

Old Catholic Apostolic Church

Advent 2020

Prepared by Bishop-elect Margaret Watson

There are readings here below for each day of Advent, to read and prayer by yourself or with others. Traditionally each week has a theme

Week 1: Hope (or promise)

Week 2: Preparation (or waiting or prophecy) Justice

Week 3: Joy (or peace)

Week 4: Love (or adoration)

Sunday 29th November 1st Sunday in Advent

Philippians 2 v 5-8 (The Message)

5-8 Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. 9-11 Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honoured him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honour of God the Father.

Advent marks the start of a season of preparation that looks forward to the celebration of Christmas. It is for some just a time to order turkeys and check how much tinsel they need but for believers, for them it is a time of reflection in preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ—we remember how our Saviour humbled Himself to be born as a baby and live among those He would save. We remember the perfect life He lived doing the will of His Father, His sacrificial death on the cross, and how He was raised from the dead three days later, having paid the penalty in order to save all who would believe. Christians remember Jesus' promise to return again one day and restore everything fully. This season invokes feelings of expectation and hope! The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning “arrival” or “coming” from the word *advenire* (*ad-* “to” *venire* “come”). Advent is a reminder of how the Jewish people waited for the Messiah and how Christians and Messianic Jews wait for the second coming of Christ, today.

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Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a wonder at the wisdom and power of Your Father and ours. Receive my prayer as part of my service of the Lord who enlists me in God's own work for justice.

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a hunger for peace: peace in the world, peace in my home, peace in myself.

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a joy responsive to the Father's joy. I seek His will so I can serve with gladness, singing and love.

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me the joy and love and peace it is right to bring to the manger of my Lord. Raise in me, too, sober reverence for the God who acted there, hearty gratitude for the life begun there, and spirited resolution to serve the Father and Son.

I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whose advent I hail. Amen.

Monday 30th November 2020

The first mention of Advent is found in ancient writings dating back to the sixth century, with some anecdotal mentions as early as AD 380 at the Spanish Council of Saragossa! So not only is it an old Christian practice, but it's also a very personal one, as churches have adapted the practice to suit their local parishes.

First the Eastern church and then the Western (or Latin) Church began to celebrate Advent and both Western and adopted the uniform date for Christmas about A. D. 380. There are some writers, however, who affirm that it was solemnly celebrated among the early Christians in the second century. Chronologists disagree as to the exact year of the nativity, but the majority believe it was B. C. 5. The celebration was at first held on January 6, but toward the end of the fourth century it was changed to December 25. The truth is of course that we really do not know the date of Christ's birth, but that is far less important than believing that he did come and why .

John 3 v 16 God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Father, in the wilderness of the Jordan you sent a messenger to prepare people's hearts for the coming of your Son. Help me to hear his words and repent of my sins, so that I may clearly see the way to walk, the truth to speak, and the life to live for Him, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday 1st December 2020

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7:

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. [...] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of

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Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

I've been out in the garden today – just tidying up, cutting out some dead shoots. The sun is low in the sky and soon it will be the winter solstice once more, a time of new beginnings even in the darkest days.. And what hope lies underneath – a ladybird still sheltering under the leaves, and fresh shoots of spring flowers just breaking through the top soil. A Peace rose bush has just one flower in bloom, but lots of hips to remind me of what glory will come again.

Father in heaven, our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Wednesday 2nd December 2020

Psalm 122 v 1-8

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." 2 Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem. 3 Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. 4 That is where the tribes go up— the tribes of the LORD— to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel. 5 There stand the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David. 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. 7 May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my family and friends I say 'Peace be within you,'" "

It is a time of year when many who would never enter a church otherwise gladly attend to sing familiar carols. This year of course things are likely to be different – no big gatherings, but I thank God for such innovations as Zooms and You tube when we can sing along. Pray for those who will hear and join in the special words . may they consider what they sing, and come to a new understanding of the true meaning of Christ and Christmas.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken,

O guide of the flock of Joseph!

Rouse your power, and come to save us.

O Lord of hosts, restore us,

if your face shine upon us, then we shall be safe.

