



# Five Crosses

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*Advent*  
*Hope · Love · Joy · Peace*



*Prose, Poems, Scripture, Prayers  
for Advent*

*Selected by  
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This year's Advent Devotional guide takes the form of a piece of poetry or prose from Christian writers across the centuries. Some are from well known writers, theologians or saints, others from names that will be new to you. But each of them have something to say about what it is to be a Christian looking for the coming of Christ. There is no theme running through the booklet beyond that.

Coupled with that writing is a short passage of scripture which is often, although not always, connected in some way to the first piece. Each day has a prayer in the form of a collect (taken from the Roman Missal for the weekdays in Advent or the alternative collects from Common Worship for the Sundays).

Use the booklet however seems best and most appropriate for you. If the first reading doesn't appeal to you ignore it, if it does savour it and reflect upon it. The biblical texts are printed in full and are taken from the *New Jerusalem Bible*, but if you prefer a different translation read them in that.

The readings and prayers will appear each early day on the benefice Facebook page ([facebook.com/fivecrosses](https://facebook.com/fivecrosses)). If you wish to make a comment on what you read please do so there (you will need to be registered with Facebook to comment).

The days before Christmas can be a hectic time in our lives and it can be good for us to take a few minutes out of each day to be quiet and still and to reflect on what God is saying to us in this Advent season.

# Advent Sunday

## Advent Prose Revisited

*Rend the heavens, come quickly down –*

Can we mean it? In the dark  
to ask the God to come like this  
would have us tremble at the presence  
sought that Sunday as we sang.

*Behold, thou wast angry and we sinned –*

dear God, we try, we know our sin,  
we see too clearly where we are.

The veiled women weep, the bomb  
explodes on distant soil:

we worry lest our own are there,  
care less about the ruined lives  
among the debris of our wars.

*All our deeds are like a polluted garment –*

hung about us in the cold  
as if we fear our nakedness,  
would do anything to hide.

The child dies at the hands of those  
whose task is care and love  
while we, appalled, avert our eyes  
from innocence betrayed.

*We all fade like a leaf*

*and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away –*

light little things in the face of creation  
and yet, and yet ...

Lord, we continue. You have never  
swept us from the face of earth.

We love and beget and children  
lovely children, innocent and clean

come naked into the world  
in your eternal promise of what can be.  
Your Son will come, again, again  
and we have hope, another chance  
to use your world in precious ways  
to hold your people to your face.  
As tiny fingers clasp round ours  
we reach into the dark and feel  
the strength of love enfolding us.  
The heavens are rent as if a cloud  
were parted at the end of rain  
and light will come too bright to tell –  
we sing again. Come, Lord, and soon.

*Christine Macintosh*

## **Read God's word**

*Isaiah 2.1-5*

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem.  
It will happen in the final days that the mountain of Yahweh's house will rise higher than the mountains and tower above the heights. Then all the nations will stream to it, many peoples will come to it and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths.' For the Law will issue from Zion and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. Then he will judge between the nations and arbitrate between many peoples. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, no longer will they learn how to make war. House of Jacob, come, let us walk in Yahweh's light.

## Pray

Almighty God,  
as your kingdom dawns,  
turn us from the darkness of sin  
to the light of holiness,  
that we may be ready to meet you  
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

## Monday in the first week of Advent

### When Christ comes, God will be seen by men and women

There is one God, who by his word and wisdom created all things and set them in order. His word is our Lord Jesus Christ, who in this last age became man among men to unite end and beginning, that is, man and God.

The prophets, receiving the gift of prophecy from this same Word, foretold his coming in the flesh, which brought about the union and communion between God and man ordained by the Father. From the beginning the word of God prophesied that God would be seen by men and would live among them on earth; he would speak with his own creation and be present to it, bringing it salvation and being visible to it. He would free us from the hands of all who hate us, that is, from the universal spirit of sin, and enable us to serve him in holiness and justice all our days. Man was to receive the Spirit of God and so to attain to the glory of the Father.

The prophets foretold that God would be seen by men. As the Lord himself says: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.* In his greatness and inexpressible glory no one can see God and live, for the Father is beyond our comprehension. But in his love and generosity and omnipotence he allows even this to those who love him, that is,

even to see God, as the prophets foretold. For what is impossible to men is possible to God.

By his own powers man cannot see God; yet God will be seen by men because he wills it. He will be seen by those he chooses, at the time he chooses, and in the way he chooses, for God can do all things. He was seen of old through the Spirit in prophecy; he is seen through the Son by our adoption as his children, and he will be seen in the kingdom of heaven in his own being as the Father. The Spirit prepares man to receive the Son of God, the Son leads him to the Father, and the Father, freeing him from change and decay, bestows the eternal life that comes to everyone from seeing God.

As those who see light are in the light sharing its brilliance, so those who see God are in God sharing his glory, and that glory gives them life. To see God is to share in life.

*Irenaeus, 130-200 A.D.*

## **Read God's word**

*John 14.6-12*

Jesus said: 'I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him. Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his works. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe it on the evidence of these works. In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do

myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father.

## **Pray**

Lord our God,  
help us to prepare  
for the coming of Christ your Son.  
May he find us waiting,  
eager in joyful prayer.

## **Tuesday in the first week of Advent**

### **Alleluia-Verse for the Virgin**

Alleluia! light  
burst from your untouched  
womb like a flower  
on the farther side  
of death. The world-tree  
is blossoming. Two  
realms become one.

*Hildegard of Bingen (Trans. Barbara Newman)*

### **Read God's Word**

*Luke 2.1-5*

Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world. This census -- the first -- took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David's town called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

## Pray

God of mercy and consolation,  
help us in our weakness and free us from sin.  
Hear our prayers  
that we may rejoice at the coming of your Son.

