

Advent Reflections

Poems, Prose & Prayers



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Introduction

This collection of poems, prose and prayers, together with the reflections upon them is offered in the hope that it will help you to use Advent to prepare for the celebration of Christmas and give you a few moments each day away from the rush and crush of what is a busy time of year for all of us.

How you use this booklet is entirely up to you but I hope that you will be able to fit it into your prayer time each day, or you might prefer to use it over a cup of coffee in the morning. If the reflections help, all well and good, but if the passages chosen are what speak to you the most clearly that's fine. It's entirely your choice.

This booklet is available in several formats. Printed copies can be obtained from the churches in the benefice. It will also be available as a pdf document and as an ebook for Kindle, iPad and other tablets and eReaders from the benefice website fourcrosses.weebly.com/advent-2014.html.

There will be daily reflections on the benefice Facebook and Google+ pages which can be reached via the benefice website.

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Advent Sunday – 30th November

**Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.**

Turn your fierce anger from us, O Lord,
and remember not our sins for ever.
Your holy cities have become a desert,
Zion a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation;
our holy and beautiful house,
where our ancestors praised you.

**Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.**

We have sinned and become like one who is unclean;
we have all withered like a leaf,
and our iniquities like the wind have swept us away.
You have hidden your face from us,
and abandoned us to our iniquities.

**Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.**

You are my witnesses, says the Lord,
and my servant whom I have chosen,
that you may know me and believe me.
I myself am the Lord, and none but I can deliver;
what my hand holds, none can snatch away.

**Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.**

Comfort my people, comfort them;
my salvation shall not be delayed.
I have swept your offences away like a cloud;
fear not, for I will save you.
I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
your redeemer.

**Pour down, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness.**

The Advent Prose (possibly 4th Century)

The *Advent Prose* is an ancient Christian text which is based on verses from the books of Isaiah and Exodus.

In this Advent season the Church calls us to reflect on the last things, to repent of our sins so that we are ready to stand before God as Judge and to be found worthy of a place in heaven. Use these verses in your prayers to remind you to reflect on ways in which you fail to live up to the standards which God sets us, but also to rejoice that God, in Christ, has brought us comfort, forgiveness and hope and the promise of eternal life.



Monday 1st December

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train:
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
God appears on earth to reign.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

This first verse of the popular Charles Wesley hymn paints a picture of the Second Coming of Christ. Wesley paints a picture of triumph and glory. In the original version of this hymn there is a greater emphasis on the coming judgement than in the version we sing. How does the Advent hope of judgement and deliverance affect your faith in God? If you were to be judged how would you fare? What needs to be put right in your life to be able to stand confidently before God's judgement throne?



Tuesday 2nd December

It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.

It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more.

15th July 1944

The Diary of Anne Frank, Anne Frank (1929-1945)

Sometimes it can be hard to hold on to our ideals. Sometimes our faith is challenged in such ways that we are tempted to give up on it, to turn our back on what we have felt to be true but now begin to doubt. Doubt, though, is a necessary part of faith. Pray for the strength to grow through doubt and come to a stronger faith.



Wednesday 3rd December

Now is the time to wake out of sleep,
for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

Romans 13.11

Advent is a season of preparing. Many of the messages we hear in this season are about ensuring that we are ready – ready for the second coming, ready for judgement, ready to meet the Lord. Jesus stressed the importance of readiness in a number of parables. In chapter 24 of Matthew's gospel Jesus foretells the events that will mark the end time and prepares his disciples to expect his second coming. He emphasises how important it is to be prepared, *Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming* (Mt. 24.42). How could you ensure that you are prepared to meet the Lord? What is stopping you being ready?



Thursday 4th December

Rabbi Joshua came upon the prophet Elijah as he was standing at the entrance of a cave. He asked him, “When is the Messiah coming?”

He replied, “Go and ask him yourself.”

“Where shall I find him?”

“Before the gates of Rome.”

“By what sign shall I know him?”

“He is sitting among the poor people covered in wounds...”

So he went and found him, and said, “Peace be with you, my master and teacher!”

He replied, “Peace be with you, son of Levi!”

Then he asked him, “When are you coming, master?”

He replied, “Today!”

Rabbi Joshua returned to Elijah and told him, “He has deceived me, deceived me! He told me, 'Today I am coming!' and has not come.”

Elijah said, “What he told you was, 'Today' – *if you would only hear his voice.*” (*Psalm 95.7*)

The Talmud, Mishnah Sanhedrin

The *Talmud* is a collection of oral sayings from Rabbinic Judaism.

By what sign shall I know him? How will you know Jesus when you see him? We see Jesus in the scriptures, in the sacraments, in the lives of the saints (those we celebrate in church and those we worship with Sunday by Sunday), in the street, among the poor, vulnerable and needy. How

often though have you walked by and missed him? How often have you not heard him speaking to you? Pray for grace to *hear his voice*.