O Lord of hosts, restore us,

if your face shine upon us, then we shall be safe.

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Thursday 3rd December 2020

In the northern hemisphere the days get ever shorter , but we are long experienced and know that this is a temporary situation – the sun will renew its strength once more. Some of us can even explain the science behind our experiences . We have hope, but it is based on what we know. Some would say this is different from faith.

Hebrews 11 v 1 faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
Not seen, but believed.

Father in heaven, the day draws near when the glory of your Son will make radiant the night of the waiting world. May the lure of greed not impede us from the joy which moves the hearts of those who seek him. May the darkness not blind us to the vision of wisdom which fills the minds of those who find him. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen

Friday 4th December 2020

This time of lockdown and the threat of Covid has been a strange time for all of us. We have missed so much of what we might consider normal. Yet there have been positives too- I think of zoom services and debates with fellows I would never have met at any other time- great blessings.

Psalms 26 v 1-9a

1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. 2 Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. 3 You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. 4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal. 5 He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust. 6 Feet trample it down— the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor. 7 The path of the righteous is level; you, the Upright One, make the way of the righteous smooth. 8 Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws ,we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. 9 My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Renew our hope. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy, so that we may share his wisdom and become one with him when he comes in glory, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Saturday 5th December 2020

On Sunday last you may well have lit a candle on an Advent wreath – a symbol of the hope that is in you.

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I grew up to go to church. I enjoyed all the candles and the singing, though the long prayers were beyond me . I had no relationship with God, and was only an onlooker. Then a friend led me through just three Bible verses:-

Romans 3 v 23, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 6 v 23 The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

and then John 3 v 16. We read together ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ‘

My friend asked me to read those words again , but this time inserting my own name - what a difference that made , finally I knew God loved me enough to send his son for me.

O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare for Thy only begotten Son,

that through His coming we may be made worthy to serve Thee with pure souls.

Through the same Christ our Lord

2nd Sunday of Advent, 6th December 2020

We look forward to Christmas and to the justice brought about by the coming of the Christ. This Christmas as we eat and drink , and where possible gather with those we love, whether in reality or virtually, there will be many less fortunate. But Christ comes for all, regardless of age or sex or nationality or religion or wealth. He comes to bring justice to an unjust world, and he calls us to help.

Light second candle in the hope of justice and as a promise to prepare and to work with Christ to bring it.

Isaiah 40:3-5:

“A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’”

Lord, we name before you those we know who are going through times of darkness. We think of them and ask, gracious God, that you may bring them light, hope, love and direction. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Monday 7th December 2020

Psalm 119:105a ‘ Your word is a lamp for my feet.’”

What’s that got to do with justice and preparation? The writer of that psalm knew the word of God well. They knew what it contained and so see it as leading them in the right way . We had a light go

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in our house today – just as I was getting out of the bath. I knew my way well, but it was still harder than usual to get about until it was fixed. We need light for practical reasons, but also for spiritual ones – we need to know the word as a preparation for working with God to bring about true justice.

Lord, I thank you that you don't leave me in darkness and confusion. I don't need to be paralysed with fear, unable to move my feet forward. Thank you that you have given your word as a lamp to my feet so that I can see what is around me. Help me to pay attention to the light. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday 8th December

In the book of Revelation the author gives us an insight into heaven.

Revelation 21 v 23 "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the lamb is its lamp."

Darkness is often a picture of sin, fear and confusion. A lack of light is a lack of life and joy. In this short text we get a glimpse of the new Jerusalem, a place where there will be no tears, mourning, pain or sorrow. It is lit up by the glory of God as people, unrestricted, worship the lamb. It is the time free from fear and hopelessness. It is the full light of God's character and it is our destiny. No matter what we have gone through. No matter the depths of sorrow or heights of joy. There is nothing to compare with being bathed in unrestricted light, to see Jesus as he truly is.