## Wednesday in the first week of Advent

### Christians Have Lost Touch With Heaven!

Something very strange has taken place in the last few years: Christians have lost touch with heaven! Of the desire for heaven, our *heavenly home*, we hear hardly a word. It is as if Christians have lost the orientation that for centuries defined the direction of their journey. We have forgotten that we are pilgrims and that the goal of our pilgrimage is heaven. Connected with this is another loss: we largely lack the awareness that we are on a dangerous pilgrim path and that it is possible for us to miss our goal, to fail to reach the goal of our life. To put it bluntly: we do not long for heaven; we take it for granted that we shall get there. This diagnosis may be exaggerated, over-stated. The trouble is, I am afraid it is essentially true.

Against this loss and neglect, the Church's Easter message proclaims: "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). "My desire is to depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23). This profound and pressing yearning does not strive for just any kind of "life after death" but is the desire "to be with Christ," to live with him, to be "at home with the Lord".

"At home!" For so many people, who have lost their homes or their homeland, the word *home* is a word of longing. The English word *home*, like the German *Heimat*, has a strongly emotional, almost devotional resonance. *Home* is not just a particular landscape, not just its language, its familiar landmarks, but above all the people who live

there. When the people we were familiar with (friends, neighbours, acquaintances) no longer live there, then home has died, even if the landscape has remained.

The Church is first of all, a heavenly reality. She has her origin in the life of God himself, and so, in the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar, she is “first and foremost a reality established in time from heaven”. The foundations of the Church are above, which is why Saint Augustine says:

“Since our foundation [Christ] is in heaven, let us be built up toward heaven . . . for we are built spiritually, and our foundation lies above. Let us hasten, therefore, whither we are built.”

This look of longing toward the heavenly homeland is not an escape from our earthly responsibilities. On the contrary, hope for heaven, for full communion with Christ and *all the angels and saints*, is the very motor, the driving force, of Christian engagement in this world. Christian hope for the coming of God's Kingdom asks for both things from God: that his Kingdom may come in glory; and that his Kingdom may begin already here on earth.

*Christoph Schonborn, Archbishop of Vienna*

## **Read God's word**

*Colossians 3.1-4*

Since you have been raised up to be with Christ, you must look for the things that are above, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand. Let your thoughts be on things above, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed -- and he is your life-you, too, will be revealed with him in glory.

## Pray

Lord our God,  
grant that we may be ready  
to receive Christ when he comes in glory  
and to share in the banquet of heaven.

## Thursday in the first week of Advent

### The People of Advent

#### *The herald angel*

Never have I entered on Advent so vitally and intensely alert as I am now. When I pace my cell, up and down, three paces one way and three the other, my hands manacled, an unknown fate in front of me, then the tidings of our Lord's coming to redeem the world and deliver it have a different and much more vivid meaning.

And my mind keeps going back to the angel someone gave me as a present during Advent two or three years ago. It bore the inscription: "Be of good cheer. The Lord is near." A bomb destroyed it. The same bomb killed the donor and I often have the feeling that he is rendering me some heavenly aid.

#### *Promises given and fulfilled*

It would be impossible to endure the horror of these times - like the horror of life itself, could we only see it clearly enough - if there were not this other knowledge which constantly buoys us up and gives us strength: the knowledge of the promises that have been given and fulfilled. And the awareness of the angels of good tidings, uttering their blessed messages in the midst of all this trouble and sowing seed of blessing where it will sprout in the middle of the night.

Then angels of Advent are not the bright jubilant beings who trumpet the tidings of fulfilment to a waiting world. Quiet and unseen they enter our shabby rooms and our hearts as they did of old. In the silence of the

night they pose God's questions and proclaim the wonders of him with whom all things are possible.

### ***Footsteps of the herald angel***

Advent, even when things are going wrong, is a period from which a message can be drawn. May the time never come when men forget about the good tidings and promises, when, so immured within the four walls of their prison that their very eyes are dimmed, they see nothing but grey days through barred windows placed too high to see out of.

May the time never come when mankind no longer hears the soft footsteps of the herald angel, or his cheering words that penetrate the soul. Should such a time come all will be lost. Then indeed we shall be living in bankruptcy and hope will die in our hearts.

### ***Golden seeds waiting to be sowed***

For the first thing man must do if he wants to raise himself out of this sterile life is to open his heart to the golden seed which God's angels are waiting to sow in it.

And one other thing; he must himself throughout these grey days go forth as a bringer of good tidings. There is so much despair that cries out for comfort; there is so much faint courage that needs to be reinforced; there is so much perplexity that yearns for reasons and meanings.

### ***Reaping the fruits of divine seeds***

God's messengers, who have themselves reaped the fruits of divine seeds sown even in the darkest hours, know how to wait for the fullness of harvest. Patience and faith are needed, not because we believe in the earth, or in our stars, or our temperament or our good disposition, but because we have received the message of God's herald angel and have our selves encountered him.

*Fr Alfred Depp, writing from a Nazi prison*

## **Read God's word**

*Acts 12.6-11*

On the night before Herod was to try him, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, fastened with two chains, while guards kept watch at the main entrance to the prison. Then suddenly an angel of the Lord stood there, and the cell was filled with light. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him. 'Get up!' he said, 'Hurry!' -- and the chains fell from his hands. The angel then said, 'Put on your belt and sandals.' After he had done this, the angel next said, 'Wrap your cloak round you and follow me.' He followed him out, but had no idea that what the angel did was all happening in reality; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed through the first guard post and then the second and reached the iron gate leading to the city. This opened of its own accord; they went through it and had walked the whole length of one street when suddenly the angel left him. It was only then that Peter came to himself. And he said, 'Now I know it is all true. The Lord really did send his angel and save me from Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'

## **Pray**

Father,

we need your help.

Free us from sin and bring us to life.

Support us by your power.

## **Friday in the first week of Advent**

### **Kneeling**

Moments of great calm,

Kneeling before an altar

Of wood in a stone church

In summer, waiting for the God

To speak; the air a staircase  
For silence; the sun's light  
Ringing me, as though I acted  
A great rôle. And the audiences  
Still; all that close throng  
Of spirits waiting, as I,  
For the message.