Friday 5th December

Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height;

look towards the east,

and see your children gathered from west and east

at the word of the Holy One,

rejoicing that God has remembered them.

For they went out from you on foot,

led away by their enemies;

but God will bring them back to you,

carried in glory, as on a royal throne.

For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills
be made low

and the valleys filled up, to make level ground,

so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.

The woods and every fragrant tree

have shaded Israel at God's command.

For God will lead Israel with joy,

in the light of his glory,

with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Baruch 5.5-9

The apocryphal *Book of Baruch* envisages a God who restores his people; a God who keeps faith with them. As we look for the coming of Christ we remind ourselves that although he comes as judge, he comes also to justify and to restore his people. He will come in glory and he will glorify his people. Pray today for those who await his coming in glory, and pray that you might be among them.



Saturday 6th December

My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.

**My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.**

There is forgiveness with you,
so that you shall be feared.

In your word is my hope.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.

**My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.**

cf. Psalm 130

Evening Prayer in Common Worship: Daily Prayer

The early Christians certainly looked expectantly for the coming of the Lord. Today, for us, that is harder. We cannot entirely recapture the sense of urgency that the early church had. We need to remind ourselves that Jesus promised to be present with us and that we should be ready for his coming. Make these words part of your prayers during this Advent season to remind yourself that our hope is in the Lord and that he comes with forgiveness for those who look for him.



Second Sunday in Advent – 7th December

Let me love thee, O Christ,
in thy first coming,
when thou wast made man, for love of man,
and for love of me.

Let me love thee, O Christ,
in thy second coming,
when with an inconceivable love
thou standest and knockest at the door,
and wouldest enter into the souls of men,
and into mine.

Plant in my soul, O Christ, thy likeness of love;
that when by death thou callest,
it may be ready,
and burning,
to come unto thee.

From My God My Glory
Eric Milner-White (1884-1963)

We have come to know Jesus through the events of his life as recorded in the gospels. The Christian hope is to know him so we can recognize Jesus when he comes again as judge. Throughout our life we need to develop a deep love for Christ so that when he comes we may be ready to greet him and to be found worthy to stand in his presence. Use this prayer to ask God to transform your life by his love.



Monday 8th December

ALMIGHTY God,
give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness,
and put upon us the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life
in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility;
 that in the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge both the quick and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who liveth and reigneth with thee
 and the Holy Ghost,
one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*The Collect for Advent Sunday
Book of Common Prayer*

There is a great sense of urgency in the Advent season. How we live now will affect what judgement we receive. We read in John's gospel how Jesus is the light of the world, Jesus spoke to them, saying, *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.* (Jn 8.12) It is only through Jesus and walking in his light that we can be saved. Use this traditional prayer to ask for grace to be ready for Christ when he comes.



Tuesday 9th December

Advent should admonish us to discover
in each brother and sister that we greet,
in each friend whose hand we shake,
in each beggar who asks for bread,
in each worker who wants to use the right to join a union,
in each peasant who looks for work in the coffee groves,
the face of Christ.

Then it would not be possible to rob them,
to cheat them,
to deny them their rights.

They are Christ,
and whatever is done to them
Christ will take as done to him.
This is what Advent is:
Christ living among us.

Oscar Romero (1917-1980)

It can be so easy to miss Christ when he comes. Perhaps you are looking for him in the wrong places. The promise of Advent is that Christ comes to us – not just in the future but every day. In the people we meet, in the people who need our help, in the people who care for us. But he comes to us too in the people we ignore, in the people we despise, in the people that we wrong or hurt. Pray that you may recognize whenever he comes to you – and however he comes – and welcome him.



Wednesday 10th December

A wreathed garland of deserved praise,
Of praise deserved, unto Thee I give,
I give to Thee, who knowest all my ways,
My crooked winding ways, wherein I live, –
Wherein I die, not live; for life is straight,
Straight as a line, and ever tends to Thee,
To Thee, who art more far above deceit,
Than deceit seems above simplicity.
Give me simplicity, that I may live,
So live and like, that I may know Thy ways,
Know them and practise them: then shall I give
For this poor wreath, give Thee a crown of praise.

A Wreath
George Herbert (1593-1633)

Paul writes that *the wages of sin is death* (Rm. 6.23). We all live in sin and need to repent. The reward for repentance is great. Paul goes on to write in the same verse, *but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*. Pray that God will reveal your sinfulness to you and give you grace to repent.