These words remind me of an old story from France. A woman was a very poor housekeeper. Her house was dirty to the point where she couldn't see any way of improving matters and so she lived there in filth. Then a Christian friend gave her a white rose bud in a vase and placed it in the centre of the table. So beautiful. What a contrast with what was around. The woman realised for the first time in a long while that there was a better way and she began to scrub and clean until all was bright once more. The light of Christ can show us the dark places in our souls in the same way, and also sustain us in our efforts to improve.

Lord Jesus, be my everything. In trial and success, in tears, in laughter, be my brightness, my light, my everything, and remind me always of the joy that is mine through your amazing sacrificial love. Amen.

Wednesday 9th December

Matthew 5 v 14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."

Think of recent news of revelations of dark deeds now come to light. Some truly horrifying, and some which the perpetrators would almost certainly want to remain in secret. But the light of justice shines.

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Jesus calls himself the light of the world in John 8 v 12, but also calls us lights in the world. I came to faith because I saw the light of Christ shining in others and wanted to know more. They had something very special and it was something I wanted for myself.

Can you imagine a large fire , glowing in your back garden perhaps. Red and orange with sparks crackling and rising into the darkness. Now think of taking a dry stick and putting the end into the heat, so it soon starts glowing – a torch from the fire. We are light because we are close to the light. It is the light that makes us lights. Brightness depends on proximity. The closer we are to the light, the greater our capacity to shine. How bright a light are you?

Draw me closer to you God. Help me to reflect your light in places of darkness. If I am not bright, help me, through your Holy Spirit, to wait upon you and know your presence. Amen.

Thursday 10th December 2020

Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus , people who lived in a very pagan world, “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light.”Ephesians 5:8

I remember my first day at senior school. We had moved house the previous weekend, and there had been no time to go and buy the needed uniform. All around there were youngsters , almost 200 of them wearing black and green and I was wearing a red dress with a polka dot bodice. A teacher came up to me ‘Are you looking for your big sister?’ My answer was ‘No . I am the big sister’ Later that day we went to the shop and I was kitted out just like all the others.

Some relish being different , but for most of us it is hard to stand out, to feel like an outsider. To be different takes courage. Yet as the children of light we are to live in truth. We are to be people of integrity. We live what we say. Sometimes living for and speaking the truth can be painful, but it is part of our discipleship. We are a people living with a different agenda, that of the kingdom of God .

Lord, help me to stand for truth today. Make me a person of honesty and integrity. Lord, when my courage fails, as it does, grant me your close presence to remind me that healing, forgiveness and love flow from you to me. Thank you, Amen.

Friday 11th December 2020

Mark’s gospel is probably the first written gospel record we have written at a time when there were still many around who had known Jesus in the flesh. We today don’t have that immense privilege, but for us Christ still promised his presence in our lives.

Mark 1 v 1-8

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,[a] the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”—

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3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness ‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”

4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with] water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Grant that your people, we pray, almighty God, may be ever watchful

for the coming of your Only Begotten Son, that, as the author of our salvation himself has taught us we may hasten, alert and with lighted lamps, to meet him when he comes.

Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Saturday 12th December 2020

Words from Sharon Rauenzahn

It’s getting dark. There are earthquakes and floods and forest fires. People are hurting. Where is Jesus?

I’m afraid. Things are changing too fast for me. I’m not sure what to do. I feel lost. Where is Jesus?

What does the Bible say? What does Jesus say?

Jesus says, “The nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. People will be terrified at what they see coming, and all the powers will be shaken.”

“Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory. So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!”

Psalms 25 says, “Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow.”

“Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you.”

Where is Jesus? Jesus is here. Jesus is with us.

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In the dark, in the shadow. Jesus is with us, leading us home.

Look up, for your salvation is near!

God is with us.

A prayer by Renee Swope

The first Christmas gift, it was the greatest gift ever.

You came as a baby born in a manger.

Wrapped like the gifts I find under my tree,

Waiting to be opened, to reveal Your love to me.

Restore to me the wonder that came with Jesus' birth,

when He left the riches of Heaven and wrapped Himself in rags of earth.

Immanuel, God with us, Your presence came that night.

And angels announced, "Into your darkness, God brings His Light."

"Do not be afraid," they said, to shepherds in the field.

Speak to my heart today, Lord, and help me to yield.

Make me like those shepherd boys, obedient to Your call.

Setting distractions and worries aside, to You I surrender them all.

Surround me with Your presence, Lord, I long to hear Your voice.

Clear my mind of countless concerns and all the holiday noise.

Slow me down this Christmas, let me not be in a rush.

In the midst of parties and planning, I want to feel Your hush.

This Christmas, Jesus, come to the manger of my heart.

Invade my soul like Bethlehem, bringing peace to every part.

Dwell within and around me, as I unwrap Your presence each day.

Keep me close to You, Lord. It's in Your wonderful Name I pray.

3rd Sunday of Advent 13^h December 2020

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The lighting of the third Advent candle is linked with Joy and Peace, but for many it is a time of rushing around, of getting children to learn lines, or crowded shops and hastily written cards, often addressed to people we hardly ever see.

Step aside from all that just for a few minutes.

John 14 v 27 "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.(New Living Translation).

Almighty God, gracious provider and giver of life, we await the celebration of your birth as did our ancestors in the faith, people of long ago. Like them we need the light of your love and direction in our lives. Show us the way to peace and joy in you, even in a world where consumerism blares so loudly that we need to listen with great care to hear the still small voice of your loving word.

Monday 14th December 2020

Isaiah 45:6-8, 18, 21-25

May it be known from east to west that there is no one except me. I am Yahweh, and there is no other,

7 I form the light and I create the darkness, I make well-being, and I create disaster, I, Yahweh, do all these things.

8 Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the clouds pour down saving justice, let the earth open up and blossom with salvation, and let justice sprout with it; I, Yahweh, have created it!

18 For thus says Yahweh, the Creator of the heavens -- he is God, who shaped the earth and made it, who set it firm; he did not create it to be chaos, he formed it to be lived in: I am Yahweh, and there is no other.

21 Speak up, present your case, let them put their heads together! Who foretold this in the past, who revealed it long ago? Was it not I, Yahweh? There is no other god except me, no saving God, no Saviour except me!

22 Turn to me and you will be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.

23 By my own self I swear it; what comes from my mouth is saving justice, it is an irrevocable word: All shall bend the knee to me, by me every tongue shall swear,

24 saying, 'In Yahweh alone are saving justice and strength,' until all those who used to rage at him come to him in shame.

25 In Yahweh the whole race of Israel finds justice and glory.

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And if we find justice we find peace and joy there too. Advent means 'Coming' It has always . has been a season that centres upon waiting gracefully for the gift of Jesus' . Therefore, "Advent means something new is coming.

Father, you offer that same joy to us now if we know you and recognize Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. You gave us a reason to celebrate when you gave us the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ. You came to dwell among us. You went to Calvary's cross for us. You overcame death and rose from the dead for us. You forgive our sins and give us eternal life when we believe in you.

Our joy doesn't come from our jobs, our family, our relationships, our finances, or our success, although we may enjoy those. Our joy doesn't come from what we have on earth or who we are with. Our joy is a gift. It is the gift that you gave us that first Christmas in Jesus Christ. Our joy is encompassed in our Saviour, King Jesus. Flood our heart with joy this Advent season as we reflect on the good news of Jesus' birth. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen. (Hope Bollinger, adapted)

Tuesday 15th December 2020

Luke 7 v 18-23

The disciples of John gave him all this news, and John, summoning two of his disciples,

19 sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?'

20 When the men reached Jesus they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, "Are you the one who is to come or are we to expect someone else?" '

21 At that very time he cured many people of diseases and afflictions and of evil spirits, and gave the gift of sight to many who were blind.

22 Then he gave the messengers their answer, 'Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, those suffering from virulent skin-diseases are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the good news is proclaimed to the poor;

23 and blessed is anyone who does not find me a cause of falling.'

So often you will hear 'Christmas is for children.' As if it is of no pleasure or consequence for the rest of us. Some years ago I was nursing on a ward in a small hospital on Christmas Eve. One of the great joys was preparing presents for each patient . I remember well the giggles as two very elderly patients unwrapped their stockings at about 3 am 'Oh, look what I've got! Your turn.' Just for a few minutes they were no longer women in their 80s looking forward to bleak futures as their health deteriorated, women who were unlikely ever to return to their own homes, and who would have no visitors on Christmas day. Just for a short while they knew once again the joy of being children on

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Christmas morning.

Further along in the ward was a young mother. She had been so overwhelmed by her responsibilities that she had attempted suicide a few days before. She too opened presents, a new nightdress, a bright bed jacket, a new lipstick and more. And we traced her family. At breakfast time her husband and daughters appeared for a joyful reunion. Tears of course, but tears of joy.

Heavenly Father, the whole meaning of Christmas can be explained in one little four-letter word... LOVE. You sent your gift of pure love to us that first Christmas. Love descended from heaven to be born of a virgin. Love lay in the scratchy hay of a manger in a meagre barn in Bethlehem. All of your love, God, was robed in the delicate skin of a baby and wrapped in swaddling clothes. This final week of Advent helps us to reflect on the magnitude of love that was made manifest in Jesus.

The greatest gift of all came that first Christmas. It wasn't wrapped in a beautiful package and set under a decorated tree. The greatest gift came wrapped in the flesh of baby Jesus and laid in the rough wood of a manger. Our perfect gift would later be rewrapped in the scars of our sin and nailed to the rugged wood of a cross on Calvary, all because of love.

Father, fill our hearts and minds with the significance of that truth. Thank you, Lord, for loving us enough to send Jesus. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen. (Hope Bollinger)

Wednesday 16th December

John 3:16-19, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

Doesn't that reading contain some real contrasts, light versus darkness, hope versus I know not what. But he came for all of us, no differentiation. It is only our own faith or lack of it which would make things different.

Christmas is a festival of light. Let us celebrate not just with shining candles or Christmas tree lights, but with the light of Christ in our hearts. Most Christians agree that Christmas is all about Jesus, yet we lead busy lives and although we may spend a lot of time preparing for the festivities, many of us spend little time preparing our hearts to celebrate Him.

Henry Clarke wrote a hymn we can use as our prayer today, not a carol as such, but apt nevertheless :- Come into my heart, O Lord Jesus, Come into my heart, I pray;

My soul is so troubled and weary, Come into my heart, today.

Into my heart, into my heart,

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Come into my heart, Lord Jesus;
Come in today, come in to stay,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.
Come into my heart, O Lord Jesus,
I need Thee through life's dreary way;
The burden of sin is so heavy,
Come into my heart to stay.

Come into my heart, O Lord Jesus,
Now cleanse and illumine my soul;
Fill me with Thy wonderful Spirit,
Come in and take full control.

That last line may be difficult to consider, but it is what is needed.

Thursday 17th December

Mark 5 v 24-34

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. 25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Not a traditional reading for Advent perhaps, but one which clearly shows how a meeting with Jesus could and still can make such a positive difference. It comes of course in the middle of the story of Jairus and his daughter - a story which shows us again how the coming of Christ brings new life. In

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this case it was physical life restored to a child, but, if we accept the truth of Christ as our Saviour, new life in him too.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Help me to hear your voice.

Touch me once again.

Give me the courage to be your beloved.

Give me courage to choose joy.

I need you now this Christmas.

Be born in me again. Today.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

~Bonnie Gray, from "Why it Takes Courage to Choose Joy"

Friday 18th December 2020

John 14 v 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

My grandmother Elizabeth had 13 children in a very small house. Fortunately they were spread out, so that the oldest had left home before the youngest was born. Even so that is a lot of youngsters and children can be very noisy. And they pester. I can almost hear them calling after all these years. I'm told that there were times when she sat by the back door and just lifted her apron over her face in an attempt at finding a little peace and quiet.

To have peace is a great blessing promised by Jesus. His peace – it has nothing to do with what is going on in this noisy, troublesome world. An inner peace which is greater than our understanding as it tells us in Philippians 4. That is the peace we should seek even more than my gran who just wanted five minutes without interruption.

