



JOEL
AMOS
HOSEA
JONAH
MICAH
NAHUM
OBADIAH
MALACHI
HABAKKUK
ZECHARIAH
ZEPHANIAH
HAGGAI

ADVENT 2025

**NEAR AND
HASTENING
FAST**



PREFACE

"It's come 'round quick this year! Are you ready?" I seem to hear this kind of thing quite a lot in Advent. Once December starts, the countdown to the big day is on and the rush to get ready for Christmas is really upon us. Because we all know, that to really get the most out of any big day—be that Christmas, a wedding, or something else—we need to be prepared. We need to be ready.

This is what Advent is all about. Not only getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, but even more so, making sure we're ready for Jesus' future return. That's why we're focussing this year's Advent Devotional on the twelve books we often call the Minor Prophets. While we tend to think of these writings as twelve short books, the earliest manuscripts suggest that they were written and received on one single scroll, which later tradition simply called 'the Twelve' or 'Twelve Prophets'.

Their strange names, brevity, and confusing content probably explain the relative obscurity of the Twelve in today's church. I remember some years ago frantically trying to locate Obadiah in my pew Bible at a church service. I found it just in time to hear the words, "Here ends the reading"! In generations past, however, these writings were central to our faith and hugely influential upon the New Testament. Their striking imagery and colourful language disturb and delight, challenge and comfort, motivate and move.

When read together, the Twelve Prophets emphasise a big day that is coming 'round quick. In the words of Zephaniah, '*The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast*' (1:14) hence the title of our devotional. The Twelve anticipates the great day(s) when the LORD

Image opposite: *The Prophet Amos* (c. 1470), Attributed to Baccio Baldini, Italian, c. 1436-1487, Art Institute of Chicago.

will intervene and act. Whether this intervention means salvation or judgement for Israel and/or the nations is complicated. In fact one tension running throughout the Twelve is how the LORD can be both *'a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,'* and yet also *'by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity... to the third and the fourth generation'* (Exod 34:6-7; cf. Hos 1:6-8; 2:1; Joel 2:13-14; Jon 4:2; Mic 7:18-20; Nah 1:2-3; Mal 1:9)?

The advent of Jesus Christ resolves something of this tension. Advent is a season when we prepare to celebrate the day of God's supreme intervention of justice and mercy in the incarnation of his Son and look forward with eager expectation to another great day when Christ returns in judgement and salvation. Christ's return is *'near and hastening fast.'* So, we need to make sure we're ready. Advent is a time of preparation and self-examination to make sure we are. But how can we be ready? What does it take to be prepared for this big day?

The Twelve encourages us to be prepared for the great Day of the Lord by returning to the LORD in repentance. Again and again, the Twelve confronts God's people with their sin and relays His urgent call, *'Return to me, and I will return to you'* (Zec 1:3; Mal 3:7). Hearers are encouraged to place their hope in the day when God's King is restored and the people *'return and seek the LORD their God, and David their King'* (Hos 3:5). It is a call we hear afresh with the advent of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, *'Repent [i.e. return] for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'* (Matt 3:2; 4:17).

This Advent, as we prepare for the big day of Christ's return in judgement and salvation by examining ourselves and returning to him, let's attend to the message of the Twelve and,

*May the bones of the Twelve Prophets
send forth new life from where they lie,
for they comforted the people of Jacob
and delivered them with confident hope.*

Ecclesiasticus 49:10

The Revd Dr Andy Meeson, Bishop's Chaplain.

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WEEK 1 - SUNDAY 30TH NOVEMBER

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

 **READ**
Hosea 1:2-11

'In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', it shall be said to them, 'Sons of the living God.' **Hosea 1:10**

Last year, I started watching *The Good Wife*, a U.S. drama about a politician's wife who returns to her job as a defence attorney after her husband is jailed for a sex and corruption scandal. What fascinates me most isn't just the courtroom drama, but the inner conflict I feel as I find myself cheering for characters who make choices that completely contradict my own moral compass.

The story of Hosea—especially the first three chapters—brings up the same kind of discomfort. It's a complex and unsettling drama. I know it's a metaphor—Gomer represents Israel's unfaithfulness to God—but I still feel torn. On one hand I feel outrage on Hosea's behalf. On the other, I struggle with the patriarchal possession of women and the complete absence of Gomer's voice. Then there are their children—innocent, yet given names like God Scatters, Not Loved, and Not My People—used as public signs of God's judgement and reminders of the broken relationship between God and Israel.

So I find myself emotionally tangled. And yet—despite all that—it's a powerful story. It doesn't just show the relationship between God and Israel but also, when I'm not too busy being outraged, the relationship between God and myself.

After the third child is named, the story shifts. God's judgement gives way to a promise of hope and we see God's incredible faithfulness. This is where Hosea meets Advent. Just as Israel waited in the tension between judgement and restoration, Advent invites us to wait in hope for Christ—who steps into our brokenness and brings healing. In the middle of my complex reactions to Hosea, I have to remember: I'm not just watching from the outside. I am Gomer. We all are. And yet, Christ comes for us to bring us back to being 'sons of the living God' (v.10b).

LET US PRAY

God of mercy, in this season of waiting, help us to see ourselves clearly—not just as bystanders, but as those who wander. Thank You for stepping into our brokenness and calling us back to You. As we wait for Christ's coming, help us to trust that even in our wandering, you are always drawing us home. Amen.

Sarah Marston, Making Disciples Coordinator.

MONDAY 1ST DECEMBER

 **READ**
Hosea 6:1-10

'Come, let us return to the LORD.'
Hosea 6:1

As Christmas approaches, many of us will be thinking about where we are going to have our Christmas dinner. Some of you may be returning to your parents' houses for that occasion. Every home has its own unwritten rules, so when you are at your parents' house, you do things the way that it has always been done there, out of respect and also to keep the peace!

In the first part of today's reading (vv.1-3), we find an invitation for Israel to return to the Lord to find reconciliation and restoration. Because of Israel's sin, the Lord would withdraw from her and punish her until in distress she will seek God and beg for His favour. To return is not just going back to the place where God is to be found, but also to return to the ways of a righteous and holy God. In other words, repentance – turning away from sin back to living by God's rules. If we return to God on our own terms, unwilling to turn from our sinful ways, we will not receive God's blessings.

However, at this juncture in the narrative of Hosea, Israel was not yet ready to return to God's way of doing things. Consequently, God had some very harsh words to say to her in the verses that follow (vv.4-10). In judgement, God lists out the "crimes" of Israel which included unfaithfulness and idolatry, the worship of other gods, widespread robbery and murder. The main issue was Israel's love for God was that it was not 'steadfast' (v.6). It was like a disappearing cloud or morning dew.

