

From
Cradle,
to
Grave,
to
Glory



PART ONE
ADVENT

THE DIOCESE OF BLACKBURN

DEVOTIONAL LITURGY

MORNING PRAYER

✙ O come come to my assistance

O Lord make haste to help me.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before me;
help me to pray with singleness of heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

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

Read the biblical passage set for the day.

If using with a Diocesan devotion read the devotion and assigned prayer.

Keep silence for a few minutes, you may like to add your own prayers.

Awaiting his coming in glory,
I pray with confidence as my Saviour has taught me:

Our Father, who art in heaven....

O Lord, help me in all things to rely upon Your holy will. Bless my dealings with all who surround me. Teach me to treat all that shall come to me throughout the day with peace of soul, and with the firm conviction that Your will governs all. In all my deeds and words, guide my thoughts and feelings. In unforeseen events, let me not forget that all are sent by You. Teach me to act firmly and wisely, without embittering and embarrassing others. Give me the strength to bear the fatigue of the day, with all that it shall bring. Direct my will. Teach me to pray. Pray within me. Amen.

May the Lord, when he comes,
find me watching and waiting. Amen.

✙ May the Lord bless me,
may he keep away all evil
and lead me to eternal life.

Amen



P R E F A C E

Earlier this year, with the help of Jeremy Duff, we studied and prayed our way through the Book of Acts in preparation for our diocesan conference, but Acts, as many of you will know, has a prequel... the story didn't all begin when Jesus ascended to glory. Before there was 'glory' there was a 'cradle' and a 'grave'. So beginning on Advent Sunday we're going to study and pray our way through this amazing, yet true, story looking at the 'cradle' in preparation for Christmas before picking up the story in Lent which leads to the 'grave' and thankfully out the other side. In other words we're going to be reading Luke's Gospel. Luke's is a Gospel written for people like us. It's a story written for those who are taught to be sceptical, who are taught to ask for facts and figures before making a decision. Luke's is a Gospel written to those who have no Jewish background and often need a little explanation as to the Jewish way of doing things. Luke's Gospel, therefore, is perfect for twenty-first century people just like us. So this Advent we're going to dive in at Luke 1 verse 1 as we prepare for Jesus' return... that is, after all, what Advent is all about, helping us to get a bit more ready for when Jesus, Luke's main character, returns to judge the living and the dead. What better way to get ready for His second coming than by learning more about His first coming?

However, whilst Luke gives us three action packed chapters before we get to the beginning of Jesus' ministry (something we'll study in Lent) there is still time in Advent for a little bit more preparation, a little bit more getting ready, and so we're going to take a look at the 'O Antiphons'. 'The what?' I hear you cry!... well each antiphon uses a title of Christ, one of His attributes mentioned in Scripture, and each title has been put to music and is sung in the days leading up to Christmas beginning on 17th December. If you've sung 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel' you have sung these titles without knowing it: 'O come, *Thou Rod of Jesse, free... O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high... O come, Thou Key of David, come*' etcetera, and if you're humming the tune now, you're welcome. And if you'd like a little more music in your life you can scan the QR code on each of the days we're studying an 'O Antiphon' and listen to Blackburn Cathedral Choir singing it just for us! For each of these Old Testament titles for Jesus we'll study the Scriptural text where the title is mentioned and hopefully by the end we'll know a little more about Him, and we'll be a little more prepared to meet Him when He comes. To further help we've added in a short liturgy to wrap your devotional reading in. If you look at the inside cover (both front and back) you will see a short service to help you to pray in and around your reading at whatever time of the day you read the devotions. Furthermore, after Christmas rip out (yes you're allowed) the devotions leaving you with the cover and a way of praying you can use at any time. I hope you're excited, I am!

The Revd Mike Print, Editor, *Diocesan Devotionals*.



C O N T E N T S

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READ: LUKE 1:1-4

'It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus'
Luke 1:3

It is often thought that the words of the Bible were beamed into the authors' heads: that God shouted down from heaven in His boomiest voice, 'Write this down,' and then told the whole story of the Bible. But that is not what happened. In today's passage, Luke is clear: he has been commissioned by Theophilus to act like a PI: to speak to eyewitnesses, do research, and record the life of Jesus. It is not given to Luke by an angel; he has to go and discover Jesus for himself.

Sometimes we think faith is not like this. We can imagine that God only deepens faith in dramatic ways: through a powerful voice or something miraculous. But actually, like Luke, we are invited to be PIs of faith. If we want to know God, we cannot expect Him to do all the heavy lifting.

Throughout history God has done amazing, wonderful things, many of which you can find in your Bible, and He continues to do them today. However, any relationship worth its salt goes both ways. We need to contribute: to investigate, do research, talk to other witnesses of faith, and take time to reflect on what we have learned. When we do this, like Luke (who never met Jesus on Earth) we find that our faith, our relationship with God, grows.

And guess what? This counts. Beginning this devotional journey is research. It is seeking other witnesses and creating space to reflect, which can deepen your faith. So, at the start of Advent, let's take time to look into God and discover more of who He is for us.

The Revd Matt Gaze, Assistant Curate, St Paul's Hoddlesden & St Barnabas Darwen.

LET US PRAY

Dear God, I want to know You more. Help me to seek You this Advent as Luke did, so that I may know Your love and power more deeply in my life. Keep me going with these devotionals, and guide me to find You beyond them too.

Amen.

READ: LUKE 1:5-25

‘they realised that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute’ Luke 1:22b

As we approach Christmas, many of us will be anticipating getting together with family and friends to celebrate the season with food, drink, and fun. There may also be the odd party game played including a round of charades when various members of our family make fools of themselves by throwing their arms around working out how to express the film or book they have been given while wondering how they ended up in this situation and thinking about spending Christmas elsewhere next year.

In our reading today, Zechariah is forced into months and months of charades as he is struck dumb for his lack of faith at the angel Gabriel’s news that his wife, Elizabeth, was to bear a son. It is amazing news for Zechariah and Elizabeth but news that Zechariah can only think about and watch from the sidelines as other people discover and celebrate with them. It would have been hard enough for Zechariah to describe what he had experienced in the temple even with the ability to speak, but with that ability removed, it would be even more difficult.

I wonder what this period of enforced silence was like for Zechariah; I can imagine it was at one and the same time incredibly frustrating not being able to talk about it but I also think it came with a sense of freedom. He has space and time to ponder the life-changing and history-changing impact of the child who would be the forerunner to Jesus, the one who will bring great joy and gladness because of His greatness before the Lord.

Perhaps for us, this Advent can be an opportunity to enforce silence on ourselves, not so that we can have a protracted game of charades and communicate non-verbally but so that we can ponder the events running up to the birth of Jesus. The angel declares that one of John’s roles would be ‘to make ready for the Lord a people prepared’ (v.17); as you silently pray may you be made ready for the Lord, a person prepared.

The Revd Craig Abbott, Head of Children, Youth, and Chaplaincy.

LET US PRAY

Let us pray: Loving God, as we seek moments of silence today, we ask that You would speak in the stillness and give us fresh wonder as we anticipate the birth of Your Son Jesus. Amen.

READ: LUKE 1:26-38

'And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' Luke 1:38

Spot-the-difference is a classic, low-tech activity, which, if the response of the children at the school I work at is anything to go by, still holds a level of excitement and challenge. Having looked yesterday at the amazing announcement from angel Gabriel to Zechariah that Sarah would give birth to John the Baptist, today we have another incredible passage before us, which has many similarities to yesterday's, but also, like spot-the-difference, has some important differences.

The angel Gabriel appears again. This time he appears to Mary. Both Zechariah and Mary were troubled when Gabriel appeared (1:21, 1:29). Once again, Gabriel shares amazing news, even more incredible than the news he shared with Zechariah. Mary was told that she was going to give birth to God's own Son (v.31), who's Kingdom would last forever (v.32). Both Zechariah and Mary ask a question of Gabriel, but here we see a crucial difference; notice the different attitudes shown by their questions. Zechariah asks a question, and is told by Gabriel that he will become silent *'because you did not believe my words'* (v.20), showing that the attitude behind Zechariah's question was disbelief and distrust.

Mary also asked a question, *'How will this be, since I am a virgin?'* (v.34), however, crucially, the question came from a place of trust and seeking to understand. Zechariah and Mary were both given news, which seemed unbelievable. Mary trusted God and His word, through Gabriel, even though she did not understand exactly how it would happen (v.38).

During Advent, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, but even more importantly prepare for Jesus' return, let us consider our own attitude towards God and His word. In God's word we hear incredible news, both about what Jesus achieved for us during His time on earth, but also about what will happen when He returns to end all suffering and to make all things new. We won't be able to understand how exactly it will happen, but will we, like Mary, trust God and take Him at His word?

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

LET US PRAY

Father God, Thank You that Your words are true and trustworthy. We are sorry for when we doubt You. Please help us to trust You and Your word more and more as we journey through Advent and look forward to Jesus' return. Amen.

READ: LUKE 1:39-45

‘And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.’ Luke 1:45

There is something wonderfully simple about Elizabeth’s words to Mary. She doesn’t say, ‘Blessed is she who understood everything.’ Or, ‘Blessed is she who knew exactly how this would work out.’ She says, ‘And blessed is she who believed...’ (v.45). Mary has been given an extraordinary promise, but she has not yet seen its fulfilment. She is carrying a child, but she cannot yet know what that child will mean for her, for Israel, or for the world. She has only God’s word to hold on to.

That is very much the shape of Advent. The Christian story is not about escaping from the world, but about God coming into His world to put things right. In Jesus, God’s long-promised purposes are breaking into history. Yet at this moment in Luke’s story, all of that is hidden inside an unborn child. Mary has to trust the promise before she can see the fulfilment.

Perhaps that is where many of us find ourselves. We may pray for things whose answers we cannot yet see. We may long for healing, reconciliation, peace or change. We may wonder whether God is really at work when, on the surface, very little seems different. Advent reminds us that God’s silence is not the same as God’s absence, and that the hidden work of God may already be underway. Mary’s blessing is not that she has certainty about the future. It is that she has learned to trust the One who holds the future.

So, as Christmas approaches perhaps the prayer we need is not simply, ‘Lord, show me what you are going to do,’ but, ‘Lord, help me to trust that you are doing what you have promised.’

The Revd Jon Price, Rector, Brindle St James.

LET US PRAY

*Lord Jesus, help us to trust Your promises when we cannot yet see their fulfilment. Give us Mary’s faith to believe that You are at work, even in the hidden places of our lives.
Amen.*

READ: LUKE 1:46-56***'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour'*****Luke 1:46-47**

Unique to the Gospel of Luke, Mary's song, often referred to as the Magnificat, expresses the depth of her joy, faith and trust in God. She praises our mighty God and makes statements about what He has done and what Jesus will do. With great humility she acknowledges that generations will now call her blessed but only because of what God has done not because she said 'yes'.

Mary's song of praise is entirely God-centred. His greatness, holiness, and saving action is at the forefront of her mind. The fact that the baby she carries is the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham is far more important than the humiliation and disgrace that she may face.

As you read through the Magnificat it is very noticeable that Mary sings of God reversing human expectations.

*'He has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty' (vv.52-53)*

The Kingdom of God is a place where the proud are scattered and the humble are lifted high. This song is over two thousand years old, and the world needs to hear these words as much now as they did then.

The well-known hymn 'Tell Out, My Soul' is a paraphrase of Mary's words, it gives us opportunity to express the same message that she did. 'Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord: unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice.' Take a few moments today and find the words of the hymn, perhaps on YouTube. Imagine Mary and join her in singing to the world of God's greatness, might, and mercy. Then go out with the courage of Mary in your heart and proclaim, 'firm is His promise' which you know to be true.

Lisa Fenton, Adviser to Primary Schools and Academies and SIAMS Lead.

LET US PRAY

Dear Lord God, I pray that during this Advent season You will 'give my spirit voice...' and I will 'make know Your might, the deeds Your arm has done.' Amen.

READ: LUKE 1:57-66

‘All who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, ‘What then will this child be?’ For the hand of the Lord was with him.’ Luke 1:66

In today’s Scripture, we see the community’s response to John’s birth. They have been repeatedly astonished: first when they witnessed Elizabeth’s unexpected joy; then by Zechariah’s restored speech; and finally by the surprising naming of the child. Their question – *‘What then will this child be?’* – stems not from curiosity but from reverent awe and wonder.

There are moments in life when people get a profound sense that something more is happening than they can yet explain. As a newborn baby is placed into the waiting and expectant arms of a family gathered in wonder and in love, the same question may rise quietly in every heart - Who will this child become?

The season of Advent restores our capacity to wonder. In the busyness of day-to-day life, especially in the run-up to Christmas, we can get so bogged down with arranging, planning, preparing, and rushing, that we can simply be too busy and distracted to even notice the amazing things taking place around us. Advent is a welcome invitation to slow down, to be still and pause before the mystery of Christ’s coming. We are asked to look and listen again and to trust that God is at work, long before we can see the whole picture.