        Prompt me, God;  
But not yet. When I speak,  
Though it be you who speak  
Through me, something is lost.  
The meaning is in the waiting.

*R S Thomas*

## **Read God's word**

*Luke 5.12-16*

Now it happened that Jesus was in one of the towns when suddenly a man appeared, covered with a skin-disease. Seeing Jesus he fell on his face and implored him saying, 'Sir, if you are willing you can cleanse me.' He stretched out his hand, and touched him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' At once the skin-disease left him. He ordered him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering for your cleansing just as Moses prescribed, as evidence to them.' But the news of him kept spreading, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their illnesses cured, but he would go off to some deserted place and pray.

## **Pray**

Jesus, our Lord,  
save us from our sins.  
Come protect us from all dangers  
and lead us to salvation.

# Saturday in the first week of Advent

## What If This Present Were the World's Last Night?

What is important is not that we should always fear (or hope) about the End but that we should always remember, always take it into account. An analogy may here help. A man of seventy need not be always feeling (much less talking) about his approaching death: but a wise man of seventy should always take it into account. He would be foolish to embark on schemes which presuppose twenty more years of life: he would be criminally foolish not to make – indeed, not to have made long since – his will.

Now, what death is to each man, the Second Coming is to the whole human race. We all believe, I suppose, that a man should “sit loose” to his own individual life, should remember how short, precarious, temporary, and provisional a thing it is; should never give all his heart to anything which will end when his life ends. What modern Christians find it harder to remember is that the whole life of humanity in this world is also precarious, temporary, provisional.

### *Two kinds of people in the end*

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "*Thy* will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.

C.S. Lewis

## Read God's word

*Luke 12.16-21*

Then he told them a parable, "There was once a rich man who, having had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself, "What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what

I will do: I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them, and I will say to my soul: My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time." But God said to him, "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" So it is when someone stores up treasure for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God.'

## **Pray**

God our Father,  
you loved the world so much  
you gave your only Son to free us  
from the ancient power of sin and death.  
Help us who wait for his coming,  
and lead us to true liberty.

## **The Second Sunday in Advent**

People, look east. The time is near  
Of the crowning of the year.  
Make your house fair as you are able,  
Trim the hearth and set the table.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the guest, is on the way.

Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,  
One more seed is planted there:  
Give up your strength the seed to nourish,  
That in course the flower may flourish.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the rose, is on the way.

Birds, though you long have ceased to build,  
Guard the nest that must be filled.  
Even the hour when wings are frozen

God for fledging time has chosen.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the bird, is on the way.

Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim  
One more light the bowl shall brim,  
Shining beyond the frosty weather,  
Bright as sun and moon together.  
People, look east and sing today  
Love, the star, is on the way.

Angels, announce with shouts of mirth  
Christ who brings new life to earth.  
Set every peak and valley humming  
With the word, the Lord is coming.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the Lord, is on the way.

*Eleanor Farjeon*

## **Read God's word**

*Ezekiel 43.2-7a*

I saw the glory of the God of Israel approaching from the east. A sound came with him like the sound of the ocean, and the earth shone with his glory. This vision was like the one I had seen when I had come for the destruction of the city, and like the one I had seen by the River Chebar. Then I fell to the ground. The glory of Yahweh arrived at the Temple by the east gate. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; I saw the glory of Yahweh fill the Temple. And I heard someone speaking to me from the Temple while the man stood beside me. He said, 'Son of man, this is the dais of my throne, the step on which I rest my feet. I shall live here among the Israelites for ever.

## **Pray**

Almighty God,  
purify our hearts and minds,  
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again  
as judge and saviour  
we may be ready to receive him,  
who is our Lord and our God.

## **Monday in the second week of Advent**

### **The Two Comings of Christ**

Jesus was born in order to die. Indeed, of all humans who ever lived on earth, God's Son is the only one who entered the world for this purpose. He came to die so that we might live in and through him. The eternal life which he brings to the world is already present and active in those who receive him, but it will be manifested fully and completely in a way which no one can question, doubt, or resist only at the end of the ages.

Christians are those who remember and celebrate the fact that God has visited his people in the person of his Son in order to be crucified and raised. And so they are also those who await his Coming, believing that all of God's promises made in and through Jesus will be actualized in the age to come. Therefore they expect nothing here. They want nothing here. They know that they will get nothing here. Their Saviour's promise for this age is only persecution and tribulation.

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will

persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also." (John 15:18-20)

Christians live between the two comings of Christ. They remember his first coming to be sacrificed. They anticipate his second coming to reign. This is vividly portrayed in traditional Orthodox church buildings where the "royal gates" of the icon screen in front of the altar table are flanked by the icons of the Theotokos and Child on the one side, and the Lord Jesus in glory on the other. To the uninitiated it may seem as though these are simply pictures of Mary and Jesus put on the same level. This is not so. The icons which frame the Orthodox altar are images of the two comings of Christ.

Mary is not alone in her icon; she is holding the Christ child, who is not shown as a baby, but as the Son of God incarnate "in the form of a slave ... in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). This is the icon of Christ's first coming. And the icon on the right of the doors is not a picture of Jesus as he was on the earth. It is his image in glory as King and Lord, the icon of his second coming.

The two comings of Christ are held together in Christian thought, action, and prayer at all times. They cannot be separated. When they are, it is the end of Christian faith, life and worship. The first coming without the second is a meaningless tragedy. The second coming without the first is an absurd impossibility. Jesus is born to bring God's kingdom. He dies to prove his kingship. He rises to establish his reign. He comes again in glory to share it with his people. In the kingdom of God there are no subjects. All rule with the risen Messiah. He came, and is coming, for this purpose alone.

Alan  
You have taken me captive with longing for You, O  
Christ,  
And have transformed me with Your divine love.  
Burn up my sins with the fire of Your Spirit

And count me worthy to take my fill of delight in You  
That dancing with joy, I may magnify Your two Comings.

