*Promises of comfort, joy and hope*

### **Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent**

**Almighty God,  
purify our hearts and minds,  
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again  
as judge and saviour  
we may be ready to receive him,  
who is our Lord and our God.  
Amen.**

### **Sunday 6 December**

Isaiah 43.1-7

*I will be with you ... you are precious ... and honoured and I love you.*

## **Monday 7 December**

Isaiah 44.1-8

*Do not fear.*

## **Tuesday 8 December**

Isaiah 9.2-7

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.*

## **Wednesday 9 December**

Isaiah 11.1-9

*A shoot shall come out of Jesse ... the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him.*

## **Thursday 10 December**

Isaiah 61.1-4

*The promised kingdom of God.*

## **Friday 11 December**

Zechariah 9.9-10

*Lo, your king comes to you.*

## **Saturday 12 December**

Malachi 3.1-7

*See I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me.*

### **Questions to ponder or discuss:**

- What struck you as you read and prayed this past week?
- What drew you or moved you?
- Where did you find yourself drawn closer to God?
- Where did you find comfort, or joy, or hope?
- What encouraged you this week?
- What did you find difficult or uncomfortable or unsettling?
- What is your prayer at the end of this week? What do you desire and seek?

## **THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT**

### **Theme for the week**

*Stirrings of comfort, joy and hope*

### **Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent**

**God for whom we watch and wait,  
you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son:  
give us courage to speak the truth,  
to hunger for justice,  
and to suffer for the cause of right,  
with Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

### **Sunday 13 December**

Isaiah 40.1-11

*A voice crying in the wilderness.*

## **Monday 14 December**

Luke 1.5-22

*The birth of John the Baptist foretold.*

## **Tuesday 15 December**

Luke 1.23-25, 57-58

*This is what the Lord has done for me ... they rejoiced with her.*

## **Wednesday 16 December**

Luke 1. 59-66, 80

*What then will this child become?*

## **Thursday 17 December**

Luke 1.67-79

*Zechariah's song.*

## **Friday 18 December**

Isaiah 7.10-14

*... she shall bear a son ...*

## **Saturday 19 December**

Ephesians 2.13-22

*... he is our peace ...*

### **Questions to ponder or discuss:**

- What struck you as you read and prayed this past week?
- What drew you or moved you?
- Where did you find yourself drawn closer to God?
- Where did you find comfort, or joy, or hope?
- What encouraged you this week?
- What did you find difficult or uncomfortable or unsettling?
- What is your prayer at the end of this week? What do you desire and seek?

## **FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT**

### **Theme for the week**

*Comfort, joy and hope, the gift of God*

### **Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**Eternal God,  
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,  
so we wait for his coming in glory;  
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age  
to see with her, our great salvation  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

### **Sunday 20 December**

Luke 1.26-38

*... the child to be born will be holy, he will be called Son of God.*

## **Monday 21 December**

Philippians 2.5-11

*... he emptied himself ... being born in human likeness ...*

## **Tuesday 22 December**

Luke 1.39-56

*... my soul magnifies the Lord ...*

## **Wednesday 23 December**

Matthew 1.18-25

*... they shall name him Emmanuel ... God is with us*

## **Thursday 24 December**

Luke 2.1-20

*... I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people ...*

**Eternal God,**

**in the stillness of the night**

**you sent your almighty Word**

**to pierce the world's darkness with the light of salvation:**

**give to the earth the peace that we long for**

**and fill our hearts with the joy of heaven**

**through our Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

**Amen.**

## **CHRISTMAS DAY**

John 1.1-18

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us*

**Lord Jesus Christ,**

**your birth at Bethlehem**

**draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:**

**accept our heartfelt praise**

**as we worship you,**

**our Saviour and our eternal God.**

**Amen.**

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**The Dean, Chapter and Clergy  
at Bristol Cathedral  
wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas**