The Coming of the Light

Reflections and Prayers for Advent and into Christmas

Peter M Down
Introduction
The season of Advent is loved by many Christians but sadly for many of us it becomes a hectic time of preparation for our family celebrations at Christmas. These readings, reflections and prayers are presented to help us to spend a few minutes each day in focussing our thoughts upon what God might have to say to us as we prepare and begin to celebrate the birth of his Son.
Each day offers a short reading from scripture followed by a reflection on that reading. It ends with a suggestion for prayer.
Use these reflections as feels best to you. You might want to read the bible passage two or three times first and then use the reflection.
The readings focus on the Advent themes of waiting, preparation, light in the darkness, and the coming of the promised Messiah. I am indebted to the website Catholic Online (catholic.org) for the cycle of readings.
Fr Peter Down

Join a discussion each day of issues raised by these reflections on Facebook or Google+. There are links via the Benefice website (fourcrosses.weebly.com).

December 1 – Advent Sunday

Reading – Romans 13.11-14

The night is far gone, the day is near. Dawn is a hopeful time of day. With dawn the past can be put behind us. Everything is now possible. We start with a blank canvas. The day that lies ahead is ours to shape. Of course, it is always possible that we will make the same old mistakes. We could repeat the past. That is why we must put on the Lord Jesus Christ. That way today becomes his day. We give control of our lives to him.
Prayer

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer

December 2

Reading – 1 Corinthians 1.3-9

In every way you have been enriched in him. Jesus makes us what we are. It's a process that has never been completed. It happens a step at a time. With every repentance, with every forgiveness, with every grace given and received we change a little. Sometimes we don't even notice. But there is a goal - so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's when the transformation will be complete.

Prayer

Lord, lead us to our heavenly home
by single steps of self-restraint
and deeds of righteousness;
through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer

December 3

Reading – Mark 13.33-37

Beware, keep alert. Keeping alert is important. If we don't we might miss something. It might be something important. We might never know that we've missed it – until it's too late. It's like being prepared – we might not notice until it's too late. You do not know when the master of the house will come. We dare not be asleep, or not paying attention, when Jesus comes to us.
Prayer

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;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*

December 4

Reading – *John 1.1-5*

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*
Darkness hides things. It keeps everything out of sight. Sometimes we like to keep things hidden; things we're ashamed of; things we don't want anybody else to see. Sometimes, in our lives the darkness takes over. But nothing can be hidden from God. His light cannot be overcome. His light reveals – and heals. That is why the darkness cannot overcome it.

Prayer

Hail, gladdening Light, of his pure glory poured
who is the immortal Father, heavenly, blest,
holiest of holies, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now we are come to the sun’s hour of rest,
the lights of evening round us shine,
we hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine.
Worthiest art thou at all times to be sung
with undefilèd tongue,
Son of our God, giver of life, alone:
therefore in all the world thy glories, Lord, they own.

Greek, tr. John Keble

December 5

Reading – John 1.6-9

He came as a witness to testify to the light. In every generation the light needs the testimony of those who have been drawn to it. We must be called to the light or else we may continue to live in our own darkness – a darkness which always holds us back. The darkness holds us back. The light can be frightening though. We need the testimony to assure us that it is safe to come to it.

Prayer

Blessed are you, Lord God, creator of day and night: to you be praise and glory for ever.
As darkness falls you renew your promise to reveal among us the light of your presence. By the light of Christ, your living Word, dispel the darkness of our hearts that we may walk as children of light and sing your praise throughout the world.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

Common Worship: Daily Prayer
December 6

Reading – Jeremiah 33.14-16

He shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. We look for justice and righteousness. God, who sends his light, hears our cry and acts. David was a just and righteous king. His descendant will share those qualities. He will be the answer to our prayers. But he will be our judge too. But he comes to save – that is why we welcome him.

Prayer

Marana tha! Our Lord, come!

1 Corinthians 16.22

December 7

Reading – Isaiah 60.19-22

Your days of mourning shall be ended. The light of God brings hope, peace, joy. Sorrow is ended because the love of God is seen clearly. No darkness can ever cast its shadow. With God's light there is no need of other sources of light – no candle, no electric light, no moon, no sun. God will be our light – the light which brings true life.

Prayer

From your royal throne, O God, you sent your living Word to pierce the gloom of oppression; so, in our souls’ night, come with your saving help and penetrate our darkness with the rays of your glory in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer
December 8 – The Second Sunday of Advent

Reading – Romans 15.4-13

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. The prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. Peace and joy are his gifts to us. Peace such as the world cannot give. He comes for all. Jew and Gentile; slave and free; female and male; black and white; rich and poor. Joy and peace comes only with believing in him. Joy and peace comes only when we are one in him.

Prayer

We are all one in Christ Jesus.
We belong to him through faith,
heirs of the promise of the Spirit of peace.