*Thomas Hopko*

## **Read God's word**

*Colossians 1.13b-20*

It is he who has rescued us from the ruling force of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that he loves, and in him we enjoy our freedom, the forgiveness of sin. He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, thrones, ruling forces, sovereignties, powers -- all things were created through him and for him. He exists before all things and in him all things hold together, and he is the Head of the Body, that is, the Church. He is the Beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he should be supreme in every way; because God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through his death on the cross.

## **Pray**

Lord,  
free us from our sins and make us whole.  
Hear our prayer,  
and prepare us to celebrate the incarnation of your Son.

## **Tuesday in the second week of Advent**

### **Seeing the Unseeable**

When duty called him  
To Jerusalem  
We had almost ceased

Hoping,  
Our hearts parched  
As the dusty hill-soil,  
Our virtue,  
Our blamelessness  
A habit,  
Our love salted  
With sorrow  
To be forever  
Two.

He came back  
Mute,  
Wild-eyed,  
Terrifying,  
So that instinct,  
Stronger than love,  
Than reunion,  
Backed me away  
Behind my loom.

The writing tablet,  
Thrust roughly  
Into my hesitant hands,  
Raved  
Of incense,  
Angels,  
Gabriel himself,  
Joy for us,  
A son,  
The Holy Spirit  
Outpoured,  
Elijah reborn,

Our son,  
John.

I was afraid,  
Seeing him maddened  
By despair's visions,  
Until I looked harder,  
Saw his wild hope  
Shot with incredulity,  
To have seen the unseeable,  
Been offered the impossible,  
And believed.

*Author unknown*

## **Read God's word**

*John 1.19-23*

This was the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He declared, he did not deny but declared, 'I am not the Christ.' So they asked, 'Then are you Elijah?' He replied, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So he said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord. Make his paths straight!'

## **Pray**

Almighty God,  
help us to look forward  
to the glory of the birth of Christ our saviour:  
his coming is proclaimed joyfully  
to the ends of the earth.

# Wednesday of the second week of Advent

## The Angel and the Girl are Met

The angel and the girl are met,  
Earth was the only meeting place,  
For the embodied never yet  
Travelled beyond the shore of space.  
The eternal spirits in freedom go.  
See, they have come together, see,  
While the destroying minutes flow,  
Each reflects the other's face  
Till heaven in hers and earth in his  
Shine steady there. He's come to her  
From far beyond the farthest star,  
Feathered through time. Immediacy  
of strangest strangeness is the bliss  
That from their limbs all movement takes.  
Yet the increasing rapture brings  
So great a wonder that it makes  
Each feather tremble on his wings.  
Outside the window footsteps fall  
Into the ordinary day  
And with the sun along the wall  
Pursue their unreturning way  
That was ordained in eternity.  
Sound's perpetual roundabout  
Rolls its numbered octaves out  
And hoarsely grinds its battered tune.  
But through the endless afternoon  
These neither speak nor movement make,

But stare into their deepening trance  
As if their gaze would never break.

*Edwin Muir*

## **Read God's word**

*Luke 1.26-28*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.'

## **Pray**

All-powerful Father,  
we await the healing power of Christ your Son.  
Let us not be discouraged by our weaknesses  
as we prepare for his coming.  
Keep us steadfast in your love.

## **Thursday in the second week of Advent**

### **The Eternal Springtime Will Surely Come**

Once only in the year, yet once, does the world which we see show forth its hidden powers, and in a manner manifest itself. Then the leaves come out, and the blossoms on the fruit trees and flowers; and the grass and corn spring up. There is a sudden rush and burst outwardly of that hidden life which God has lodged in the material world. Well, that shows you, as by a sample, what it can do at God's command, when he gives the word. This earth, which now buds forth in leaves and blossoms, will one day burst forth into a new world of light and glory, in which we shall see saints and angels dwelling. Who would think, except from his experience of former springs all through his life, who

could conceive two or three months before, that it was possible that the face of nature, which then seemed so lifeless, should become so splendid and varied?...

So it is with the coming of that Eternal Spring for which all Christians are waiting. Come it will, though it delay; yet though it tarry, let us wait for it, "because it will surely come, it will not tarry." Therefore we say day by day, "Your kingdom come," which means, "O Lord, show yourself; manifest yourself; you who sit between the cherubim, show yourself; stir up your strength and come and help us" (Psalm 80). The earth that we see does not satisfy us. What we see is the outward shell of an eternal kingdom; and on that kingdom we fix the eyes of our faith.

Shine forth, O Lord, as when on your Nativity your angels visited the shepherds; let your glory blossom forth as bloom and foliage on the trees. Bright as is the sun, and the sky, and the clouds; green as are the leaves and the fields; sweet as is the singing of the birds; we know that they are not all, and we will not take up with a part for the whole. They proceed from a centre of love and goodness, which is God himself; but they are not his fullness; they speak of heaven, but they are not heaven; they are but as stray beams and dim reflections of his image; they are but the crumbs from the table.

*John Henry Newman*

## **Read God's word**

*Psalm 67*

May God show kindness and bless us, and make his face shine on us.

Then the earth will acknowledge your ways, and all nations your power to save.

Let the nations praise you, God, let all the nations praise you.

Let the nations rejoice and sing for joy, for you judge the world with justice, you judge the peoples with fairness, you guide the nations on earth.

Let the nations praise you, God, let all the nations praise you.

The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God has blessed us.

May God continue to bless us, and be revered by the whole wide world.

## **Pray**

Almighty Father

give us the joy of your love

to prepare the way for Christ our Lord.

Help us to serve you and one another.

## **Friday in the second week of Advent**

### **Spiritual Journey**

And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles,

no matter how long,

but only by a spiritual journey,

a journey of one inch,

very arduous and humbling and joyful,

by which we arrive at the ground at our feet,

and learn to be at home.

*Wendell Berry*

### **Read God's word**

*John 3.1-7*

There was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him.' Jesus answered: In all truth I tell

you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus said, 'How can anyone who is already old be born? Is it possible to go back into the womb again and be born?' Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit; what is born of human nature is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above.