Luke 1:66 is a prediction of John’s future: to prepare the way and to point beyond himself to Jesus. While not everyone is called like John, every life can be shaped by God’s hand. Perhaps this Advent will reawaken how you question your purpose, encouraging you to ask, ‘Who is God calling me to become?’ ‘How might my life point towards Christ?’

‘What then will this child be?’

In John’s case, the answer leads to Jesus. For all of us, as we wait and prepare this Advent, let’s allow our wonder to become hope. Sure and certain hope that God is at work in our lives beyond our sight. You were created in Christ. You are part of God’s plan. He chose you for a purpose and He is preparing the way for you.

Jo FitzGerald, Diocesan Schools Adviser.

LET US PRAY

Lord, awaken in us the holy wonder that asks what You are shaping in our lives. Help us to trust Your hand upon our life, and shape us, like John, to point others towards Jesus. Amen.

READ: LUKE 1:67-80

*'to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace' Luke 1:79*

As a curate I was greatly influenced by a woman in one of the twelve deeply rural congregations I served. Jane was in her nineties when I met her, and she would steadily walk the mile to church for services, only accepting a lift home again if the weather was really awful. Always one to show interest in others first, asking after my children and interested in everyone, it was a long time before I found out much about Jane herself. In fact, it was only when her son, who worked as a missionary and doctor in Pakistan, visited that I learned that he had taken the same path his mother had taken before him. This quiet and unassuming old lady had spent many years serving Christ, as a doctor herself, in places of danger and deprivation.

During his visit, her son shared at one morning prayer how much the Benedictus meant to him, the song of praise that Zechariah pronounces on the birth of his son, after his voice has been released from months of silence. The words of God's promise *'that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days'* (vv.74-75) are precious words to Christians who live, work, and worship in places where the name of Jesus Christ cannot be freely spoken, for fear of prosecution or persecution, and even death. My memories of Jane and her son have never left me, and I always read the Benedictus with gratitude that I can share my faith in Christ without fear.

As we prepare for Christmas, we have the freedom to voice the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. What a gift! Like Zechariah, we can sing out praise and use our voices to share with others the Good News of Jesus Christ, as we prepare to celebrate again the birth of the Light of the World.

Who do you need to use your voice to share the Good News of Jesus with today?

The Revd Canon Lucie Lunn, Vicar, Heart of Lunesdale Parishes, and Diocese's Dean of Women's Ministry

LET US PRAY

As we get ready for Christmas, free to worship You without fear, we hold before You Lord all those who need Your protection now. May they know your peace and your light in their darkest moments. Amen.

READ: LUKE 2:1-7

‘And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.’ Luke 2:7

In a former job, I was once told in no uncertain terms that ‘if you don’t blow your own trumpet, nobody else is going to blow it for you.’ Every year as appraisals rolled around and I was required to list my achievements, I felt the deep inner conflict between my desire for recognition and my innate Britishness, which rendered me completely unable to admit that something I had done might have been somehow good or valuable.

A quick glance at the global headlines would suggest that this is not a trait shared by many of those in positions of power today; the modern world seems to reward those who shout loudest about their success, their incredible skills and intellect or their impressive achievements, regardless of whether or not their claims of greatness are, in fact, accurate.

Today’s passage, Caesar Augustus—the self-declared ‘Son of God’—decides that all the world should be registered—perhaps to ensure he was receiving all the tax he was due, perhaps to assess his military capacity, perhaps as a means of asserting control and maintaining order across the empire. In the book of Samuel, there is a clear connection drawn between conducting a census and a sense of pride and self-reliance. There can be little doubt that Caesar Augustus, as a leader, was a man of pride and arrogance.

Against this backdrop, Jesus, the true Son of God, was born in humility and laid in a manger, establishing a kingdom that promises justice and peace—not through force and conquest, but through sacrifice and service. The Son of God, lying in a manger, shows us that the promised King came not with armies or displays of power, but in humility and weakness. When we recognise Jesus as the Son of God, we can have confidence that we are not at the mercy of uncertain leaders or a troubled world, but saved by the grace of a compassionate king who came in humility and will come again in glory.

Sam Lee, Ignite Project Manager.

LET US PRAY

Jesus, thank You that You are the true King. Help me to seek Your kingdom on Earth as I await Your glorious return. May You bring peace and justice to Your world, and may Your will be done. Amen.

READ: LUKE 2:8-14

***'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'* Luke 2:10**

Once upon a time, this townie was a country girl through and through. 4.30am isn't my preferred wake-up time, but I loved walking through a field of sleeping cows before dawn to bring them in for milking. Breathing in their earthy warmth in the cold air and listening to the herd stirring to life was a peaceful way to start my day, so I can imagine the shepherds' terror when their darkness was suddenly shattered by the glory of the Lord.

'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' (vv.10-11).

What an announcement. It was not proclaimed with trumpets from a palace, splashed across headlines, or shared on social media, but entrusted to those in the humblest of circumstances. A beautiful reflection of how the Lord enters and intervenes in our world; after all, first century shepherds were hardly the people society would have expected God to choose to receive this incredible announcement. The promised King came not with armies or displays of power, but in humility and weakness, for all people, whether in a palace or in a field.

'...And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger' (v.12).

As God's kingdom breaks into the kingdoms of this world, the shepherds were given a sign: a baby lying in a manger. We too can look to that same sign and remember that Jesus, the true king, has come and will come again, and that His victory over sin and death is secure. This good news of great joy is not only for the shepherds, but for us too. It is certainly a message worth disturbing a quiet night for!

Sarah Marston, Making Disciples Coordinator.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, as we wait and prepare this Advent, help us to look to the child in the manger and remember that our hope is in You. Thank You that Your kingdom has come, Your victory is secure, and You will come again in glory. Amen.

READ: LUKE 2:15-20***'And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph...' Luke 2:16***

When I was at school I always wanted to be an angel in the school nativity play. The problem was that when I was five years old I had red hair and glasses – and back then, girls with red hair and glasses were never chosen to be angels. Girls like that were chosen to be shepherds.

Every year I donned a tea towel from Gran's house, wore an old pair of curtains all tied up with a tatty bit of rope my Dad found in the shed. I used to look on with awe and jealousy at the beautiful angels with their blond hair and tinsel wings.