What about us today? Is there a sense in which we need to return to the Lord? Is our love for Him steadfast and unwavering or have we strayed away from God?

Let us look honestly at our own hearts and if we have strayed away from putting God first, then, let us return to the Lord with true repentance. By the blood of Christ, we will find healing (v.1), revival (v.2) and refreshment (v.3). This is as sure as the sun rises everyday (v.3).

LET US PRAY

Loving Lord, thank You that Your love is steadfast. Please help us to turn back to You with true repentance, and help our love for You to become increasingly steadfast. Amen.

Kenneth Lee, Lay-member of St Barnabas Church, Darwen.

TUESDAY 2ND DECEMBER



READ

Hosea 11:1-11

'I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.' **Hosea 11:9**

Last week we witnessed a great solemnity in the secular-liturgical calendar of our age. Black Friday was once again celebrated by humans, whom God has made in His image, shoving their fellow image-bearers aside as they strove to grab the best bargain. At the same time across the world innumerable human lives were offered up as sacrifices to the gods of self-interest, hatred, tyranny, and tribe.

Looking at our world today compared to that of the Prophet Hosea, everything seems radically transformed. Yet at the same time the human heart is so unchanged. In the book of Hosea, the people God calls 'my son' put their faith in the gods of the nations. They choose the simple path of the gods of their age over the more inscrutable, upside-down ways of the God of Israel. Can we truly say that in our nation, our church, our own hearts, we are so much better than what Hosea decried?

Yet despite human idolatry and sin, there is hope. Advent is usually articulated as a season of waiting. Yet it must be a season of waiting in hope, just as the Israelites waited in hope for the Messiah. For the God we worship is one who is loving and good as Hosea tells us. He is a God who nurtured Israel like a mother; a God who in the midst of our sin and idolatry waits with compassion, *'warm and tender'* (v.8) for humanity; a God who draws us with *'bands of love'* (v.4).

Most of all there is hope because God is not like us: He is 'God and no mortal' (v.9). It is because He is God and without sin that He could take on our mortality and die to it for us, so that we mortals might be freed from our state of corruption and come to share in God's life. With St Athanasius we affirm our hope that the 'Son of God became man so that we might become god'. Advent invites us by God's power to turn away from unfulfilling idols and turn fully to this hope.

**LET US
PRAY**

Almighty God, in this Advent season, renew our hope in Your Son Jesus Christ and cast out the idols of our hearts that we might be given more fully to Your service. Amen.

The Revd Calum Mullet, Assistant Curate, St George the Martyr, Preston.

WEDNESDAY 3RD DECEMBER



READ

Hosea 14:1-9

'I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.'
Hosea 14:4

At this time of year creation is barren and desolate. The natural world abounds with dead and decaying things. There is more darkness than light. Though we know spring is coming, it feels a long time away. Like a glimmer of hope, out of sight that can't be grasped. I wonder if that's a little how it felt for the people of God in Hosea's time. Life was grim, despairing and bleak. Yet they kept hearing that things could be better. A promise of a future when there would be dew to cause abundance, fine fragrances, blossom on the vine, growth and beauty. A flourishing of life.

They had to act to get there. There had to be a turning to God. He urged and invited them to repentance but they had to respond. Notice that Hosea says the response needs words, *'Take words with you and return to the LORD'* (v.2). Empty, meaningless sacrifices that weren't accompanied by obedience were considered worthless by God. He wants them in wholehearted repentance and surrender to Him. And when they respond in repentance, He will meet them with grace, *'In you the orphan finds mercy'* (v.3).

This is not half-hearted love and acceptance, God will love them freely, heal their disloyalty and cause them to thrive. He promises shoots in the future, stability and new life. They will be a visible splendour, a desirable fragrance to attract others to God.

What an incredible invitation, open and available for each one of us today. No matter how barren we feel, how limpid and insignificant we think our lives are, there is hope. There is one who longs to have us live beneath His shadow. Experiencing and embracing His love, compassion, and tenderness. Today I invite you to speak your words to Him, to turn to Him, to rest in the assurance of His presence in the darkness as in the light.

**LET US
PRAY**

Father God, thank You that under Your shadow we find safety, security, love, and acceptance. Soften our hard hearts that we might turn to You to find hope and a future. Amen.

**The Revd Hannah Boyd, Vicar of All Saints, Higher Walton
& Holy Trinity, Hoghton.**

THURSDAY 4TH DECEMBER

 **READ**
Joel 1:13-2:2

'Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near' Joel 2:1

The prophet Joel's words cut through the centuries, landing in our Advent with startling urgency. He speaks to a world in crisis, where the familiar rhythms of harvest and celebration have broken down. As we look around our own world in 2025, we might recognise a similar unease. Headlines speak of climate concerns, of shifting global tensions, and of a lingering collective fatigue from years of disruption. It can feel like a long, grey winter for the soul, where hope feels fragile.

Joel's call, however, isn't meant to paralyse us with fear. It's a spiritual alarm clock, rousing us from complacency. Think of the sudden, shared focus in a community when a great storm is forecast. We secure shutters, check on neighbours, and gather essentials. There's a shared, purposeful energy. Advent is our spiritual storm-watch. This is our time to 'secure our souls' through repentance, prayer, and quiet preparation.

The 'day of the Lord' Joel announces is not merely a day of judgement, but a day of arrival. It is the coming of the King. The same urgency that calls us to clear the clutter from our hearts is the urgency of a household preparing for the most honoured guest. We sweep away the dust of old grudges and make room for joy. We straighten the crooked paths of our habits to welcome His grace.

This is the joyful paradox of Advent. The seriousness of our preparation is matched only by the brilliance of our hope. The one who is coming is Jesus, the one who shares our fragile humanity and our world's anxieties. He comes not to condemn, but to save; not to overwhelm, but to dwell with us. In the midst of the world's noise and our own inner tremors, we can trust His promise to be with us. Our preparation is filled with a thrilling, confident expectation, for the Lord is near.

LET US PRAY

Lord, in our preparing, make our hearts ready for You. Amen.

The Revd Cornelius Ashgar, Assistant Curate, St Laurence's & St Peter's, Chorley.

FRIDAY 5TH DECEMBER

 **READ**
Joel 2:12-20

'rend your hearts and not your clothing.' Joel 2:13

As we move on through this time of Advent, as Christians looking forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus, we see how much Jesus has changed our understanding of the nature of God, from a god of wrath to one of doubtless love, through His sacrifice once and for all on the cross. Jesus shows us that God is indeed *'gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love'* (v.13) as Joel informs us himself.

But, at this time, without Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, these people had to cling on to hope of God's mercy. The perilous depiction of the land being invaded by locusts is the threat of being punished and abandoned to a terrible outcome by God. The threat is real; the hope is that He will never expose His people to harm.