## **Pray**

All powerful God,  
help us to look forward in hope  
to the coming of our Saviour.  
May we live as he has taught,  
ready to welcome him with burning love and faith.

## **Saturday in the second week of Advent**

### **God's Promises Are Held Out to Us by His Son**

God established a time for his promises and a time for their fulfilment.

The time for promises was in the time of the prophets, until John the Baptist; from John until the end is the time of fulfilment.

God, who is faithful, put himself in our debt, not by receiving anything but by promising so much. A promise was not sufficient for him; he chose to commit himself in writing as well, as it were making a contract of his promises. He wanted us to be able to see the way in which his promises were redeemed when he began to discharge them. And so the time of the prophets was, as we have often said, the foretelling of the promises.

He promised eternal salvation, everlasting happiness with the angels, an immortal inheritance, endless glory, the joyful vision of his face, his holy dwelling in heaven, and after resurrection from the dead no further fear of dying. This is as it were his final promise, the goal of all our

striving. When we reach it, we shall ask for nothing more. But as to the way in which we are to arrive at our final goal, he has revealed this also, by promise and prophecy.

He has promised men divinity, mortals immortality, sinners justification, the poor a rising to glory.

But, brethren, because God's promises seemed impossible to men - equality with the angels in exchange for mortality, corruption, poverty, weakness, dust and ashes - God not only made a written contract with men, to win their belief but also established a mediator of his good faith, nor a prince or angel or archangel, but his only Son. He wanted, through his Son, to show us and give us the way he would lead us to the goal he has promised.

It was not enough for God to make his son our guide to the way; he made him the way itself, that you might travel with him as leader, and by him as the way.

Therefore, the only Son of God was to come among men, to take the nature of men, and in this nature to be born as a man. He was to die, to rise again, to ascend into heaven, to sit at the right hand of the Father, and to fulfil his promises among the nations, and after that to come again, to exact now what he had asked for before, to separate those deserving his anger from those deserving his mercy, to execute his threats against the wicked, and to reward them just as he had promised.

All this had therefore to be prophesied, foretold, and impressed on us as an event in the future, in order that we might wait for it in faith, not find it a sudden and dreadful reality.

*St Augustine of Hippo*

## **Read God's word**

*Matthew 11.16-19*

'What comparison can I find for this generation? It is like children shouting to each other as they sit in the market place: We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't be mourners. 'For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He is possessed." The Son of man came, eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.'

## **Pray**

Lord,  
let your glory dawn to take away our darkness.  
May we be revealed as children of light  
at the coming of your Son.

## **The Third Sunday in Advent**

### **The Great Little King**

Just as a craftsman in ordinary life makes a thing in a shape suitable for its intended use, so the Master Craftsman has fashioned our nature to be a fitting instrument for the exercise of sovereignty over the universe, by providing it with spiritual gifts and a bodily shape for a king.

The soul's exalted and royal nature is shown to be far removed from submissiveness by the fact that it is free and independent and acknowledges no master – it has been provided with its own unchallenged power of choice. What is more characteristic of a king than this?

Those who paint portraits of rulers in ordinary life copy the details of their form and underline their kingly importance by dressing them in purple so that the portrait is as that of a king by its composition. In the

same way, human nature by virtue of its likeness to the King of All, who created it to rule others, is seen to be a living portrait of him – the portrait has a part in the title and importance of its Master.

It is not dressed up in purple nor does it show its importance by a sceptre or a crown – the Original does not have these either – but it is clothed in virtue, which is in truth the most royal of all garments, instead of a purple robe. It relies on the blessedness of immortality instead of a sceptre. In place of a kingly crown it is adorned with the garland of righteousness.

Thus the accoutrements of kingship show it to be in all respects an accurate copy of the form of the Original.

*Gregory of Nyssa*

## **Read God's word**

*Genesis 1.26-28*

God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground.' God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth.'

## **Pray**

God for whom we watch and wait,  
you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son:  
give us courage to speak the truth,  
to hunger for justice,  
and to suffer for the cause of right,  
with Jesus Christ our Lord.

# Monday in the third week of Advent

## After Annunciation

This is the irrational season  
When love blooms bright and wild,  
Had Mary been filled with reason  
There'd have been no room for the child.

*Madeleine L'Engle*

## Read God's word

*Luke 1.39-45*

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

## Pray

Lord,  
hear our voices raised in prayer.  
Let the light of the coming of your Son  
free us from the darkness of sin.

# Tuesday in the third week of Advent

## Miracle Fair

The commonplace miracle:  
that so many common miracles take place.

The usual miracles:  
invisible dogs barking  
in the dead of night.

One of many miracles:  
a small and airy cloud  
is able to upstage the massive moon.

Several miracles in one:  
an alder is reflected in the water  
and is reversed from left to right  
and grows from crown to root  
and never hits bottom  
though the water isn't deep.

A run-of-the-mill miracle:  
winds mild to moderate  
turning gusty in storms.

A miracle in the first place:  
cows will be cows.

Next but not least:  
just this cherry orchard  
from just this cherry pit.

A miracle minus top hat and tails:  
fluttering white doves.

A miracle (what else can you call it):  
the sun rose today at three fourteen a.m.  
and will set tonight at one past eight.

A miracle that's lost on us:  
the hand actually has fewer than six fingers  
but still it's got more than four.

A miracle, just take a look around:  
the inescapable earth.

An extra miracle, extra and ordinary:

the unthinkable  
can be thought.

*Wisława Szymborska*

## **Read God's word**

### *1 Kings 19.9-14*

There he went into a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of Yahweh came to him saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh Sabaoth, because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, have torn down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left, and now they want to kill me.' Then he was told, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before Yahweh.' For at that moment Yahweh was going by. A mighty hurricane split the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the hurricane. And after the hurricane, an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire, a light murmuring sound. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice came to him, which said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh, God Sabaoth, because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, have torn down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left and now they want to kill me.'