Thursday 11th December

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 comes, the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure;
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich 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 (1702-1751)

Advent is a season full of hope. Although Christ comes as judge he comes also as deliverer for all the faithful. When Jesus is in the synagogue in Nazareth he reads from the prophet Isaiah, *he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour* (Lk. 4.18; Is. 61.1-2). Pray that God will set you free from sin that you may greet Christ with joy when he comes.



Friday 12th December

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss –

This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction –

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever –

This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful counsellor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world –

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers –

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history –

–

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshippers

shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ – the life of the world.

Advent Credo, from Testimony: The Word made Flesh
Daniel Berrigan SJ

These are the things we believe; these are the things that give us hope. God has acted to make the world the better place it can be; God has acted to make us the better people we can be. Advent is about the victory of hope over despair and the expression of our belief in that hope. Praise God that he has made the triumph of good over evil possible – that death is defeated by life.

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Saturday 13th December

O Lord our God,
make us watchful and keep us faithful,
as we await the coming of your Son our Lord;
that when he shall appear,
he may not find us sleeping in sin,
but active in his service and joyful in his praise,
for the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Gelasian Sacramentary (8th Century)

Jesus told the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Mt. 25.1-13) to emphasise the importance of being prepared for the coming of the Lord. Unless we are watchful and ready it is so easy to slip into sin. We must be alert and conscious of our actions and the outcome of all that we do. Self examination and penitence are vital to ensure that we do not *sleep in sin*. Pray that God will make you aware of how your actions affect others – and yourself – and give you grace to amend your life where necessary.



Third Sunday in Advent – 14th December

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!

The Lord has taken away the judgements against you,
he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.

The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;

he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3.14-17

The Old Testament has many passages, of which this is one, in which the hope is expressed that God will be in the midst of his people. His presence will bring forgiveness, justification and protection. When God is among his people they have nothing to fear. Christians have the same belief about the presence of Christ. We look forward to his coming, but we know he is with us now as well. Give thanks today for the presence of Christ with you and pray for grace to know his presence always.



Monday 15th December

Awaken me, Lord
To your light,
Open my eyes
To your presence.

Awaken me, Lord
To your love,
Open my heart
To your indwelling.

Awaken me, Lord
To your life,
Open my mind
To your abiding.

Awaken me, Lord
To your purpose,
Open my will
To your guiding.

From Tides and Seasons, Modern prayers in the Celtic tradition
David Adam

Jesus, in his Summary of the Law, instructed his disciples to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself* (Lk. 10.27). Every part of our being should love the Lord and rejoice in his presence. Pray for grace to know and love God in every part of your life.



Tuesday 16th December

‘Behold, I am coming soon’, says the Lord,
‘and bringing my reward with me,
to give to everyone according to their deeds.

‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last,
the beginning and the end.’

Blessed are those who do God’s commandments,
that they may have the right to the tree of life,
and may enter into the city through the gates.

‘I, Jesus, have sent my angel to you,
with this testimony for all the churches.

‘I am the root and the offspring of David,
I am the bright morning star.’

‘Come!’ say the Spirit and the Bride;
‘Come!’ let each hearer reply.

Come forward, you who are thirsty,
let those who desire take the water of life as a gift.

Revelation 22.12-14,16,17

No book in the New Testament is as full of hope as the *Revelation of John*. Read this passage through and let it inspire your prayers today. Pray that God will give you grace to look forward eagerly to the coming of Christ. Ask him to make you ready for the day of judgement that it may be a day of joy.



Wednesday 17th December

O Sapientia

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,
reaching from one end to the other mightily,
and sweetly ordering all things:
Come and teach us the way of prudence.

cf Ecclesiasticus 24.3; Wisdom 8.1

The *Advent Antiphons* which are said before and after the *Magnificat* at Evening Prayer from today until 23rd December have been in use since at least the sixth century.

Today, reflect on the wisdom of God. Consider the way in which the world is ordered for the good of all creatures and how God has given his human creation *dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.* (Gen. 1.28) Pray that humankind might use that authority with *prudence*.



Thursday 18th December

O Adonai

O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel,
who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush
and gave him the law on Sinai:
Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.

cf Exodus 3.2; 24.12

Adonai means *Lord*. The word is used in place of the name of God (יהוה in Hebrew, YHWH or Yahweh in English), which was never spoken, when reading the Old Testament.

Think about what it means to say that God is Lord of all. When Moses met God at the burning bush (Ex. 3.1-6) remember that he was told to keep his distance and to remove his sandals because the place where he was standing was *holy ground*. Through Jesus we are able to approach God. The challenge for us is to be found worthy to stand in God's presence. That is only possible through God's grace and the forgiveness and redemption which is offered to us through Jesus. Pray that you may recognize your need of Christ's grace to make you worthy to be in the presence of God.



Friday 19th December

O Radix Jesse

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples;
before you kings will shut their mouths,
to you the nations will make their prayer:
Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.

cf Isaiah 11.10; 45.14; 52.15; Romans 15.12

Isaiah says (Is. 11.1) that *a shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots*. Christians believe that Jesus is that *shoot* and *branch*. God has not abandoned his Chosen People but has brought out of them the Saviour who delivers us from sin and death. Pray that Jesus will be a sign to you of God's saving power and love for his people.



Saturday 20th December

O Clavis David

O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel;

you open and no one can shut;

you shut and no one can open:

Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house,

those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

cf Isaiah 22.22; 42.7

In John's gospel we hear that Jesus is the *Way* (Jn 14.6) to the Father. He has opened for us a way into heaven. John also tells us that Jesus said that he is the gate to the sheepfold (Jn 10.9). From what in your life do you need Jesus to set you free? What is your prison? Where is your darkness? Pray that Jesus, the Key of David, will open the door and set you free.



Fourth Sunday in Advent – 21st December

O Oriens

O Morning Star,
splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness:
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.

cf Malachi 4.2

Jesus said, *I am the Light of the World.* (Jn 8.12) and promised that those who believe in him would *never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.* Who do you know who needs the light of Christ to shine on them to lead them out of darkness? Pray for them.

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Monday 22nd December

O Rex Gentium

O King of the nations, and their desire,
the cornerstone making both one:
Come and save the human race,
which you fashioned from clay.

cf Isaiah 28.16; Ephesians 2.14

God is the creator, sustainer and King of the world. In him alone the world's true peace can be found. We see a world in need of salvation because of human sinfulness. Pray for situations in the world which need God's love to transform them; and pray for forgiveness of your own sins.



Tuesday 23rd December

O Emmanuel

O Emmanuel, our King and our lawgiver,
the hope of the nations and their Saviour:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.

cf Isaiah 7.14

Emmanuel means *God-with-us*. The heroes of faith have all known the presence of God in their lives and we know it when our faith seems easiest. Frequently though we find God's presence in our lives and in the world difficult to discern. Pray, that as we approach the celebration of Christ's birth and incarnation you may know God's presence with you to bring you hope and salvation.



Christmas Eve – 24th December

The Almighty himself, Creator of the universe,
the God whom no eye can discern,
has sent down from heaven his very own Truth,
his holy Word,
to be planted in the heart of the human race.

To do this, one might have imagined he would send
some servant, some angel, some prince.
But no. He has sent
the very Artificer and Constructor of the universe,
through whom the heavens were made,
and the seas set within their bounds,
whose word is obeyed by the very elements of creation,
who assigns the sun the limits of its course by day,
and commands the moon to unveil its beams by night,
and orders the obedient stars to circle the heavens.
He is the Ordainer, Disposer and Ruler of all things,
of all that is in heaven and earth,
of the seas and all that they contain,
of fire, and air, And the deep,
of all that is above and below and in between.
Such is the Messenger God sent to the human race.

One might have imagined that his coming
would be in power, terror and awesomeness.
But no. His coming was in gentleness and humility.
God sent him as a king might send his own son,
and he came among us as a fellow human being.
For God would save us by persuasion, not by compulsion,

(there is no compulsion to be found in God)
and he sent him not to judge us, but out of love.

Epistle to Diognetus (anon. 2nd Century)

The miracle of the Incarnation lies in more than just the physical events which we celebrate at Christmas. The wonder of Christmas is that God should come among us as a human being to save us. His own Son is the means by which he sets us free from sin and calls us to new life. *God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us (Rm. 5.8).* As the celebration of Christmas begins ask God to bless you with the knowledge of his love revealed in Jesus Christ.



Christmas Day – 25th December

Come, all you unbelieving men,
I'm glad to see you today:
I'll tell you of a miracle
two thousand years away.

*We can't believe a miracle
two thousand years away
but only a miracle
that we can see today.*

The shepherds came to a cattle shed
two thousand years away,
and they found the Son of God
a-lying in the hay.

*We can't believe in a Son of God
two thousand years away
but only in a Son of God
that we can see today.*

They won't believe in the Bible now,
they want to touch and see;
but Matthew, Mark and Luke and John
were good enough for me.

*They're good enough for the Pope of Rome,
and Billy Graham and you,
but you can't believe what you can't believe
so what are we to do.*

Christ was born in a cattle shed

two thousand years away,
but still he can be born again
in you and me today.

*Show us where the Son of God
is being born today.*

Sydney Carter (1915-2004)

Christmas is full of meaning for us. But it is not a story about something that happened two thousand years ago. It is something that has happened – and is happening – in our lives today. Thank God today for the gift of his Son. Pray today that Jesus will be revealed in the world through your life and lives of all who believe in him.

Reveal where the Son of God is being born today.

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