But still, here we are, exposed to a similar threat – the terrors of the world in which we live. Without letting Jesus into our hearts, we are as exposed as the people in the land of Joel.

The message to us is that in order to truly benefit from the security, safety and love available to us today through our Lord Jesus, we still need to *'rend our hearts, not just our clothing.'* It is not enough just to put on an outward appearance of repentance. Through this, even though the fears of the world still abound, we can receive the benevolent love of God which He offers to the inhabitants of this land.

With God's help, if we are sincere, search our souls, and do away with the self-justifying voices in our heads that hold us back from delivering the mercy that God shows to His people in this passage, then we will have let Jesus be the change that He can be for the world, shown through us, this Advent, this Christmas, and always. Through *'rending our hearts,'* let us be more ready to welcome Jesus, when He comes.

LET US PRAY

Lord God, please help us confront our failings with sincerity and purity of heart, so that we can better know Your love and show Your love. Amen.

Sarah Marshall, R.E. Lead, St. Mary's C.E. Primary School, Mellor.

SATURDAY 6TH DECEMBER

 **READ**
Joel 2:25-32

'You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame.' Joel 2:27

What will happen when I die? This is a not infrequent question I get asked as a hospital chaplain. I wonder what you would say? It's questions like this that make me aware of what I do know, what I don't know, and where I put my trust.

Our passage from Joel today comes straight after God says He will restore the land and take pity on His people. The restoration, He says, will show the people that He is their God, that there is no other beside Him. It will be a sign that they can trust Him completely.

Is this something you feel like you can say? Do you feel like you trust God? Have you seen God at work in ways that mean you can say there is no other besides you God?

Many people I know tell stories of God answering their prayers, His miraculous intervention in their lives, their conviction that the words they read in the Bible are true beyond doubt. But there are also others I meet who aren't sure, they have doubts, they want to believe but don't feel convinced yet, something big has happened in their life and they're not sure what they can trust. Doubts, wobbles, big questions, I think that's all OK. It can be a really hard place to be in – you're not sure who or what to trust.

I think the second half of our passage offers some ways forwards. God declares, He will pour out His Spirit on all people. As Christians, we believe this promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when people from all backgrounds received the Holy Spirit. When we are troubled by doubt, when we are finding it hard to trust in God, I think this passage encourages us to ask God to send His Spirit on us, to give us dreams or prophecies, to see visions or wonders. Part of the role of the Holy Spirit is to help us in our faith. So I encourage you, when faith feels hard, to ask the Holy Spirit for an encouragement, that you will know the Lord as your God, and that there is no other beside Him.

**LET US
PRAY**

Holy Spirit, give us strength that we would trust more deeply in You. Amen.

The Revd Amy Bland, Chaplain, University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Trust.

WEEK 2 - SUNDAY 7TH DECEMBER THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

 **READ**
Amos 5:18-27

'But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a ever-flowing stream.'
Amos 5:24

Most of my childhood was spent in the North-East of Scotland, so there were many days that I started and ended the school day in darkness. I would often yearn for the long sunny days of summer. It may be that you are feeling that way now and glad for the cheer that Christmas lights bring to this time of year.

In our reading today a warning is given to those who are longing for the day of the Lord. A warning that when the day of Lord arrives it may not be what is expected. Although we can think of darkness as a physical force, it is also emotional and psychological. As we hear the news of wars, of disasters, of violence on our streets we would be forgiven for crying out to our God to come and bring peace, to bring justice. It may be that you face dark days in your own life: a husband or wife committing adultery, a toxic work environment, a loved one who is terminally ill. We cry out to God to make everything right again.

Amos warns about the answer to our cry. It may not be what we expect. He warns us that when the day of the Lord comes it will not be light that comes it will be darkness. It will be pitch black dark. Why? Because the people have walked away from God. They have gone through the motions in their precious with the Lord God Almighty. They have become a people of darkness rather than light.

I wonder what kind of relationship you have with your heavenly Father. Advent is an early Christmas present, an invitation to reflect on our walk with Jesus. Are there any areas of darkness in your life? What gets in the way of your relationship with God? Are you going through the motions?

Although Amos warns that the day of the Lord will be dark, we can be a people of hope and light because Jesus came to be the light of the world. As the Baptism service reminds us, 'God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and has given us a place with the saints in light. You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life.'

**LET US
PRAY**

May you shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The Revd Mary Ashton, Warden of Spiritual Directors.

MONDAY 8TH DECEMBER



READ

Amos 9:11-15

'On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old.'

Amos 9:11

The prophet Amos doesn't hold back. He speaks into a time when Israel has become unjust and corrupt – a society where the poor are trampled, worship is hollow, and leadership has lost its way. It's a sobering picture, and one that feels uncomfortably familiar.

In our own nation, we see signs of this brokenness. In schools, we feel this strain – underfunded, overstretched, and watching vital services for young people crumble. Nowhere is this more visible than in SEND provision, where children and families are left waiting, unheard, and unsupported.

But Amos doesn't end with judgement. He ends with hope.

Amos 9:11 is a turning point. God promises to rebuild the fallen house of David – a symbol of justice, mercy, and godly leadership. Christians believe this promise is fulfilled in Jesus, the descendant of David, who comes not just to restore a kingdom, but to heal hearts and renew society.

As Church schools, we live in this tension. We see the injustice – but we also hold onto hope. Hope in education, which opens minds, nurtures resilience, and dares young people to dream beyond their limits. And hope in Jesus, who shows us what true restoration looks like.

This Advent, as we wait and prepare, may we also act – praying that in the power of the Spirit, we might work to put right what is broken, and help rebuild a society that reflects God's kingdom.

**LET US
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus, raise up what is broken in us and in our world,
and help us to walk in Your ways of justice and peace.
Amen.*

Iain Parks, Director of Education.

TUESDAY 9TH DECEMBER



READ

Obadiah 15-21

'And the kingdom shall be the Lord's.'
Obadiah 21

"What goes around comes around", is a phrase I remember from childhood, usually when my sister or I had done something naughty. I think this saying sums up the essence of Obadiah's message. In verse 15 we read: *'As you have done, it shall be done to you'*. Obadiah is an angry prophet, highlighting the atrocities of warfare and plunder committed by the house of Esau – a neighbouring territory of Israel. Obadiah is saying they will get their comeuppance for relishing in the downfall and hardships of their neighbours.

Obadiah is consumed by rage as he wills destruction on the enemy. At times, maybe, like Obadiah, we are consumed by anger. When we see images on our TV screens of innocent people caught up in modern day atrocities, it is hard not to feel angry at injustices. Anger is sometimes necessary, but it can never be the end. We need to get beyond the anger, to discern the will of God, to encounter our living God in the midst of the upheavals of life.