You will know that in the Christmas story there is the message of the angels to the hillside shepherds "Good news of great joy;" "peace on earth and good will." All because the Saviour was to be born.

Lord, in a season when every heart should be happy and light, many of us are struggling with the heaviness of life—burdens that steal the joy right out of our stockings. Tragedy arrives as innocent victims suffer, and an inner voice whispers, "Be afraid!" We need your peace, Jesus. We confess that our hearts are too often filled with wonder of a different kind: wondering when the bills will be paid, when the terror will stop, when rest will come. Will it ever? Is the message still true? In a world where worry, not peace, prevails, stir up that good news again. This Advent, make it real in our hearts. Never have we needed Your joy and peace more than now. Thank You for the gift of Jesus,

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our Immanuel, the Word made flesh. We not only need Your peace and joy; Lord, we crave it. You've promised rest for the weary, victory for the battle-scarred, peace for the anxious, and acceptance for the broken hearted—not just at Advent, but every day of every year. Your name is still called "Wonderful," "Counselor," "The Mighty God," "The Everlasting Father," and "The Prince of Peace." We know that peace on earth can only come when hearts find peace with You. You are still our Joy. You are still our Peace. You are no longer a babe in the manger. You are Lord of lords and King of kings. And we still celebrate You as Lord—this Christmas and always. ~

Edited from Rebecca Barlow Jordan's 'A Prayer for peace and joy at Christmas

Saturday 19th December 2020

Luke 1 v 5-25

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

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21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people."

The Jews must have thought God had deserted them. There had been an invasion by pagan Romans for one thing, and there had been no great prophet bringing the word of God for hundreds of years. The words of Malachi had been written more than 400 years earlier.

Malachi 3 v 1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way for Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts."

So where was he, this promised Lord?

They didn't of course have the Lord's prayer – that would come, but this New Zealand version fits their situation perfectly :-

The Lord's Prayer (from A New Zealand Prayer Book)

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,

Source of all that is and that shall be,

Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

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For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever.

Amen.

4th Sunday in Advent 20th December 2020

The traditional theme for this final week of waiting is Love, and the writer of Psalm 89 knew the love of his God:-

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. 2 I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. 3 You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, 4 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.' " 5 The heavens praise your wonders, LORD, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones. 6 For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? 7 In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. 8 Who is like you, LORD God Almighty? You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

I can remember in the early hours after the birth of my daughter looking down at this perfect being whom I had never expected to see alive, and love engulfed me. It was absolutely over whelming. She was sleeping peacefully, but I so wanted to pick her up and hold her very close as my tears of joy bathed her.

Such is the overwhelming joy the psalmist has in his God, to whom nothing and no one can compare.

The Pan Viaticum, literally prayer for the journey, prayer for the sick, says this :- Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." That is the love we need – an anointing from God. No oil needs to be involved, jus the knowledge that God loves us so, so much.

This is a very old prayer , but on ewe can still find today:-

Come, true light.

Come, light eternal.

Come hidden mystery.

Come, reality beyond all words.

Come, person beyond all understanding.

Come, rejoicing without end.

Come, light that knows no evening.

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Come, unfailing expectation of the saved.

Come, resurrection of the dead.

Come, all powerful, for unceasingly you create, refashion and change all things by your will alone.

Come, invisible, whom none may touch or handle.

Come, for you continue always unmoved, yet at every instant you are wholly in movement; You draw near to us who lie in hell, yet you remain higher than the heavens.

Come, for your name fills our hearts with longing and is ever on our lips; yet who you are and what your nature is, we cannot say or know.

Come, Alone to the alone.

Come, for you are the desire that is within me.

Come the consolation of my humble soul.

Come, my joy, my endless delight, come love . -- Symeon the New Theologian, 949 – 1022
(adapted)

Monday 21st December 2020

In Revelation 22 v 16 Christ describes himself :- “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

We can lose the idea of the morning star in our modern world . Street lights galore flashing bright. Cars going past even in quieter places.