But a few weeks ago, someone told me something about the shepherds I wish I had known back then. We always consider the angels to be girls and the shepherds to be boys, but in the Bible the only angels that are mentioned by name are male. And as for the shepherds, many of them would have been women.

Importantly, shepherds are good at lambing, so understand the complications around birthing a new life - so much so that often times if there was not a midwife available to help at a human birth, people would call on the local shepherds to assist.

The angels could have appeared to carpenters or tax collectors or farmers, but they didn't. Mary was a stranger in a foreign country with only Joseph for help, so the angels found her some help in the form of the local shepherds who knew all about giving birth.

Now when I think about the nativity story the shepherds have moved from being a passive onlookers, to a really important and vital part in the birth of Jesus, the saviour of the world.

God has a job for each of us, whether we are called to be shepherds or angels. Our job is to listen to what God is calling us to and embrace the role He gives us. God knows us intimately, He knows what we are good at, and what we will become good at in the future. So whilst sometimes God's call might seem outrageous or difficult to hear remember that God never makes mistakes.

The Revd Canon Anne Beverley, Director of Ministry

LET US PRAY

Heavenly father, open my eyes to see what You are calling me to, and give me the courage to step into that calling. Amen.

READ: LUKE 2:21

'at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.' Luke 2:21

The mention of Jesus' circumcision is brief but highly significant. It reminds us that Jesus' human life was full and authentic: the first thing we know about Him after His birth is that, just like every other Jewish boy 'born of a woman, subject to the law,' (Galatians 4:4) He received circumcision, with all its vulnerability and pain. We can infer, from this titbit of trivia, that Jesus will have also enjoyed and endured every other experience that belongs to normal human childhood. The One who, according to His divine nature, sustains creation by His will and His word, in the human nature He assumed in the Virgin's womb will have been weaned, toilet-trained, learned to walk, taught to read. To borrow a phrase, the Circumcision of Christ reminds us that Jesus' humanity was not just for Christmas, but for life.

His circumcision also reminds us of the Jewishness of our Saviour. Jesus was born as a descendant of Abraham, a child of God's chosen people, Israel, obedient to the Law delivered through Moses, a member of the royal tribe of Judah and an heir in the line of David. The covenant with the patriarchs, the promise given through the prophets—of which circumcision was the 'sign and seal' (Romans 4:11)—is fulfilled in Him. Of course, we greatly rejoice that He is 'the Saviour of the world' (John 4:42) – including of us gentiles. But Jesus' eighth-day circumcision testifies both that He is 'first for the Jew' (Romans 1:16) and that, through Him, our 'salvation is from the Jews' (John 4:22). It shouldn't be controversial to say that the rise of antisemitism in our country ought to be especially scandalous to Christians. This Advent, as we prepare to welcome the Christ-child, let us remember that the Saviour we receive is the Jewish Messiah through whom the God of Israel has graciously opened His ancient promises to the whole world.

The Revd Dr Tom Woolford, Vicar, All Saints', New Longton.

LET US PRAY

Faithful God, we thank You for Jesus Christ, the promised Seed of Abraham and Son of David, born among Your people Israel and given as Saviour for the world. Keep us from pride, prejudice, and hatred; make us grateful that by Your grace we have been brought into Your covenant promises; and teach us to honour the people through whom our Saviour came. Amen.

READ: LUKE 2:22-35

'And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about [Jesus].'
Luke 2:33

In today's passage, Mary and Joseph bring the newborn Jesus to a wise old man called Simeon. Simeon was righteous and devout, no doubt spending much of his time in the temple and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Because the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he will not die before he has seen the Messiah, it's possible that Simeon was getting on in years. I like to think he had a pretty epic beard. Whatever the case, Simeon was watching and waiting, expecting God to move, hoping for a coming Saviour!

As Mary and Joseph present Jesus, Simeon's reaction was one of excitement and joy. This was what he had been waiting for! Taking the infant Jesus in his arms, he blesses God, saying that he can now depart in peace. He proclaims that he has seen God's salvation, meaning that Jesus is the way God will do this.

Simeon declares this salvation is part of God's plan, not only for the Jews, but the Gentiles also! He can see that all people can be included in God's plan, describing Jesus as a light to reveal God to the nations. Indeed, Jesus' message will transform the whole world.

But he also gives us a warning. Simeon tells Mary that Jesus will be opposed, that He will be controversial. Even in this nascent moment, Simeon is pointing towards what Jesus will eventually do on the cross.

Mary and Joseph marvelled at what was said about Jesus. And I think we can marvel at Jesus too! We can be surprised by the hope that Jesus brings, that no matter our background, we can know the joy of salvation. Whatever challenges or difficulties we face in our daily lives today, we can be excited and encouraged that we are included in God's plan for the world. All this through what Jesus has done!

Jotham Bate, Stewardship Resourcing Officer.

LET US PRAY

Thank you Lord for what you have done on the cross, that we can know God personally and if we trust in you, we are included as part of your amazing plan. Amen.

READ: LUKE 2:36-40

‘Coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God.’ Luke 2:38

He’s behind you! In pantomimes there’s nearly always a time when the character looks away just at the wrong minute and misses seeing someone, or something, maybe a ghost. And many farces rely on people just missing seeing someone, or mishearing what they say.

In contrast, in real life we can often (though not always, of course) recognise God’s providence when things happen just at the right time. When we turn up at the right time to meet someone who will play a significant part in our life, or to witness something important going on. I’m sure that I’m far from the only person who, if I hadn’t been in a certain place (in my case on a certain holiday), I’d never have met, let alone married, my wife.

That providence certainly was at work in bringing Anna to the Temple at just the right moment to witness Simeon take Jesus in his arms and acclaim Him as a light to lighten the nations and the glory of His people Israel. If one ‘bookend’ of Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth is the angel’s visit to Mary, the other is her visit to the Temple and the recognition by these two elderly, Spirit-filled saints, of the sanctity of her newborn baby, Jesus. What had been announced by a visitor from heaven is now acknowledged by humans on earth. The Messiah has come. God’s long awaited act to Redeem His people has got underway. It’s amazing, subversive, renewing, life-giving news for all then and for all time—for women as much as for men—and so Luke delights to tell us that Anna the prophetess corroborates Simeon’s announcement.

Having been there as a witness, Anna’s response is first thanksgiving and second witness. Today let our prayer be one of thankful praise of the God who came in Jesus to redeem us all. And may we also tell even one person today, one person who seems to be waiting for God to act—of the greatest divine act of all—the coming of His Son Jesus Christ.