In this season of Advent, as we await our Prince of Peace, we pray for peace in all the upheavals of our world, and in ourselves. This will often mean praying for those categorised as the enemy and offering forgiveness. Who do you need to pray for today? Which of your relationships need care and attention?

Obadiah ends his vision affirming the sovereignty of the Lord *'the kingdom shall be the Lord's'* (v.21). This declaration brings hope; God's kingdom is coming. No matter how bleak the situations we face, God will never abandon us. Even when we feel we are fumbling in the dark, or can't see the bigger picture, God's plan is being fulfilled, God's kingdom is coming.

Advent is a season of hope, when we rejoice in God's saving plan for all. God is merciful, compassionate and loving. May our prayer be that today and always, we embody these kingdom values, showing solidarity and care for humanity and God's wonderful world.

**The Revd Canon Tracy Charnock, Vicar, Holy Trinity & St Peter,
South Shore.**

WEDNESDAY 10TH DECEMBER

READ **Jonah 3:1-10**

'When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.' **Jonah 3:10**

As a child, I was an avid reader. One of my favourite books was the story of Jonah and the Whale. The colourful illustrations depicting a cosy whale's belly, complete with cheery-looking Jonah, left me questioning why Jonah had been so quick to escape this wonderful adventure. I know now, of course, that this was in fact a horrendous fate, one that Jonah suffered because he chose to run away from God's instruction to travel to the city of Nineveh, the home of his enemies the Ninevites, and to cry out against their wickedness.

In today's passage, we read what happened once Jonah was back on dry land. There are several things I love about this story, the first is that it reminds us that God is a God of second chances. At the start of Chapter 3 (v.1), we read that, 'God came to Jonah a second time'; God didn't give up on Jonah, and this time Jonah committed to the job, journeyed to the city and declared to all that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days. Despite Jonah's initial reticence to speak out, the citizens responded to his message by believing God and turning from their evil ways. Seeing how repentant they were, God changed His mind and did not destroy the city after all. And that's another thing that resonates with me, the forgiveness of God towards the people. God's compassion is so evident in this passage, and not only that, but we also learn that it is universal, extending even to enemies. We read of God's overwhelming love not just for His chosen people but for all people, even those considered wicked.

There is so much that challenges here; firstly, the magnitude of how incredibly loved we are. Just as He forgave the people of Nineveh, God wants a relationship with us; if we turn away from our wrongdoing and say sorry to Him, He welcomes us back with open arms. Finally, let's consider how much we demonstrate that same kindness to those around us, not just friends and family, but our 'enemies' too.

LET US PRAY

Lord, thank You that You are a God of second chances. Forgive our choices that fall short of Your best and help us to love others as You have loved us. Amen.

Rachel Rongong, Headteacher, St Michael's CE High School, Chorley.

THURSDAY 11TH DECEMBER

READ **Micah 5:1-5**

And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord [...] and he shall be the one of peace. **Micah 5:4-5a**

Advent is a time of writing Christmas cards in our house, and I am always keen to send cards which highlight the true meaning of Christmas. But I wonder if I'm the only one who shies away from sending cards which hail Jesus as the 'Prince of Peace' to those who don't have a Christian faith, because as we look around the world today we see a lot of conflict. We know that the Prince of Peace, or 'one of peace' (v.5) has come - but where is that peace?

Our reading today reminds us that Jesus has come as our shepherd (v.4). Jesus calls us all into His flock, where we will find peace (v.5) and security (v.4). Let's recognise the context in which this peace is experienced, however, this is not a peace which is detached from the realities of living in a broken world, as the NIV translates it: 'And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land' (v.5). The peace which Jesus brings is deeper and longer lasting than a lack of conflict. The peace which Jesus brings can even be experienced by those whose country have been invaded.

Jesus, 'the one of peace' (v.4), through His first Advent, brought a spiritual, a personal peace, which will last forever, which all those who choose to follow Jesus. Whilst I have personally not known the horrors of war, I have known un-peaceful and stressful situations, and have known 'the peace of God, which passes understanding' (Philippians 4:7).

During this Advent season, not only do we look back to when our Shepherd, the One of Peace, arrived that first Christmas, we eagerly look forward to when Jesus will return to bring pervasive, eternal peace, not just to the individuals who seek to follow Him now, but bringing an end to all wars, sufferings, and personal conflicts. It's impossible to sum up the depths of the peace Jesus brings in a simple Christmas card, but I pray that recognising Jesus as 'the One of peace' will bring hope and joy this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, thank You came the first Christmas as the One of peace. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in this Advent and Christmas, please help us to firmly place our trust in You, our true and lasting peace and security. Amen.

Natalie Print, Lay-member of St Leonard's, Langho.

FRIDAY 12TH DECEMBER



READ

Micah 6:1-8

'... what does the Lord require of you?'
Micah 6:8

After Christmas I always say, "next year it'll be different! Cards, gifts, all the preparations will be done earlier so I can spend Advent preparing myself spiritually." But it never goes to plan; there's always so much to do and time passes so quickly. All these extra tasks we impose on ourselves can eat up our time. The shopping, the decorating, fancy dress, and where on earth do I get a donkey for the nativity from?!

In our reading today, Micah draws us back to God, to all that He has done for His people and to the way He longs for us to live. He warns that empty rituals are not enough and then he says this (v.8):

*'He has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?'*

These beautiful words offer hope to people who have wandered away from God. They reach out and they call us back to Him. God doesn't just want sacrifices and offerings; He wants our hearts. The God of the universe wants to be close to us, to walk with us day by day—how amazing is that! And we find that as we stay close to Him, our hearts begin to desire what He requires, to do what's right and to love mercy.

This Advent do you want to draw closer to Him? Resolve to walk humbly with Him as He, in Jesus, walked humbly with us.

**LET US
PRAY**

*Father, may we be drawn back into Your loving embrace,
experiencing Your presence more intimately, this Advent.
Amen.*

The Revd Barbara Hunter, Vicar of the Parish of Oswaldtwistle.

SATURDAY 13TH DECEMBER



READ

Micah 7:7-9,18-20

*'But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will
wait for the God of my salvation; my God
will hear me.'* **Micah 7:7**

Two years ago, during Advent, my father, then 80, went into hospital for a quadruple heart bypass. We were deeply concerned about whether he could endure the operation, knowing there was a real risk he might not survive. After being prepared for surgery, he was taken from us to the operating theatre. That moment of separation brought a strange mix of emotions—worry for his wellbeing, yet comfort knowing he was in the right place receiving the care he needed.

Once the surgery was underway, all the family could do was wait. There is always that uncomfortable sinking feeling that comes with worry and the endless rehearsing of the outcomes of what might be, whether good or bad, as well as the hope of good news.