## **Pray**

Father of love,  
you made a new creation  
through Jesus Christ your Son.  
May his coming free us from sin  
and renew his life within us.

# Wednesday in the third week of Advent

## Obsessive

Jesus rolled over and propped himself up on his elbows. He looked steadily at Judas. ‘You want it clean?’ he said, ‘You want it super squeaky clean? I am not sure you will like it better that way. But here goes.

‘There was a bloke. A trader – a specialist. He dealt in pearls. Always seeking the most beautiful, perfect pearls for his customers. And he never minded selling. There was no risk. Each pear he sold gave him more money to buy new pearls. And he never needed to cheat, as such, Judas, because he would buy with just the usual haggling, and then sell at a premium price to the super rich, because they respected his expertise and his knowledge.

‘Then it happened. He found the super pearl. Huge. Its lustre unbroken. A perfect sphere. A wonderful colour, white, pure. He knew at once he would never see another pearl like it. The trouble was, it was in the hands of another merchant.

They haggled. It was good humoured, but ruthless. The price was agreed. The pearl merchant, our honest, shining example of a pearl merchant, sold everything. He sold all his pearls, every one. He sold his house. He sold his donkey. Everything he could realise, he did. The lot. Then he handed over the money and came away with the pearl.’

Judas nodded, shining approval.

Jesus sighed. ‘Yes but look at the dilemma. He now has the perfect pearl. What is he going to do? Do you imagine he can sell it? That he can let go the one thing he has been searching for all his life?’

Jesus had this power with his stories. He sucked you in. You lived them. We were all looking horrified, and none more than Judas. No, we all knew what obsessives were like. No real person in this position could let go of that pearl.

‘He has nothing but the pearl,; said Jesus quietly, ‘and he will need to

start from the bottom again if he wants to rebuild his business. Maybe he can. Maybe he has enough credit with others to borrow enough to buy little inexpensive pearls. But will his customers really want them? It is a disaster, that is what it is. Once you have the most valuable thing, you give up everything for it, and it may not be the shining easy thing to do you all seem to think.'

Then he wrapped his cloak around him, as though he was cold, and sat staring into the distance as if he was seeing something we could not see.

*Rosemary Hannah*

## **Read God's word**

*Matthew 13.45-51*

'The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it. 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen bring it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. 'Have you understood all these?' They said, 'Yes.'

## **Pray**

Father,  
may the coming celebration of the birth of your Son  
bring us your saving help  
and prepare us for eternal life.

# Thursday in the third week of Advent

## Gaudete

My friend Father Who, a Catholic priest, has a teeny bit of an issue with the vestments used on the third Sunday of Advent. They are, according to him, *not* pink. They are *rose*. Because he would not be caught dead wearing pink, mandated by the Church or not.

Last year I told him, “Rose by any other name would look as pink.” He was unamused.

Gaudete Sunday was always my favourite part of Advent, growing up. I loved the pink candle. I loved how it told me we were almost to Christmas, but not quite. I loved the idea that suddenly, in the midst of preparation, we were supposed to celebrate joy.

I didn't really get it then, of course, or for a long time afterward. Children who've been through trauma often emerge with a rigid need for control, because if you can control everything, then you can make sure bad things never happen again. Not being in control means that bad things are right around the corner, waiting. Don't turn the corner! You can imagine, holidays tended to make me a wee bit anxious. The only way to stave off the anxiety and desperation was to get everything exactly right—the best presents I could find, perfect cards mailed early, all my ducks in a row and cookies baked and i's dotted and tinsel and lights. I loved Christmas but I couldn't enjoy it. I had to be ready. I had to be prepared. Also, if I quit preparing and started feeling, I would drown.

*Gaudete*. In the midst of preparations, remember joy.

Of course being in control is a myth. We could claim that God is in control, except then, does God bring the bad things? Instead we learn the harder lessons, of trust and empathy and love. Emmanuel, *God with*

us. God walking beside us, not metaphorically but actually, in human form, divine. We will never be in control. We will never be alone.

Gaudete.

*K B Bradley*

## **Read God's word**

*Philippians 4.1-8*

So then, my brothers and dear friends whom I miss so much, my joy and my crown, hold firm in the Lord, dear friends. I urge Euodia, and I urge Syntyche to come to agreement with each other in the Lord; and I ask you, Syzygus, really to be a 'partner' and help them. These women have struggled hard for the gospel with me, along with Clement and all my other fellow-workers, whose names are written in the book of life. Always be joyful, then, in the Lord; I repeat, be joyful. Let your good sense be obvious to everybody. The Lord is near. Never worry about anything; but tell God all your desires of every kind in prayer and petition shot through with gratitude, and the peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, let your minds be filled with everything that is true, everything that is honourable, everything that is upright and pure, everything that we love and admire -- with whatever is good and praiseworthy.

## **Pray**

Lord,  
our sins bring us unhappiness.  
Hear our prayer for courage and strength.  
May the coming of your Son  
bring us the joy of salvation.

# Friday in the third week of Advent

## God bearing

What is this wondrous mystery unfolding within me?

I have no words to name it,

for that One is above all praise, transcends all words.

My reason sees what has happened, wishes to explain,  
yet can find no words to tell you.

What it sees is invisible, simple, pure, unbounded in its majesty.

I have seen the totality, received not in essence but by participation.

As when you light a flame from a flame, the whole flame you receive.

*St Symeon the New Theologian*

## Read God's word

*Titus 3.4-7*

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour for humanity were revealed, it was not because of any upright actions we had done ourselves; it was for no reason except his own faithful love that he saved us, by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our Saviour; so that, justified by his grace, we should become heirs in hope of eternal life.

## Pray

All-powerful Father,

guide us with your love

as we await the coming of your Son.

Keep us faithful

that we may be helped through life

and brought to salvation.