The Revd Toby Webber, Vicar, St George’s & All Saints’, Chorley.

LET US PRAY

Lord we thank You that our prayers, fasting and longing are already answered in Your greatest gift, of Jesus Christ, who came to redeem and save His people and Your whole creation. Amen.

READ: LUKE 2:41-52***‘And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.’ Luke 2:51***

I remember the blind panic when we lost our 6-year-old daughter in IKEA. One moment she was beside us; the next, vanished into the maze of furniture. We frantically sprinted around, hearts pounding. When we finally found her calmly reading in the children’s section, the rush of relief was overwhelming, followed by a breathless, ‘How could you do this to us?’

Mary and Joseph felt that exact, agonising dread. Returning from Jerusalem, they assumed twelve-year-old Jesus was in their traveling caravan. It took three days of frantic searching before they found Him in the temple, completely consumed by His Father’s business. When Mary questioned Him, Jesus gently replied, ‘Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ (v.49). Though they did not fully understand Jesus’ explanation that He must be in His Father’s house, Mary quietly treasured these mysteries and experiences in her heart.

The Greek word for ‘treasured’ implies guarding something safely, protecting it from being lost or trampled. When my daughter was back in my arms, my panic transformed into a deep sense of joy. Similarly, Mary didn’t let her confusion or terror overwhelm her. Instead, she stored it away, trusting that God was at work in the mystery.

We often experience our own seasons of feeling ‘lost’ during Advent. Amid the frantic holiday rush or the heavy cloud of grief, God can feel distant. We worry that the Saviour has left us behind in the maze of life. But Mary’s posture teaches us how to navigate the panic. Advent is a season of holding space for the unexpected ways God moves. This Advent, when life feels chaotic and God seems distant, we are invited to guard our unanswered questions and trust in His ongoing purpose.

The Revd Sarah O’Donoghue, Diocesan Renewal Officer.

LET US PRAY

Lord, in this Advent season, help me to trust Your presence, and treasure Your mysterious ways. Amen.

READ: LUKE 3:1-14

*'As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,
'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.'* Luke 3:4

No doubt in your house the preparations are well underway for the celebration of Jesus' coming as an infant in Bethlehem. Presents are being wrapped; decorations are being hung. But as Luke turns from Jesus' childhood to His years of public ministry, he pauses to help us to consider the preparations that need to be made if we are to respond to the message of salvation Jesus will bring.

Just as in Isaiah's day, when the prophet spoke to the Lord's people in captivity, the first act of preparation John the Baptist spoke of, was to be those who listen to *'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'*. To turn our ear to hear what God has to say. Instead of finding reassuring words to say about ourselves (v.8), we are to come with our questions to the One who brings the word of God.

When we do that in Luke 3, we hear John the Baptist talking about what looks like a great civil engineering project. Making paths in the desert; levelling out the rough places; and carving a way through the hills. Yet what we are called to is not great public works, but intimate private ones. As one writer has put it, *'the highway that clears the way for God's coming is a purified heart'*. John's message is that we are to, *'Bear fruits in keeping with repentance'* (v.8). To humbly turn from our past failings and our present self-reliance and turn to the coming of our Saviour.

Christmas is a time of such joy, but in order to be prepared for it we are to allow God's word to speak to us in such a way that we are ready to receive the message that Jesus offers. As Isaac Watts so beautifully put it,

*'Joy to the world, the Lord is come,
Let earth receive her king
Let every heart prepare him room'*

As we travel through this Advent season and look to Jesus' coming in glory, let's use the time to listen to God's word, to prepare our hearts, and to turn again in repentance.

The Revd David Whitehouse, Vicar, St Andrew's, Leyland.

LET US PRAY

Father, as this Christmas we hear again the message of a Saviour born to us, may we be ready to receive Him with humble hearts and true repentance. Amen

READ: LUKE 3:15-20

'John answered them all, saying, 'I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.' Luke 3:16

Waiting for someone can be exciting, especially if it's someone you long to see. You hear footsteps at the door, only to discover it's not who you expected. That's how I imagine the people felt about John the Baptist. Is he the Messiah? Our Saviour, our Anointed One? They were waiting for a Messiah they assumed would be a great political and military leader who would free them from Roman occupation. But the true Messiah was not who they expected.

John is clear: he is not the Messiah. In fact, he says he isn't even worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. He baptises with water, but Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. John places himself below even the role of a servant in relation to Jesus. He leaves the crowd—and us—in no doubt about the greatness of the Christ. John then uses the image of winnowing to describe Jesus' work. Winnowing was an everyday practice. After the harvest was threshed, the grain was thrown into the air and the wind separated the wheat from the chaff—the good from the useless.

This image speaks to two hopeful truths. First, it points to God's judgement and purification. We all fall short in our relationship with God; none of us is worthy even to untie His sandals. Yet God loves us so deeply that He promised us a Saviour. Christ came to save us from our sins, so that we might be spared the unquenchable fire and receive eternal life with Him. And in a beautiful reversal, Jesus Himself unties the sandals and washes the feet of His disciples—He is our servant King.

Second, winnowing describes what God offers us through the Holy Spirit. If we invite God into our lives and follow Jesus as best we can, the Spirit becomes like the wind blowing through us. If we allow Him, He can carry away what harms us and help us to hold on to what is good.

This is our hope: Christ comes with power, mercy, and the Spirit's cleansing wind—to gather, to restore, and to renew.

The Revd Gregor Stewart, Rector of the Fellside Team of Churches.

LET US PRAY

Lord, send Your Holy Spirit to shift our hearts and separate the wheat from the chaff that we might follow You more faithfully. Amen.

READ: LUKE 3:21-22

‘when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form’ Luke 3:21b-22a

Why was Jesus baptised? He was sinless without spot or blemish how could He not be? For truly Jesus is God. And yet Christ chooses to submit Himself to being washed not so that He might be clean but that the waters themselves might have the power to cleanse and heal. The very waters of the river Jordan across which the people of Israel trod to enter the promised land are through and by Jesus’ baptism sanctified so that all those who are washed in those same waters might have new life, dying to sin, the world, and devil, and rising once more renewed, released and made whole. Once more reflecting that good image of the good God in which we were created.

Though we do not travel the many miles and suffer the many hardships of that journey, we travel to a spiritual Jordan when we gather around the font, the basin, the sea, or the pool. Those same waters which flowed over Christ at His baptism, those same waters which were spilled from His side upon the Cross of our salvation, are unstopped and flow with abundance in our churches. So that all who are washed in them and signed with the cross are forgiven their sins and brought not merely into the family of faith but irrevocably attached to the body of that same Jesus Christ who is our supreme head.