Our reading from the prophet Micah today captures that same emotional turmoil as he reflects on how we fall short of what God would want from us and deserve the justice from God for our sinful ways of believing we don't need God and serving our own wants and needs. You can almost feel the churning stomach as the words talk of waiting for the judgement of the Lord even though there is hope of salvation.

I remember vividly the phone call from my mother: my father was out of surgery, and everything had gone well. The relief and joy were overwhelming. The churning anxiety vanished, replaced by peace and gratitude. The closing verses of Micah 7:18-20 mirror that feeling, celebrating God's grace and forgiveness—our sins cast into the depths of the sea, never to be seen again.

Yet there's a key difference between my father's surgery and Micah's message. The outcome of the operation was uncertain. But with God, we have assurance and hope. We can be confident in the promise of forgiveness from a faithful God.

**LET US
PRAY**

*Heavenly Father, as I go through today give me confidence to
look to You and to wait for the God of my salvation knowing
that at all times and in all places, 'my God will hear me'. Amen.*

Canon Stephen Whittaker, Diocesan Secretary.

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT



READ
Nahum 1:2-9

'A jealous and avenging God is the Lord, the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies.' **Nahum 1:2**

Every December, I am plagued by the constant chorus of, "It's come 'round quick this year! Are you ready?" And every December, I nod in agreement, whether or not I feel ready (often not). Usually, they mean are you ready for the family drama, the chaos, the endless parade of holiday events? But Advent isn't just about getting ready for Christmas morning, it's about preparing our hearts for something much bigger: the return of Christ. And that kind of preparation needs more than fairy lights.

If that's what we're getting ready for, we can't ignore passages like this one. We like to focus on the warm fuzzies of Christmas like peace, joy, good will to all, and sweet little baby Jesus in a manger. But then along comes the book of Nahum, and suddenly God is furious, jealous, and bent on vengeance. Bet you don't see that in the kids nativity. Merry Christmas?

For me, yes. Because if like me you've ever felt powerless or overlooked, mistreated or dismissed, you may have longed for a God who doesn't turn away. A God who sees injustice and says, "That's enough." Maybe like me, you needed a God who cared enough to get angry. That's the God this passage points us to. He's not out of control. He's not unpredictable. His anger isn't in spite of His goodness, it is His goodness in action. He gets angry because He loves. And love protects. God's wrath isn't separate from His mercy. In fact, verse 7 calls Him 'a refuge in the storm.' Not because He avoids judgement, but because He brings justice through it. For me, that's not terrifying, it's hopeful.

This Advent, the book of Nahum invites us to prepare for the return of the Lord who is both loving and strong. A God who brings peace not by ignoring evil, but by defeating it. So maybe the better question this year isn't, "Are you ready for Christmas?" but "Are you ready for Christ?" Are you ready to let the God who loves you enough to get angry into your life?

LET US PRAY

Father God, teach us to trust not only in Your mercy but also in Your strength. Be our refuge in the storm, and shape us into people who reflect Your justice and love. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Christy Sawyer, Warden of Lay Ministry and Lay Training Officer.

MONDAY 15TH DECEMBER



READ
Habakkuk 3:1-3, 17-19

'Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.' **Habakkuk 3:17-18**

God calls Habakkuk to be His messenger at a very difficult time. People have made their own gods out of stone and wood; violence and injustice is everywhere. Habakkuk has got to the point where his heart pounds, his bones decay and his legs tremble. And yet, he rejoices in God his saviour despite the prospect of losing the earthly things he relies upon. How has Habakkuk found such joy and the ability to give such open-handed trust in God?

Habakkuk prays. He pours out his heart to the Lord with raw honesty: *'How long must I call for help, but you do not listen?'*

Habakkuk listens. God answers decisively telling Habakkuk that He is going to act, in judgement, in a surprising way.

Habakkuk stands in awe before God. Habakkuk has a fresh realisation that the Lord is holy, glorious, splendid, and powerful. Such knowledge leads him to ask God to show mercy.

Habakkuk rejoices. Realising that the immediate future would be bleak, he finds joy in God his saviour. He rejoices that God will give him the agility to be sure footed in the difficult times ahead.

Whatever we are facing today, we have a holy, just and merciful God, who listens to our prayers, and has promised to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

LET US PRAY

Sovereign Lord, we thank You that You are just and merciful. Give us joy, strength and agility to walk on the heights whatever we are facing. Help us to be the people You have called us to be; may Your kingdom come and Your will be done. Amen.

Joy Rushton, Being Witnesses Manager.

TUESDAY 16TH DECEMBER



READ

Zephaniah 1:14–2:3

'The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast.' **Zephaniah 1:14**

There are lots of ways we find ourselves passing time, waiting...

Zephaniah speaks with urgency... *'The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast'* (v.14). He describes a time of reckoning, when darkness falls and things are shaken to their foundations. Yet even in such sobering words, hope is offered: *'Seek the Lord... seek righteousness, seek humility'* (v.3). God's call isn't to instil fear but to draw us into deeper relationship with Him. His justice is always joined with mercy, and His desire is to restore His people to life. The prophet speaks not only to individuals but to the whole people of God, judgement, and renewal belong to all creation, not just our private struggles.

In hospital chaplaincy, I often see how our sense of time changes in moments of crisis. For some, days drag while waiting for recovery. For others, time feels sharpened, precious, urgent. A difficult diagnosis can alter the way time is experienced, bringing both change and clarity. In those moments, what is most precious comes into focus: family, friendships, faith, small mercies of each day. A brush with illness or frailty can reawaken us to life's sacredness. In much the same way, Zephaniah's words bring us to a point of realisation, life is fragile, time is short, and the call to turn back to God is too important to delay.

The "Day of the Lord" is not simply about wrath, but about renewal, fulfilled in Christ who invites us into His gift of mercy, repentance, and new beginnings. Just as illness can awaken gratitude and sharpen love, so God's judgement opens the door to healing, hope, and life made new.

In the hospital, I often see how people, even in difficulty, rediscover what is most precious. Those moments I witness at the bedside, when love and faith shine brightest in weakness, remind me that God meets us in both our vulnerability and our hope. Zephaniah calls us to the same fresh perspective, an invitation to treasure what truly matters, leading us into freedom, hope, and faith renewed.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord, guide us to treasure what matters, watching and waiting with hearts full of hope. Amen.

The Revd Clive Lord, Hospital Chaplain, Blackpool Teachings Hospitals.

WEDNESDAY 17TH DECEMBER



READ

Zephaniah 3:14–20

'Rejoice and exalt with all your heart'
Zephaniah 3:14

We're in the third week of advent and we have just celebrated the third Sunday of Advent, "Rejoice Sunday". "Gaudete Sunday". Often our hymns and responses will have reminded us to REJOICE in the Lord. Here's a question then – are you rejoicing?