But there are places. I can remember being on a beach in Corfu looking across to Albania. No street lights there, and in the east Venus, the morning star was just above the horizon. Soon a new day would dawn. There was hope. He speaks of being the root – the origin, the creator, but also of a new day. A fresh start. It makes me think back to my school days. A page of scruffy writing, crossings out perhaps, and teacher’s remarks in red, but you could turn the page and begin all over again.

Jesus is both the past in creation, but also our future .He is the Shekinah Glory, the dwelling place of God, as seen in the brightness and visibility of the light of the morning star

O Morning Star, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness:

Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

Tuesday 22nd December

Luke 1 v 46-55

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Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”

You may be very familiar with those words of Mary that it is hard to see them in a fresh way, a way which makes you realise how revolutionary they actually are.

Do try to read it in a different version so that you get the true impact of her words, perhaps in this paraphrase from The Message:-

Mary sang this song:

“My soul is ecstatic, overflowing with praises to God!

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47 My spirit bursts with joy over my life-giving God!

48 For he set his tender gaze upon me, his lowly servant girl.

And from here on, everyone will know

that I have been favoured and blessed.

49 The Mighty One has worked a mighty miracle for me;

holy is his name!

50 Mercy kisses all his godly lovers,

from one generation to the next.[c]

51 Mighty power flows from him

to scatter all those who walk in pride.

52 Powerful princes he tears from their thrones

and he lifts up the lowly to take their place.

53 Those who hunger for him will always be filled,[d]

but the smug and self-satisfied he will send away empty.

54 Because he can never forget to show mercy,

he has helped his chosen servant, Israel,

55 Keeping his promises to Abraham[e]

and to his descendants forever.”

There are phrases in there which really speak to me ‘My life giving God’ for instance. You will find your own highlights, yet there is a commonality as we share in the love of God

WE are thinking of going to the stable at this time, but this prayer reminds us that we also need to go out from that place.

Creator and loving God, In this Advent of expectation

draw us together in unity, that our praise and worship

might echo through our lives.

In this Advent of expectation, although separated,

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draw us together in mission ,that the hope within
might be the song we sing, and the melody of our lives.

In this Advent of expectation

draw us together in service, that the path we follow
might lead us from a stable
to a glimpse of eternity.

Wednesday 23rd December

Luke 1 v 57-66

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 All the neighbours were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

One meaning for the name John is 'God is gracious.'

A gracious person is one who does not differentiate in giving his gifts. There is a song by Ablaze music which says :-

Gracious God, mighty one on high. All powerful, Lord and saviour of my life
You are worthy to be praised

Gracious God, You conquered darkness with light
You've changed this wasteland to be my home, gave me life

Lord I lift my praise to You for all that You are
I surrender my life to You for all You've done for me (Lord)

I'll declare to the world how great You are for You are my gracious God
Lord, I'm not worthy, but You died for me sinful as I am, You've forgiven me

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Here I am embraced by Your love

I'm no singer , but I can prayer those words.

God of hope, who brought love into this world,

be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world,

be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world,

be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon,

be the centre, the focus of our lives

always, and particularly this Advent time.

Christmas Eve, Thursday 24th December 2020

Psalm 89 v 2-5, 27 and 29.

2.You have said: love is built to last for ever, you have fixed your constancy firm in the heavens.

3 'I have made a covenant with my Chosen One, sworn an oath to my servant David:

4 I have made your dynasty firm for ever, built your throne stable age after age.

5 The heavens praise your wonders, Yahweh, your constancy in the gathering of your faithful.

27 So I shall make him my first-born, the highest of earthly kings.

29 I have established his dynasty for ever, his throne to be as lasting as the heavens.

It is getting close now. All the preparations are done, or will be soon, yet if we read the scriptures it seems Mary wasn't quite prepared – no place to give birth to the Saviour of the world. But God provided as we know so well.

Most Loving Father, thank you for this night and for all it represents. Thank you for the hope you bestow, the peace you bring, the love you pour out, and the joy you give. We praise you most of all for Jesus, your Word made flesh. May he light our way as the holy star lit the way for the wise men. Amen

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Christmas blessings to all, Margaret Watson