It is through and by our own baptisms which reflect that which Jesus undertook Himself in the river Jordan that we hear Almighty God claim us as His own, you are my beloved daughter, my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. As we prepare for the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the flesh we are reminded in today’s portion of scripture of the ultimate objective of the Incarnation. God becomes a human being, so that human beings might become like-God, sanctified and deified, reigning in heaven with the most holy and undivided Trinity for all eternity, not as subjects but as heirs, as sons and daughters, for ever and ever, Amen.

The Revd Canon David D’Silva, Priest in Charge, St Silas’, Blackburn.

LET US PRAY

*Heavenly Father, give us grace to live as You created us to be, a beloved son or daughter.
Amen.*

READ: LUKE 3:23-38

'Jesus....the son of Joseph....the son of David, the son of Jesse.....the son of Adam, the son of God.' Luke 3:23, 31, 32, 38

'Who do you think you are?' is a favourite TV program of mine. I love the unfolding stories of the persons discovered in the family tree, often there are surprising facts of heroism but also of broken lives and relationships.

In today's Scripture we read Jesus' genealogy, His family tree, which when researched reveals that Jesus entered a messy family history, just as we may encounter in ours.

If we look at David the son of Jesse from the list, he was chosen and anointed as king. Originally a humble shepherd boy, the youngest of eight boys fathered by Jesse. One day God sent the prophet Samuel to Jesse's home to anoint a new king after King Saul disobeyed God (1 Samuel 16). David grew strong and full of the Holy Spirit following the anointing. He was brave and a warrior. He eventually gained royal status and became king but then was tempted and committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his loyal soldiers Uriah. He had Uriah killed to cover up his sin. David suffered the consequences of his actions but God did not desert him because David was humble and repentant. His prayers of repentance can be read in the psalms especially Psalm 51.

The story of David shows both the heart of David and also of God, how God despite the brokenness keeps to His plan and works within the mess of life to restore, heal and forgive (2 Samuel 12:13).

Jesus' family tree reaches back to Adam, the first human. God sent His Beloved Son Jesus born from humanity into the world to be with humanity and to be their Saviour showing God's heart of love for His creation of both the world and its people. It also shows Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Adam and to God.

Looking at Jesus' family tree is helpful because we can see God at work throughout the Old Testament leading into the New Testament when Jesus entered the world as God's divine plan, the one sent to save all of humanity.

The Revd Hilary Murphy, Resident Chaplain of Whalley Abbey.

LET US PRAY

Loving God, thank You that You sent Your son Jesus into the world to save us. Thank You that You never leave us even in our messiness. Create in me a clean heart O God, restore to me, the joy of Your salvation. Amen.

READ: ISAIAH 40:14

‘Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?’ Isaiah 40:14

Could AI really kill us all in the next decade? Will the UK be at war soon and are we ready? How should we respond to the climate emergency? What should we do about the current cost of living? We desperately need wisdom! If ever there was a time when we need to know where wisdom can be found (Job 28:12), it's now. So, where can we find it?

God alone knows where wisdom dwells (Job 28:23) because it comes from Him. Wisdom has been with God from the beginning (Prov. 8:22-23), constantly rejoicing at His side (Prov. 8:30), and sharing His throne (Wis 9:4; 1 Enoch 84:3). Wisdom proceeds from the mouth of the Most High (Sir. 24:3), by which and with which God created the world (Prov. 3:19; 8:27-29). By wisdom the universe is ordered and sustained (Wis. 8:1). But still, we may ask, where can we find wisdom? How can we benefit from the life and fullness that wisdom offers (Prov. 8:19; 9:5-6)?

Well, it turns out wisdom is not a thing of God, but a person of God. Where is wisdom found? It is found in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30). It is with and by the Son that God made all things (John 1:1-4; Col. 1:15-17). It is the Son who has always and will always rejoice at the Father's side (John 17:5), sharing His throne (Rev. 3:21; 5:6; 22:1). It is the Son who upholds and sustains the universe (Heb. 1:3; Col 1:17).

So as we look for wisdom to navigate today's complexities, let's look to Jesus and the unlikely wisdom of His cross (1 Cor 1:18-31; 2:6-16). Let us look to Jesus to learn to walk in His ways. And as we long for a day when our world is ordered and ruled by true wisdom, let us pray today, 'Come, O Wisdom.' To which He replies, 'Tomorrow, I will be there.'

The Revd Dr Andy Meeson, Bishop's Chaplain.

LET US PRAY

Come, O Wisdom, fill our hearts with Your Spirit that we might always walk in Your ways, and follow Your path. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Antiphon chant link



READ: ISAIAH 11:4-5***'O Lord and Ruler of the house of Israel, come and save us.' - O Adonai Antiphon***

Come and save us... if only it were that simple...

The season of Advent is a time of waiting though, waiting for the coming. We wait for Christmas, but we can also reflect that waiting is a huge part of life — waiting for holidays, waiting for news, waiting for treatment, waiting for things to change, and waiting for hope to return.

In my work and vocation as a hospital chaplain, I meet many people who know what it is to wait. Sometimes there is an answer at the end of the waiting, sometimes there isn't. And sometimes the hardest thing is sitting quietly with someone simply not knowing what the waiting will bring

Come and save us. It doesn't pretend that everything is fine. It doesn't try to find a positive answer to something that may be frightening or painful. It is a cry to God, come close to us. Be with us. Come and save us is not a promise that everything will suddenly become easy if we ask. It is a heartfelt cry to God from within the uncertainty: Come and save us, be with us, do not leave us alone or abandon us.

This is Advent. As we imagine God walking towards us, reaching out, He comes not with loud organs or shouts of praise, but as a vulnerable baby, born into a humble human family. God chooses to enter our world as it really is in all its beautiful, messy, joyful, painful, and uncertain moments, and He comes bringing hope. Hope of good over evil.

In hospital, I see snippets of that same hope, in small act of kindness, a reassuring gentle touch, or sitting quietly at a bedside. We can't change what is happening. We can't take away someone's illness or make the waiting disappear. But we can come close. We can sit alongside someone and remind them that they are not alone.

In Advent we are given permission to simply wait, to watch and to trust that God is coming towards us. Advent reminds us that we do not have to see the whole road ahead, we simply have to wait.

The Revd Rachel Fielding, Chaplain, East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust.