Most of us like to see a feel good film or perhaps to read a feel good book. Well today we have a feel good passage given to us. Like other minor prophets, the book of the prophet Zephaniah begins in judgement, but it ends with a joyful message, a hopeful message, and God's people are bidden to rejoice and exalt, because God is merciful, because our God is not just a distant force but He is a living reality, ever present in our midst. So the people are bidden to rejoice: *'Sing aloud, O daughter Zion! Shout O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart!'* (v.14).

And what's more, not only are we to rejoice in Him but we are to realise that HE rejoices in US. In this passage we see that God doesn't just forgive His people, He delights in His people, despite all that has gone before—despite the sins and shortcomings of His people God never gives up on them. Although He knows our every weakness, He always sees in us what we are capable of becoming by His grace. He delights in you.

Our passage today speaks of healing and restoration indeed of transformation: saving the lame, gathering in the outcast, and restoring the fortunes of the people, and then these beautiful words *'I will bring you home'* (v.20). This healing, restoration and transformation would come to fruition in and through the life, the ministry and saving work of Jesus Christ in whom is our hope, and in whom we find our eternal home. What a fabulous feel good passage is given to us today. So – are you rejoicing? Rejoice and exalt with all your heart, and know that God rejoices in you. I conclude with the words of the well known hymn:

*Rejoice in glorious hope! Our Lord and judge shall come
And take His servants up to their eternal home:
Lift up your heart, Lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice! Amen.*

**LET US
PRAY**

*Father we rejoice in You, and praise You that You rejoice in us.
Amen.*

The Revd Damian Porter, Vicar of Torrisholme and Westgate.

THURSDAY 18TH DECEMBER



READ

Haggai 2:1-9

'Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts'. Haggai 2:4

Three times in just this one verse the Lord, through His prophet Haggai says 'take courage'. He is speaking to Zerubbabel, the Jewish leader, descendent of King David, Joshua the high priest, and the people of Israel who have returned from exile. The people are re-building the destroyed Temple so that worship can resume and Israel's relationship with God restored. However, for the older generation, who had known the splendour of the original Solomon's Temple, discouragement had set in because this 'new' Temple could not match the glory of the former one. The reality of the situation was falling short of their expectations; the people were deflated and demoralised.

And yet, this is a message of hope and encouragement in those tough times of discouragement, for the people of Israel then, and for us now, when we too face such disappointments and difficult times. How often I wonder do we 'hanker' after the past, the 'what has been' and the former glories? Do we mumble under our breath, 'well it was better before...' or 'I remember when...' or make unhealthy comparisons with what has been? This could be on a personal level, or we could be talking about the Church, or a wishful thinking rose-tinted view of the past.

But this is where we need to hear the words and believe the promises of God. God speaks to us in the words 'take courage'... *'the latter splendour of this house will be greater than the former'* (v.9). In other words, things not only can get better, but the future glory lies in the person of Jesus Christ whom we watch for and wait for in Advent, meaning we too can 'take courage', and believe God is fulfilling His purposes and keeping His promises.

There is now no longer the need for rebuilding a new Temple of bricks and mortar because as Christians, the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, now lives in us, we become the temple of the Holy Spirit because Jesus, Son of God, is Emmanuel, 'God with Us'.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord Jesus, help us to take courage today; to invite You to live in our hearts by faith, so that we know Your presence and power in our lives and are temples of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Revd Karen Herschell, Diocesan Renewal Officer.

FRIDAY 19TH DECEMBER



READ

Zechariah 3:1-10

'The angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Take off his filthy clothes [...] and I will clothe you in festal apparel!'. Zechariah 3:4

As a mum of two boys, there is a constant pile of laundry awaiting my attention and I am often found tackling stains from mud, ink, food, or grass in the relentless pursuit of having outfits clean and ready to wear. Sometimes, after an item has been through the wash multiple times and treated with the stain removers I keep in the cupboard, I give up and I ask my mum for help; her success rate is unrivalled!

In today's reading, we encounter a powerful vision of the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord, clothed in filthy garments. We can imagine Satan pointing to Joshua's soiled attire as evidence that he was unfit to stand in the Lord's presence, but the Lord rebukes Satan and commands that Joshua's dirty clothes are removed and replaced with clean, pure, celebratory robes. The verses highlight Satan as the adversary who opposes us in every spiritual battle, yet the Lord stringently limits what he is able to do.

As we continue to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus—and for His return—the themes of hope, restoration, and the coming of the Messiah found within this passage deeply resonate. In this season of waiting and longing for redemption, Joshua's cleansing points us to the hope of forgiveness that can only be found in Jesus. This change of clothing symbolises God's forgiveness of Joshua's sin and guilt, and his restoration to a position of honour and acceptance.

So, what are the stains we bear? Are we marked by mistakes that we've made, greed, dishonesty, lies, or a lack of self-control? Thinking about the stained items we find in our laundry baskets, that no matter how hard we scrub, never come clean, we are reminded that it's impossible to remove the blemishes caused by our sins on our own. Thankfully, Christ came to defeat sin and evil, offering us robes of righteousness instead of our filthy clothes. So let us prepare our hearts to receive the new life that Jesus offers and be ready to be clothed in His grace, renewed, and restored through Him.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord, remove my stained garments and clothe me in Your grace, that I may be renewed and wrapped in the righteousness only You can give. Amen.

Sarah Earnshaw, Diocesan Children's Work Adviser.

SATURDAY 20TH DECEMBER



READ

Zechariah 9:9-17

'Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.' **Zechariah 9:12**

'Hope you have a good Christmas' is a common statement we all hear as we finish work or school for the festive season. 'What do you hope to have for Christmas?' is another familiar phrase used, the closer we get to the 25th December. Hope. 'I hope the results are good ones...' a phrase we hear so often during all seasons throughout the year and one that is not as joyous as the others. What is this hope that is so commonplace in our daily vocabulary?

In this passage of the minor prophet Zechariah, which speaks so clearly of the coming of the Messiah, we read of the *'prisoners of hope'*. This phrase really caught my attention as an unusual paradox. Can we be chained to hope? Is being a prisoner not a negative experience whereas it is hope that keeps us going? Paul shows us in Acts 16 that this is not the case. His hope, and that of Silas, was in the gospel of Christ, even choosing to remain imprisoned when the prison doors flew open after an earthquake. They were not bound by physical doors but by their eternal unshakeable hope in their Saviour. The same is true here in Zechariah where he speaks of the Messiah who will set prisoners free as their hope is revealed and completed in Him.

A number of years ago my husband and I experienced a miscarriage. A compassionate nurse said, 'Well, at least you have Christmas to look forward to.' Those words stayed with me. Even today, as I write this, awaiting medical results, I have Christmas to look forward to. I am imprisoned to hope. No matter what this physical earth brings or threatens to bring, the Messiah came and will come again. My hope, regardless of how I feel, is chained to my Saviour.