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England

December 9

Reading – Psalm 43.3-6

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? God will represent me to vindicate me. He will stand up for me. He will let the truth be known – he will make it known. Nothing is hidden from him. His light shines to reveal the truth. The only response is worship and praise. How can I be downcast, how can I be sorry when God is on my side?

Prayer

Come, creator Spirit, light and truth;
bring us to the altar of life
and renew our joy and gladness
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer
December 10

Reading – Psalm 27.1-4

_The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?_ All I can ask of the Lord is to be found worthy to be in his presence. If he grants that privilege to me I will want for nothing. Nothing else can ever matter. No one can take that away from me. The Lord is mine, and I am the Lord's. That is to be in heaven; that is to know God fully.

Prayer

God, our light and our salvation, illuminate our lives, that we may see your goodness in the land of the living, and, looking on your beauty, may be changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord.  

*Common Worship: Daily Prayer*

December 11

Reading – Psalm 119.105-106

_Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path._ All God asks of us is obedience. That we do his will. That we follow his word. That we listen to what he says. It sounds so easy, so straightforward. But we know that is not really how it is. We know how easily we can be led astray. We know how attractive the wrong path seems. But God has given us his word – to lighten the path and make it clear before us.

Prayer

And now we give you thanks because the wisdom of your word sustains all things and reveals you to us in your fullness.  

*New Patterns for Worship*
December 12

**Reading** – John 12.35-36

*If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.* The only certainty we have is in God. How else could we know who we are or where we are going? His light reveals the path before us. His light reveals the choices we make in life. His light draws us to him. His light allows us to see ourselves as we are.

**Prayer**

Almighty Father,
whose Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world:
may your people,
illumined by your word and sacraments,
shine with the radiance of his glory,
that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed
to the ends of the earth;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

*Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*

December 13

**Reading** – Ephesians 5.6-14

*Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*

Having been called by God we are no longer people of the darkness. We are people of the light. Now we must shun the darkness. We must hold to the light. Just as the light has shone on us, so it will shine in us. Our lives will reveal the light which is in us.
“Sleepers, wake!” the watch cry pealeth,
While slumber deep each eyelid sealeth:
Awake, Jerusalem, awake!
Midnight’s solemn hour is tolling,
And seraph-notes are onward rolling;
They call on us our part to take.
Come forth, ye virgins wise:
The Bridegroom comes, arise!
Alleluia! Each lamp be bright with ready light
To grace the marriage feast tonight.

Zion hears the voice that singeth
With sudden joy her glad heart springeth,
At once she wakes, she stands arrayed:
Her Light is come, her Star ascending,
Lo, girt with truth, with mercy blending,
Her Bridegroom there, so long delayed.
All hail! God’s glorious Son,
All hail! our joy and crown,
Alleluia! The joyful call we answer all,
And follow to the bridal hall.

Praise to Him Who goes before us!
Let men and angels join in chorus,
Let harp and cymbal add their sound.
Twelve the gates, a pearl each portal:
We haste to join the choir immortal
Within the Holy City’s bound.
Ear ne’er heard aught like this,
Nor heart conceived such bliss.
Alleluia! We raise the song, we swell the throng,
To praise Thee ages all along.

Philipp Nicolai, tr. From the German by Frances E. Cox
December 14

Reading – 1 Peter 2.5-9

See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious. God is building a new creation. Christ is the cornerstone. Those who believe are being built into the new creation. We have come to the light. We have been purified and cleansed by the light. We will never be put to shame. Our whole life is to be found in him.

Prayer

O Lord of hosts,  
purify our hearts  
that the King of glory may come in,  
your Son, Jesus our redeemer.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer

December 15 – The Third Sunday of Advent

Reading – Isaiah 60.1-3

The Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. The light reveals the glory of the Lord. His glory overwhelms us. His glory empowers us. His glory lights the way for us – to him, and to heaven. When we turn to his glory his glory will be revealed in us. When we are in Christ, we reveal Christ to the world.
Prayer

We praise you, O God,
we acclaim you as the Lord;
all creation worships you,
the Father everlasting.
To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,
the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise:
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer

December 16

Reading – 2 Corinthians 4.3-6

We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. The light reveals the truth. Christ is revealed to us. He is not veiled. We can see him as he is – in the light. When we proclaim Jesus we invite others to come to the light. We remove the veil from their minds. We allow them to come to the light.

Prayer

Eternal God, giver of love and power,
your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:
confirm us in this mission,
and help us to live the good news we proclaim;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

New Patterns for Worship
December 17

Reading – 1 John 1.4-7

If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true. There is a world of difference between light and darkness. Darkness cuts us off from God; light brings us close to him. Darkness means that we live in sin; light means that we have our sins forgiven, and we are one with God – and one with all his people.

Prayer

In the tender mercy of our God, the dayspring from on high shall break upon us, to give light to those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

New Patterns for Worship

December 18

Reading – John 3.16-21

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. The coming of the light is God's gift to us – the gift of life. We judge ourselves – by how we respond to his light. If we choose darkness we can have no life; if we choose the light we have the fullness of life. If we live in sin we cannot bear the light, but the moment we repent the light gives us life.
Prayer

Free us, God of mercy,  
from all that keeps us from you;  
relieve the misery of the anxious and the ashamed  
and fill us with the hope of peace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer

December 19

Reading – Isaiah 40.1-11

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it.  
God's saving work cannot remain hidden. It will be proclaimed from the  
high mountains; a way will be prepared; all people will see the Lord's  
glory. How will they respond? How will we respond? Who will come to  
him? Who will hide from him?

Prayer

God, our light and our salvation,  
illuminate our lives,  
that we may see your goodness in the land of the living,  
and, looking on your beauty,  
may be changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer
December 20

Reading – John 9.1-7

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ Christ is the light of the world, and that light brings healing; that light reveals the glory of God. The world needs Christ's light. How can Christ's light remain in the world today if not though us. Those of us who have come to the light must share the light in the world today. God's glory must continue to be revealed.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
light of the nations and glory of Israel:
make your home among us,
and present us pure and holy
to your heavenly Father,
your God, and our God.

Common Worship: Additional Collects

December 21

Reading – Luke 3.1-6

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The message must be heard; the light must be revealed. God sent a forerunner to prepare the way; to make the people ready. John called on people to repent in readiness for the coming of the light. The coming of the light requires our repentance, or else we remain in the darkness.
Prayer

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.

Common Worship: Additional Collects

December 22 – The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Reading – Isaiah 11.1-10

With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. The coming of the light is a time of judgement. The judgement will be just – not like human justice, but with the righteousness of God. The judgement, like the light, will bring healing and wholeness. It reveals what is good – and what is evil. The whole creation will be made whole.

Prayer

Free us, righteous God, from all oppression,
and bring justice to the nations,
that all the world may know you
as King of kings and Lord of lords,
now and for ever.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer
December 23

**Reading** – *Zephaniah 3.14-17*

*Rejoice and exult with all your heart.* Those who welcome the light; those who are ready for the coming judgement can rejoice. The Lord comes to bring security, justice, new life and hope. No more will God's people live in fear; no more will disaster threaten their lives. God gift is peace – peace such as the world can never give.

**Prayer**

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

*Common Worship: Times and Seasons*

December 24 – Christmas Eve

**Reading** – *Matthew 1.18-25*

*She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus.* The promise is fulfilled. The light is coming into the world. Emmanuel, God is with us. To judge, to cleanse, to heal, to bring life. There can be a new beginning – for sinners, and for the world.

**Prayer**

Almighty God, as we prepare with joy to celebrate the gift of the Christ-child, embrace the earth with your glory and be for us a living hope in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Common Worship: Additional Collects*
December 25 – Christmas Day

Reading – Luke 2.8-20

The glory of the Lord shone around them. On the mountainside – and in the stable – the glory of the Lord shone around. The glory of the Lord is irresistible to the shepherds; it is irresistible to Mary and Joseph; it is irresistible to us – once we have seen it. Who could refuse this call?

Prayer

Eternal God,
who made this most holy night
to shine with the brightness of your one true light:
bring us, who have known the revelation of that light on earth,
to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England

December 26

Reading – Matthew 4.14-16

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. The words, the hope, of the prophets is fulfilled. The light is revealed to all the world. It cannot be hidden. The darkness cannot overcome it. God will not be refused. His light is filling the whole world.
Prayer

God our Father,
whose Word has come among us
in the Holy Child of Bethlehem:
may the light of faith illumine our hearts
and shine in our words and deeds;
through him who is Christ the Lord.

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England

December 27

Reading – Isaiah 2.1-5

Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! Now we are drawn to the light. Now we are called to follow Christ. Now we are called to bring others with us. If we are obedient to the call the world will be changed for ever. In Christ nothing can ever be the same. It will be changed – conformed to the will, and the ways, of God.

Prayer

In the face of Jesus Christ
your light and glory have blazed forth,
O God of all the nations;
with all your people,
may we make known your grace
and walk in the ways of peace;
for your name’s sake.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer
December 28

Reading – Luke 2.25-33

A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. The light, the glory is for the whole world. What we have watched and waited for is come. It cannot be taken away. The light, once in our lives, remains. It is the sign of a God who keeps his promises.

Prayer

King of the universe,
you show the bright glory of your reign
in acts of mercy and enduring love;
raise the spirits of the downcast
and restore those who have fallen away,
that we may sing for ever of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer

In addition to this booklet these daily reflections are available to download from the Benefice website (fourcrosses.weebly.com) as a pdf, or for eBook readers (epub or Kindle). They will also be posted each day on the Benefice Facebook and Google+ pages (links to these are on the Benefice website) where you can join in a discussion if you wish (registration required).

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