LET US PRAY

*Come, Lord Jesus. Come close to us,
and to all who are waiting today. Amen.*

Antiphon chant link



READ: ISAIAH 11:1

*‘There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.’ Isaiah 11:1*

Have you ever sung that beautiful Advent hymn ‘O come, O come, Emmanuel’ and wondered what ‘the Branch of Jesse’s tree’ is all about? It comes from a line in the prophet Isaiah, written seven hundred years before Jesus was born. The modern carol is that ancient prayer put to song.

Jesse was King David’s father. The tree of Jesse is a family tree, and for generations the fruit of Jesse’s tree were kings. We still talk like this without noticing: a cousin is a branch of the family, someone comes of good stock, we want to know our roots. And an heir used to be called a scion, the gardener’s word for a young shoot. But by Isaiah’s day the tree of Jesse had gone wrong. The kings had failed their people, enemy armies were closing in, and in the verses before this passage Isaiah describes God walking into the forest with an axe. The tree of Jesse has become a stump.

Three years ago two men cut down the Sycamore Gap tree, on Hadrian’s Wall. They snuck up there in the night to commit their terrible act of vandalism, and by morning the beautiful tree was reduced to a stump. People travelled there to stand and weep at the seemingly irreparable damage. The collective grief that poured out across the nation gives us a window into the emotions that Isaiah is addressing. But two years later, the stump began to sprout. Small green shoots pushed up from the stump: fragile and beautiful they speak of hope that today’s stump is not the end of the story and that the roots may still be alive after all.

That is Isaiah’s promise, that out of the cut-down family of David, a shoot can be seen. Out of the roots springs forth a branch. Small, fragile, and hopeful. That shoot is Jesus. God did not abandon His promise, He didn’t start again with a new tree. Out of the stump of Israel’s failure comes a baby: small, fragile, and hopeful. So, whatever in your life looks like a stump this Advent, fear not, God can bring forth fresh shoots.

The Revd Canon James Lawrence, Canon Missioner, Blackburn Cathedral.

LET US PRAY

*Come, Lord Jesus, when life feels hopeless
comfort me with Your hope. Amen.*

Antiphon chant link



READ: ISAIAH 22:22

'I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.' Isaiah 22:22

If you've ever had a door shut (or even slammed) in your face, you'll know the pain of rejection. A closing door says that you are not welcome, that you are not wanted here. Even worse to hear the locks and bolts sliding home, securing the rejection further. For centuries, it felt like the door was shut; locked and barred so that no-one could enter the community of God's chosen people. Millions were excluded because their face did not fit, or they were considered unclean, even unholy. Strangers and foreigners were told they did not belong.

In the climax of our Advent devotions, we remember that God chooses to wait with the excluded; looking for the day when the barriers are lifted, the prison doors unlocked, and every single soul is home where they belong.

King David defined his nation as the People of God. Christ, the direct descendant of David, gives us an access-all-areas-pass to God's grace and mercy; unlocking the Kingdom's door so that every unwanted stranger and unholy foreigner is welcomed as one of God's chosen people.

Whether you count yourself as a rejected stranger or one of the in-crowd, Christ opens the door of our hearts. With Christ's key, we unlock the great mystery that we too are welcome in the stable in Bethlehem, just like the unclean shepherds and foreign Magi who sought the Saviour of the world.

If you feel lost and unloved today, here is the key that opens the stable door. Let God gaze on you through infant eyes - let yourself be welcomed home by Him, for the door of heaven will never be shut and this joy and love is for you.

But the Key of David works another way. It also shuts the gates of hell. Jesus locks out the pain and shame; locking and bolting the door against every evil that seeks us harm. When the world feels uncertain and fragile, here is the key of faith that welcomes us safely into Christ - where we belong.

The Revd Carol Backhouse, Vicar, Christ Church, Lancaster.

LET US PRAY

O Christ, come and bring forth all who sit in darkness into the light of Your presence. Amen.

Antiphon chant link



READ: MALACHI 4:2

'But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.' Malachi 4:2

On a flight home from holiday this summer, somewhere over the Atlantic, I watched the darkness turn into light. We had been flying east, back from America towards home. Outside the window there was nothing but darkness. Inside the cabin, people were sleeping, reading, watching films. Everything was quiet. Then, almost in an instant, there was light. It didn't creep slowly across the sky. It seemed as though someone had suddenly switched on all the cabin lights. I looked around, expecting to see where the light was coming from but the cabin lights were still dimmed. Nothing had been switched on. We had simply reached the dawn. Darkness had not been defeated by anything we had done. We had simply travelled far enough to meet the rising sun.

Malachi speaks of the coming Messiah as the 'sun of righteousness' who rises 'with healing in its wings.' Centuries later, Zechariah speaks of the 'dawn from on high' coming to those who sit in darkness. These are seen as images of Christ. As Christians our hope is not just that things will get brighter. It is the hope that Christ comes. God's answer to the darkness of our world is Jesus himself. The eternal Son enters our human darkness - the Light comes among us.

Perhaps that is why dawn is such a strong image for Advent. We cannot make the sun rise or switch it on. We wait and then discover that the light has come. The dawn is not something we create; it is something we receive. Advent invites us to wait for Christ and welcome the light He brings. There is a verse in the beautiful Advent hymn, 'O come O come Emmanuel' that is very fitting for today;

*'O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine Advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.'*

I say 'amen' to that, because darkness does not have the final word!

The Venerable Jane Atkinson, Archdeacon of Blackburn.

LET US PRAY

*O Dayspring come, shine into our darkness,
bring healing and lead us into Your light. Amen.*

Antiphon chant link



READ: JEREMIAH 10:7

'Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.' Jeremiah 10:7

I have just been listening to Caitlin Moran talking about her latest book. It is entitled, 'How to be hopeful; My year of living joyfully'. She explained that she wrote it to the world at a time when many are struggling to find hope. It was good to hear someone wanting to speak hope and joy into the world.

We are fast closing in on Christmas Day. In this latest reflection on the 'O' antiphons, we consider Jesus' call to be King of the Nations. What does this look like in world relations at such a precarious time? Well, I would say something like speaking hope and joy into the world. The truth is, those who place their trust in Jesus will give Him sovereignty. Sovereignty of their hearts, their lives, their resources, their towns, villages, cities and nations. One of the great deceptions of the current age is that religion has nothing to do with state. What is also true is Jesus clearly says, 'My Kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). What do we make of this?

Well, Jesus clearly did not seek to be enthroned in a palace as Charles III is. He did, however, ask us to make the right decision about enthroning Him in our hearts. Imagine if the whole world did this overnight. The Prince of Peace would reign and God's true shalom (peace and wellbeing) would be over the whole world.