In these last few days of Advent, as we prepare for the coming of our Saviour, let's remember that whatever our circumstances our hope is the gift He has given us as we wait for Him. Remember – we have Christmas to look forward to.

**LET US
PRAY**

Father, at this time of year, and indeed throughout it, may we remember that our hope is forever in You. Amen.

Hannah Pountain, RE & Worship Lead, St Leonard's Primary, Langho.

WEEK 4 - SUNDAY 21ST DECEMBER

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



READ

Zechariah 12:10-13:1

'And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication.' **Zechariah 12:10**

In this chapter of Zechariah, the prophet talks about *'that day'*. Earlier, we heard more about what the Lord will do on *'that day'*, a day that holds both judgement and salvation. And in the middle of it, God says, *'I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication'* (v.10). It's a turning point, a moment of renewal, when God softens hearts and draws His people back to Himself.

Over the past year, I think many of us have felt a deep sense of compassion as we've seen the unrest in the Middle East and watched the images on our screens. Compassion feels like the heartbeat of God flowing into our lives, reshaping how we see and how we treat one another. And compassion begins with seeing—really seeing. Just as Jesus looked at the crowds and had compassion on them because they were *'harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd'* (Matthew 9:36).

So who do we see today? Our world has its own crowds, people in places of unrest, those who've been displaced or maybe closer to home—people facing loneliness, financial struggles or quiet battles with anxiety. But compassion doesn't stop at seeing, it moves us to act. Where hearts are hard, compassion softens them. It helps us listen before judging, give before hoarding and forgive before condemning. Sometimes it's as simple as offering a kind word, standing alongside someone who's suffering or reaching across a divide that culture or politics has drawn.

The beautiful thing about God's promise is that compassion isn't something we have to conjure up ourselves. It's poured out freely, so that our love can reach further than we ever could on our own. When we receive that grace, we become channels of it. During this time of advent maybe we can pause and ask: *Where can we show compassion?* Because when we carry this spirit into our workplaces, schools and homes, we become living reminders that God is still pouring out His love into a world so thirsty for kindness.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord, pour out Your spirit of compassion on us today. Open our eyes to see as You see, and move our hearts to love as You love. Amen.

The Venerable Jane Atkinson, Archdeacon of Blackburn.

MONDAY 22ND DECEMBER



READ

Malachi 2:17-3:5

"Where is the God of justice?"
Malachi 2:17

Christmas is almost here and we have probably already been to Christmas events, even though it's Advent. We can be weary at this point as well as excited. Weary because through all the celebrations there's a lot to do, particularly if we are entertaining family this year. We may be facing travel. I can remember the years when we toured the country trying to see our family, conscious that we had been called to live far from them.

So, it was for the people as Malachi addresses them. The excitement of the restoration has become a weariness that things don't seem to have changed and there's even a hint at the beginning of today's passage that God has abandoned them.

'Where is the God of justice?' Malachi speaks into this situation with clarity. There will be a messenger to proclaim the Messiah. Then, the promise that the One who is awaited will come. So far, good news and what the people need to hear.

But love, mercy and truth come with judgement and we need to be committed to the Lord. Messiah will come but those who have strayed from the Lord's ways will face judgement.

These are true Advent themes. There is rightly excitement at the hope of the coming Christ, and all Christians should pray *'Maranatha'* Come Lord Jesus! - return to set your people free. Yet, we need also this day to have hearts that are truly turned to the Lord and seeking His ways desiring to be the people whom He calls us to be.

In these last hours and days before Christmas try to find a time to pray with longing for the coming of the Lord. That He may *'be born again in us today'* for the time we spend on earth. For those who do not know Him, that they may take this opportunity to respond. Then, with longing for His return in glory that all shall be well and that the God who desires us to be close to Him will return us to His heart of love.

**LET US
PRAY**

Maranatha - Come Lord Jesus.

Venerable David Picken, Archdeacon of Lancaster.

TUESDAY 23RD DECEMBER



READ

Matthew 11:7-15

'See I am sending my messenger ahead of you.' **Matthew 11:10**

It's nearly Christmas. And that means that the season of escapist television is upon us. Soon we will be lazing around on our sofas, sipping Baileys and watching classics such as Strictly Come Dancing, DIY SOS, and Call the Midwife. One of my own favourites is The Masked Singer in which viewers have to guess the identity of a concealed celebrity by listening to their voice. The highlight of the show is the big reveal when the mask is removed and the celeb's identity is finally made known.

Which is pretty much what happens in this passage of St Matthew's Gospel. There is a big reveal. And in fact it is not just one mask that is removed, but two.

The first reveal is John the Baptist, the mysterious, ascetic preacher who by this stage has been locked up in prison for prophesying against King Herod. *'What then did you go into the wilderness to look at?'* Jesus asks the crowd. And then he draws on one of the Twelve prophets, Malachi, to answer his own question. *'See I am sending my messenger ahead of you.'*

At Chapter 3 verse 1, Malachi looks to the day when the Lord will send a messenger *'to prepare the way before me.'* Then at the end of the Book he names this messenger as Elijah who will arrive *'before the great and terrible Day of the Lord'* (4:5). Here Jesus declares that Malachi's prophecy is fulfilled. John the Baptist is that messenger. And so, for those who can accept it, John is Elijah.

But as Jesus unmask John, He also unmask Himself. For if the messenger has come, then it stands to reason that the day of the Lord has come also. And what is that Day? It is Jesus. In Him, God Himself has come in mercy and judgement to destroy sin and fill the world with unending light.

Christmas is nearly here. But it is still not too late to heed the teaching of the Messenger John and his call to repentance. Be ready and rejoice, for in the birth of the Christ-child the Day of the Lord is here.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord Jesus, enlighten us through the teaching of Your messenger John the Baptist, that our hearts may be ready to welcome You, the Eternal Day, who brings us to everlasting light. Amen.

The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn.



CHRISTMAS EVE

WEDNESDAY 24TH DECEMBER



READ
Matthew 12:38–41

'We wish to see a sign...'
Matthew 12:38

Image: Jonah and the Whale, folio probably from a Jami al-Tavariikh (Compendium of Chronicles), ca. 1400, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"Santa Stop here" says the sign by hopeful front doors. When our boys were young, we left out mince pies, a bottle of real ale, and a fresh carrot. So we had a sign that Santa and Rudolph had stopped by on Christmas Eve.

"God give me a sign" we find ourselves saying, like the scribes and the Pharisees.

The hearts of the people of Israel ached for the longed-for Messiah and Rescuer. A sign God was keeping his promises. All they got was a baby in a manger. A sign for those with eyes to see: *'The Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the virgin is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel'* (Isaiah 7.14).