# Saturday in the third week of Advent

## Veni, veni, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free  
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell Thy people save,  
And give them victory o'er the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,  
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come  
And open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Adonai, Lord of might,

Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,  
In ancient times didst give the law  
In cloud and majesty and awe.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

*J M Neale*

## **Read God's word**

*Isaiah 11.1-10*

A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse, a new shoot will grow from his roots. On him will rest the spirit of Yahweh, the spirit of wisdom and insight, the spirit of counsel and power, the spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh: his inspiration will lie in fearing Yahweh. His judgement will not be by appearances. his verdict not given on hearsay. He will judge the weak with integrity and give fair sentence for the humblest in the land. He will strike the country with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips bring death to the wicked. Uprightness will be the belt around his waist, and constancy the belt about his hips. The wolf will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid, calf, lion and fat-stock beast together, with a little boy to lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like the ox. The infant will play over the den of the adder; the baby will put his hand into the viper's lair. No hurt, no harm will be done on all my holy mountain, for the country will be full of knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea. That day, the root of Jesse, standing as a signal for the peoples, will be sought out by the nations and its home will be glorious.

## **Pray**

Father,  
creator and Redeemer of mankind,  
you decreed, and your Word became man,

born of the Virgin Mary.

May we come to share the divinity of Christ,  
who humbled himself to share our human nature.

## **The Fourth Sunday in Advent**

### **Love's constancy**

Anyone who has waded  
Through Love's turbulent waters,  
Now feeling hunger and now satiety,  
is untouched by the season  
Of withering or blooming,  
For in the deepest  
And most dangerous waters,  
On the highest peaks,  
Love is always the same.

*Handewijch of Antwerp (translated by Oliver Davies)*

### **Read God's word**

Though I command languages both human and angelic -- if I speak without love, I am no more than a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. And though I have the power of prophecy, to penetrate all mysteries and knowledge, and though I have all the faith necessary to move mountains -- if I am without love, I am nothing. Though I should give away to the poor all that I possess, and even give up my body to be burned -- if I am without love, it will do me no good whatever. Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited, it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage, it does not take offence or store up grievances. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes. Love never comes to an end. But if there are prophecies, they will be done away with; if tongues, they will fall silent; and if knowledge, it will be done away with. For we know

only imperfectly, and we prophesy imperfectly; but once perfection comes, all imperfect things will be done away with. When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and see things as a child does, and think like a child; but now that I have become an adult, I have finished with all childish ways. Now we see only reflections in a mirror, mere riddles, but then we shall be seeing face to face. Now I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall know just as fully as I am myself known. As it is, these remain: faith, hope and love, the three of them; and the greatest of them is love.

## **Pray**

Eternal God,  
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,  
so we wait for his coming in glory;  
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age  
to see, with her, our great salvation  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Monday in the fourth week of Advent**

### **The reason the Word of God became man**

For this reason the Word of God became man and the Son of God became the son of man in order that man, being mingled with the Word of God and being granted adoption should become the son of God.

In no other way could we have received incorruptibility and immortality, without ourselves first being united to them. How could we be made one with incorruptibility and mortality by immortality and so enable us to receive adoption as sons.

This same Son of God, therefore, who is our Lord and the existing Word of the Father is also son of man. He was born like other men, born of Mary, who was herself of human stock and a member of the human race, and so he became the son of man.

It was for this reason that the Lord gave a sign here below and in heaven above that man had not asked for. Man had neither hoped that a virgin could be with child and bear a son, although she was a virgin; nor that this child would be God with us, coming down to the earth below in search of the sheep that was lost (which he himself had made) and once again ascending on high and offering in trust to the Father the man he had found. This same Lord himself became the first-fruits of the resurrection of man, so that the resurrection of the head should mean the resurrection of the rest of the body, and that every man alive should rise again on completion of the time of the punishment, which his disobedience had earned. For the body in its varied joints and ligaments grows up and is strengthened by God's aid, and each of the members has its appropriate fitting place in the body. The Father has many mansions in the same way as there are many members in the body.

When, therefore, man fell, God was generous in mercy, since he foresaw the victory which would be his through the agency of the Word. For because his power was made perfect in weakness, he displayed the kindness of God and the greatness of his power.

*St Irenaeus (130-200)*

## **Read God's word**

*Philippians 2.5-11*

Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. And for this God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names; so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

## **Pray**

Father,  
you show the world the splendour of your glory  
in the coming of Christ, born of the Virgin.  
Give to us true faith and love  
to celebrate the mystery of God made man.

## **Tuesday in the fourth week of Advent**

### **The wonder of Christ**

Of all the marvellous and splendid things about the Son of God there is one that utterly transcends the limits of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence to think of or understand, namely how this mighty power of the divine majesty, the very Word of the Father, and the very Wisdom of God, in which were created "all things visible and invisible," can be believed to have existed within the compass of that man who appeared in Judaea, yes, and how the wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a child and uttered noises like those of crying children. And further, how it was that he was troubled, as we are told, in the hour of death, as he himself confesses when he says, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death" and how at the last he was led to that death which is considered by men to be the most shameful of all – even though on the third day he rose again.

When, therefore, we see in him some things so human that they appear in no way to differ from the common frailty of mortals, and some things so divine that they are appropriate to nothing else but the nature of deity, the human understanding with its narrow limits is baffled, and struck with amazement at so mighty a wonder, knows not which way to turn, what to hold to, or whither to betake itself.

If it thinks of God, it sees a man; if it thinks of a man, it beholds one returning from the dead with spoils after vanquishing the kingdom of death.

For this reason we must pursue our contemplation with all fear and reverence, as we seek to prove how the reality of each nature exists in one and the same person, in such a way that nothing unworthy or unfitting may be thought to reside in that divine and ineffable existence, nor on the other hand may the events of his life be supposed to be the illusions caused by deceptive fantasies.