Jeremiah's prophecy foresaw a time when One would come who would offer all the world would ever need. He came and we celebrate His coming in a few days' time. The issue is all have to individually 'own' that for themselves.

This day as we give thanks for the gift of Jesus, let us pray for world leaders that they may see through the fog of events to see the true claim of the one who only seeks to be 'King of the Nations' that all may live in hope and peace.

The Venerable David Picken, Archdeacon of Lancaster.

LET US PRAY

'O King of the nations, and their desire, the Cornerstone making both one; Come and save the human race, which You fashioned from clay.' Amen.

Antiphon chant link



30 WEDNESDAY 23RD DECEMBER - O EMMANUEL (O GOD WITH US)

READ: ISAIAH 7:14

‘the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.’ Isaiah 7:14

It was St Matthew who tells us that these words of the Prophet Isaiah find their fulfilment in the birth of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1:23). For Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, and He is Emmanuel, which means God-with-us.

This is indeed the wonder of Christmas – that we see in the manger this one person who is truly God and truly human.

Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, we human beings have sought to become the lawgiver – imagining that we, not God, can decide what is right and wrong. In the end, this is what sin is: attempting to ‘raid heaven’ (so to speak), trying to make ourselves equal with God (see Genesis 3:5).

But God the Son, on the contrary, ‘came down from heaven’ (as the Nicene Creed teaches). He took on our human nature, and humbled Himself even to the point of dying for us (see Philipians 2:6-8).

All this should bring us to our knees before the Christmas Crib. God the Son coming to save us, to pay the price for our sins. This is the only hope and salvation.

So it is that, with today’s Evensong Antiphon, we turn to Jesus Christ in faith:

The Rt Revd Dr Joe Kennedy, Bishop of Burnley.

LET US PRAY

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

Antiphon chant link



READ: 2 SAMUEL 7:1-16

‘Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me. Your throne shall be established for ever.’ 2 Samuel 7:16

Today the Christmas count-down reaches fever pitch. Only one more sleep before The Day we have been waiting for. I take my hat off to Andy Park from Wiltshire, who likes Christmas so much that he celebrates Christmas every day of the year. In our Insta-culture, we are not so adept at waiting. At this time of year, on a clear morning, I love to watch the dawn break. There is a moment when the night sky starts to become a little less dark, long before the sun crests the horizon.

In today’s reading, we meet King David at the peak of his powers. He has decided to build God a house, a final resting place for the Ark of the Covenant. He is assured in his plans by the prophet Nathan (v.3). But then the same night, the word of the Lord comes to Nathan the prophet with a surprising about-turn. It will be the other way around: *‘Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house’* (v.11)... *‘Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me, your throne shall be established forever’* (v.16). What an astonishing prophecy from Nathan. In a world of political turmoil and instability, the sky starts to become a little less dark.

And on Christmas Eve, the sun crests the horizon. After nearly a thousand years of waiting, when very obviously the descendants of David did not hold political sway on the throne of Israel, the Angel of the Lord appears to the shepherds on the hills above David’s town of Bethlehem: *‘To you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord’* (Luke 2.11).

Over the last years, Christmas Eve attendance in our churches has been most definitely on the up. Yes, it maybe the only time in the year (like the old joke: “I’m a regular at church: once a year on Christmas Eve without fail”). But I am praying that today in hearts across Lancashire that seeds are sown of our heavenly home. May their sky start to become a little less dark.

The sunrise is unstoppable. *‘The dawn from on high will break upon us’* (Luke 1:78) *‘For no word from God will ever fail’* (Luke 1:37, NIV). *‘Christ is the morning star who, when the night of this world is past, brings to his saints the promise of the light of life and opens everlasting day’* (The Venerable Bede).

The Rt Revd Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, Son of David, may your unstoppable sunrise dawn in hearts across Lancashire today. Amen.

READ: ISAIAH 9:2-7*'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.' Isaiah 9:2a*

My greatest terror is to be locked in a windowless room. That's because I can't abide darkness. I can't sleep unless there is some form of light in the bedroom and I love mornings because the daylight has returned.

Isaiah was writing to a people in darkness. Judah was being attacked by the mighty Assyrians and the king was relying on fragile political alliances rather than trusting in God. It was a time of terror and violence. But despite such darkness, Isaiah speaks words of great hope. A light is coming. And what is that light? It is a child. A son is given.

Today, Christmas Day, we who long for light can rejoice that Isaiah's promise has been richly and vividly fulfilled.

As we have journeyed through Advent with the early Chapters of Luke, we have seen Isaiah's prophesy echoed and re-echoed. Remember Zechariah who sang, *'By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness.'* Remember Simeon who prophesied, *'My eyes have seen your salvation, a light for revelation to the Gentiles.'*

Today their words are fulfilled. The light they foretold (in company with Isaiah) has now come. And the proof? The child in the manger. A son is given.

In this child, all darkness is dispelled. Our new-born king will dispel the darkness of injustice as he declares the truth of God's kingdom. He will destroy the darkness of sin as He carries our sins to the cross. He will shatter the darkness of death as He ascends to the Father to complete the work of our salvation. In this child, we who dwell in darkness can know the glorious light of God's eternal new day.

Christmas happens at the very darkest time of the year, because the deeper the darkness the brighter the light shines forth. And the light we rejoice in today is inextinguishable. The Christ-child is here! Happy Christmas!

The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn.

LET US PRAY

Heavenly Father, we rejoice that you have dispelled the darkness of our hearts and lives through the dazzling light of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.



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DEVOTIONAL LITURGY

EVENING PRAYER

✠ O come come to my assistance
O Lord make haste to help me.
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

That this evening may be holy, good, and peaceful
help me to pray with singleness of heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As my evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon me
to cleanse my heart and set me free to sing your praise.
now and for ever. Amen.

Read the biblical passage set for the day.

If using with a Diocesan devotional read the devotion and assigned prayer.

Keep silence for a few minutes, you may like to add your own prayers.

Awaiting his coming in glory,
I pray with confidence as my Saviour has taught me:

Our Father, who art in heaven....

Almighty God, give me grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when He shall come again in His glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, I may rise to the life immortal; through Him who is alive and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

May the Lord, when he comes,
find me watching and waiting. Amen.

✠ May the Lord bless me,
May he keep away all evil
And lead me to eternal life.

Amen

We'd love your feedback
on this resource!



All texts in this booklet are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

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