Unlike Christmas crackers, God does not disappoint. There are no expiry dates on His promises. Yes, we see through a glass darkly for now. But all that He has promised will happen. 100% guaranteed.

We live in the tension that we haven't yet reached the end when Jesus comes again and *'his glory fills the whole earth'* (Psalm 72.19). But we glimpse it. We glimpse His glory. Out the corner of our eyes. A trailer of the 3D blockbuster movie which is to come.

*"Earth's crammed with heaven
And every common bush afire with God
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
the rest sit round and pluck blackberries"*
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

The signs of God are everywhere. I have got used to quietly treasuring these *"ordinary miracles"* or *"God-incidences"*. The calling cards of His Spirit

Jonah was a sign for the people of Nineveh. He was to be a sign of judgement. But the twist in the fishy tale? The people of Nineveh turned to God. The sign of Jonah was buried and hidden in the *'belly of Sheol'* (Jonah 2:1). The ultimate sign that the universe is being rescued... Jesus in the belly of hell—is buried and hidden. The sign that God is with you through the ups and downs this Christmas—is buried and hidden.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord Jesus, our sign that God never disappoints, may our county have eyes to see You are our Immanuel, God with us, this Christmas. Amen.

The Rt Revd Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster.



CHRISTMAS DAY

THURSDAY 25TH DECEMBER



READ
Matthew 1:18-25

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall name him Emmanuel.'
Matthew 1:23

Image: *The Nativity*, Puccio di Simone (Italian, Florence, active by ca. 1340–died 1362), ca. 1350, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Today our Advent journey reaches its destination. Here we are: it's Christmas Day. We have travelled through Advent in the company of the minor prophets. These prophets' words, because they are God's Word, point ahead to Christmas. For Christmas is when we see God's Word wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in a manger.

So today we read the story of the birth of Jesus in St Matthew's Gospel – Chapter 1, verses 18–25. In this portion of the story, Matthew draws our attention to the words of the one of the major prophets, Isaiah.

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us'.'

And this is what happens at Christmas. Mary, His mother, conceives by the Holy Spirit, and so Jesus is born of a virgin: the Son of God.

And if we read on just one more verse: in Matthew Chapter 2, verse 1, we read that Jesus was born in Bethlehem – and this was to fulfil the words of Micah, one of the minor prophets.

'But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel...'

Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David, because the Messiah, the Saviour, was to be a descendent of David – as Jesus was.

Bethlehem, which in Hebrew means 'the house of bread' – for Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry."*

Bethlehem, on the hills around which were farmed the lambs for the Temple sacrifices – for Jesus is *"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"*, the one perfect sacrifice for our sins.

So, as we read the Christmas story, we see the words of the prophets springing into life in Jesus. These words open our eyes to see the identity of this Child, who is the Saviour, the Bread of Life, the Lamb of God, the Son of Mary and the Son of God. Merry Christmas.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the prophets' words are fulfilled, we kneel today to worship You, who are our Saviour and our God. Amen.

The Rt Revd Joe Kennedy, Bishop of Burnley.

WHAT'S NEXT

We really hope you've enjoyed walking through Advent with this booklet. If you're wondering how you can continue with this pattern of daily reading there are a whole host of resources available to you. For ease of access, many resources are now available either online or as apps. A few suggestions are:

DAILY PRAYER

churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer

Daily Prayer is available free as an app or on the Church of England Website and gives complete services for Morning, Evening and Night Prayer in both contemporary (Common Worship) and traditional (Book of Common Prayer) forms.

BIOY

bibleinoneyear.org

With BIOY each day you receive a Psalm or Proverbs reading, a New Testament and an Old Testament reading. It also provides daily audio and written commentary to walk you through each day's reading, to provide fresh understanding of the texts.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

blackburn.anglican.org/bible-study

BIBLE PODLETS

bdeducation.org.uk/podcasts/bible-podlets

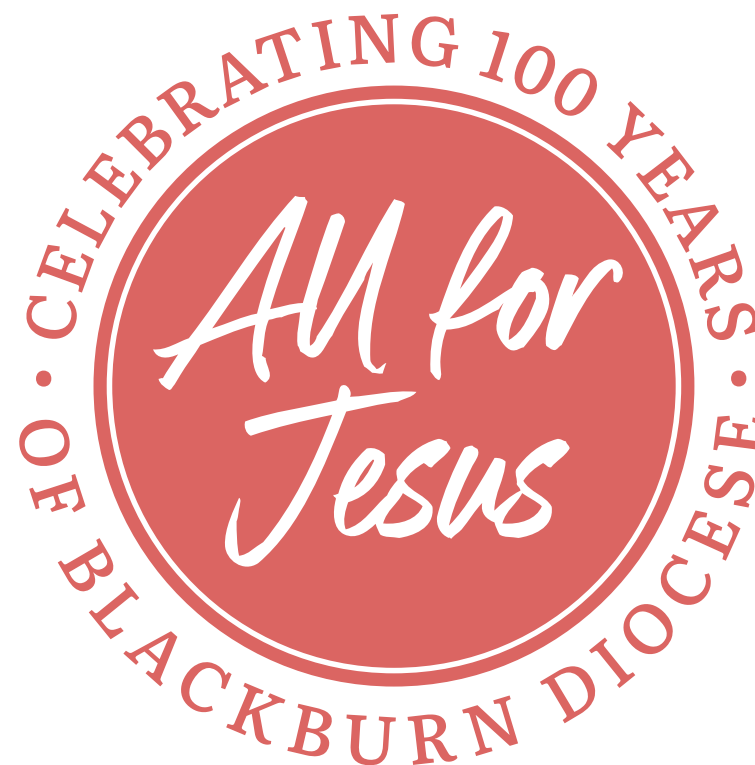
Bible Podlets is a Bible study and discussion podcast for primary aged children to do with adults. Each episode has fun games/activities, an engaging Bible reading in the form of a news story, and discussion, with places to pause and talk together about the topic. You can download discussion notes from the resources area of the site.

If you prefer a hard copy resource, Christian bookshops carry a large range of Bible reading material, from daily reading notes to study books on particular themes or books of the Bible.

BISHOP'S BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

Access Bible studies created by Bishop Philip, Bishop Jill, and Bishop Joe, designed for small groups or individual use, directly in the Fruitful App, accessible anytime, anywhere.

In addition to these resources there will be regular Quiet Days and Retreats offered by Whalley Abbey: whalleyabbey.org



The year 2026 is our centenary year as a Diocese.



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<https://www.blackburn.anglican.org/all-for-jesus-centenary-of-blackburn>



*All texts in this booklet are taken from the
New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated*

Designed by Morse-Brown Design

We'd love your feedback on this resource!