But to utter these things in human ears and to explain them by words far exceeds the powers we possess either in our mortal worth or in mind and speech. I think indeed that it transcends the capacity even of the holy apostles; nay more, perhaps the explanation of this mystery lies beyond the reach of the whole creation of heavenly things

*Origen (185-254)*

## **Read God's word**

*Hebrews 1.1-5*

At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages. He is the reflection of God's glory and bears the impress of God's own being, sustaining all things by his powerful command; and now that he has purged sins away, he has taken his seat at the right hand of the divine Majesty on high. So he is now as far above the angels as the title which he has inherited is higher than their own name. To which of the angels, then, has God ever said: You are my Son, today I have fathered you, or: I shall be a father to him and he a son to me?

## Pray

God of love and mercy,  
help us to follow the example of Mary,  
always ready to do your will.

At the message of an angel  
she welcomed your eternal Son  
and, filled with the light of your Spirit,  
she became the temple of your Word.

## Wednesday in the fourth week of Advent

### Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord

The Prophet's words stand as stately and as monumental  
as the summit of which he sings:  
a craggy beacon to all nations;  
a plateau-table for feasting on rich food and vintage wines;  
the rocky anvil on which mutilating weapons  
are beaten into the farmer's harvest tools.

And then some strange words:

'On this mountain he will destroy the veil  
which used to veil all peoples.'

What is hidden now that longs to be seen?

What knowledge lies always beyond our unstoppable ingenuity?

Surely we can see clearly already from up here?

The Prophet's words burn back the hazy veil that mutes the Light  
and we begin to see a dawn unlike that of our daily expectation.

This Dayspring from on high is a Light that is  
love beyond our keenest desiring  
hope beyond our sorest longing  
truth beyond our wisest knowing  
life beyond our fullest living

comfort that exceeds our direst hurting  
peace that drops  
stillness  
into the most vigorous turbulence.

*J M C Luckie*

## **Read God's word**

*Isaiah 25.6-9*

On this mountain, for all peoples, Yahweh Sabaoth is preparing a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of succulent food, of well-strained wines. On this mountain, he has destroyed the veil which used to veil all peoples, the pall enveloping all nations; he has destroyed death for ever. Lord Yahweh has wiped away the tears from every cheek; he has taken his people's shame away everywhere on earth, for Yahweh has spoken. And on that day, it will be said, 'Look, this is our God, in him we put our hope that he should save us, this is Yahweh, we put our hope in him. Let us exult and rejoice since he has saved us.'

## **Pray**

Lord,  
hear the prayers of your people.  
May we who celebrate the birth of your Son as man  
rejoice in the gift of eternal life when he comes in glory.

## **Thursday in the fourth week of Advent**

### **Annunciation**

The art misleads  
Across centuries,  
Its European light,  
Soft foliage,  
Pale golden stone

A gentler brightness  
Than the harsh  
Blue sky  
The glaring whites,  
The angular palms  
Of my human world.

I did not sit  
Blue-clad,  
Cool,  
Suspended  
In passive innocence.  
Blue sucked colour  
From my dark skin.  
In my rose-brown shift,  
Rough, old,  
Sweat-soaked  
By roof-chores  
Under  
The relentless sun,  
I was ambushed  
By unimaginable choice.

The messenger, too,  
Was wingless.  
Clothed, yes,  
Beautiful,  
But no gorgeous youth.  
Clad in all-colour,  
No-colour,  
Glowing impression  
More than man.

The words,  
The message,

Were as described,  
Save only  
That he spoke  
Not aloud  
But in the sudden  
Silence  
That drowned my heart  
In fear,  
Doubt,  
Bliss,  
A sword-thrust's pain,  
And drove  
From my soul  
That all-changing  
Yes.

*Sophie Agrell*

## **Read God's word**

*Luke 1.26-35*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of

the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.

## **Pray**

God our Father,  
you sent your Son  
to free mankind from the power of death.  
May we who celebrate the coming of Christ as man  
share more fully in his divine life.

## **Friday in the fourth week of Advent**

### **Good is the Flesh**

Good is the flesh that the Word has become,  
good is the birthing, the milk in the breast,  
good is the feeding, caressing and rest,  
good is the body for knowing the world,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the body for knowing the world,  
sensing the sunlight, the tug of the ground,  
feeling, perceiving, within and around,  
good is the body, from cradle to grave,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the body, from cradle to grave,  
growing and aging, arousing, impaired,  
happy in clothing, or lovingly bared,  
good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,  
longing in all, as in Jesus, to dwell,  
glad of embracing, and tasting, and smell,

good is the body, for good and for God,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

*Brian Wren*

Read God's word

*Matthew 1.18-25*

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home; he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.

## **Pray**

Father,  
we contemplate the birth of your Son.  
He was born of the virgin Mary  
and came to live among us.  
May we receive forgiveness and mercy.

# Christmas Eve

## Christmas Bells

I HEARD the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old, familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
Till ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime,  
A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
Then from each black, accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearth-stones of a continent,  
And made forlorn  
The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth," I said;

"For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

## **Read God's word**

*Luke 2.4-14*

Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David's town called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space. In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours.

## **Pray**

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

## **Christmas Day**

### **I sing the birth was born tonight**

I sing the birth was born to-night,  
The author both of life and light;  
The Angels so did sound it.  
And like the ravish'd shepherds said,  
Who saw the light, and were afraid,  
Yet search'd, and true they found it.

The Son of God, the Eternal King,  
That did us all salvation bring,  
And freed the soul from danger;  
He whom the whole world could not take,  
The Word, which heaven and earth did make,  
Was now laid in a manger.

The Father's wisdom will'd it so,  
The Son's obedience knew no No,  
Both wills were in one stature;  
And as that wisdom had decreed,  
The Word was now made Flesh indeed,  
And took on him our nature.

What comfort by him do we win,  
Who made himself the price of sin,  
To make us heirs of glory!  
To see this Babe, all innocence,  
A martyr born in our defence;  
Can man forget this story?

*Ben Jonson*

## **Read God's word**

*John 1.1-14*

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him. What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, he was to bear witness to the light. The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself. The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

## **Pray**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
your birth at Bethlehem  
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:

accept our heartfelt praise  
as we worship you,  
our Saviour and our eternal God.

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