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ADVENT 1B

3rd December 2023

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Call to worship

If you have several candles, in the house, you could gather them on a table and light them. And maybe turn out the lights so the rest of this reading is done by candlelight.

So, today I light the match,
Spark the flame,
Begin the Advent journey of preparation and waiting,
Of anticipation and surprise,
Of encounter and transformation.

Come into this space, Immanuel God.

Light of the world,
This Advent season comes as an annual reminder that you are not a God of distance, of high-heavens and of power,
Rather, you are a God of presence, of earthly-ordinariness and of poverty.

Prince of peace,
In a world of much injustice, fighting, disaster and pain,
Bring your Christmas light.

Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Readings: Mark 13:24-37 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus paints a vivid picture of his second coming – a day of great cosmic events and divine intervention. He implores us to "stay awake and watch" for the return of Jesus, as no one knows the exact time.

This passage challenges us to ponder our readiness for that coming – a good Advent theme. How prepared are we? It's easy to become complacent in our faith, to become engrossed in the routines of life, and to forget that we are awaiting something of eternal significance, the arrival of love unbound.

Consider these questions:

- Do you consider yourself 'spiritually awake'? Life's distractions can lull us into spiritual slumber. We must remain vigilant, not merely going through the motions of faith but actively seeking God's presence in our lives.
- Are you watchful? Just as a watchman waits for the dawn, we are called to eagerly anticipate Christ's return. This anticipation should shape how we live, love, and serve. You might like to read Psalm 130 – is this a prayer you recognise at the start of this Advent season?

- Are you prepared? The unpredictability of Christ's return, and the possibility of encountering the incarnate Christ in anyone we meet, see, talk to or think about in our day-to-day lives should motivate us to live with intentionality. Are we living lives that reflect our faith? Are we extending love and grace to others? Are we faithfully following Jesus' teachings? Are we noticing the blessings that God is sharing with us, showing to us?
- Are you hopeful? Even amid uncertainty and chaos, we hold on to the hope of Christ's promise. Our faith isn't grounded in fleeting circumstances but in the enduring Word of God.

As you reflect on Mark 13:24-37, challenge yourself to live with spiritual awareness and watchfulness. Embrace the anticipation of Christ's return as a driving force for your faith and actions. Let this passage remind you that, as followers of Christ, we are called to live with purpose, hope, and readiness for God's glorious appearing.

Will you be vigilant in this Advent season?

Responding through singing

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness - [YouTube](#)

Prayers of intercession

Lord Jesus, during this season of anticipation, I pause for a moment to remember those who are suffering and in need. To pray for the hungry, the homeless, and the marginalised. May I, as your hands and feet, reach out to offer comfort, sustenance, and hope to those who need it most.

Gracious God, I ask for your guidance and wisdom to be with our leaders and decision-makers around the world. May they make choices that promote justice, equality, and the well-being of all. Grant them the courage to act in accordance with your divine will.

Today, on this first Sunday of Advent, I pray for all those who are suffering from illness, grief, or despair. Bring your healing touch to their lives and comfort them in their times of need. May they find strength and hope in your presence.

As I embark on this Advent journey, may my prayers and actions reflect the love, hope, and peace that Christ brings to the world. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen.

Blessing

May I go out disrupt all that is wrong, unjust and hateful in this world.

May I nurture and plant seeds of love.

May I celebrate your coming into this world – then, and now, Immanuel.

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week Ahead

Monday 4th December

- On this second day of Advent, is there something you'd like to commit to doing each day or each week between now and Christmas Day? Journalling? Meditating? Spending 10 minutes in the garden? Reading a passage from Luke's gospel? Spend a few minutes today praying and thinking about what would be a helpful habit for you to work on over the next 4 weeks.

Tuesday 5th December

- God of all grace,
Help me to notice my blessings today.
Today I am grateful, and I come to you to say 'thank you'.
Amen.

Wednesday 6th December

- O Come, O Come Immanuel.
Pray this pray today. As you go about your day, try to find as many opportunities as possible to mutter, say out loud, write down, breath, or just think this simple five-word prayer: O come, o come, Immanuel.
- Notice how that prayer for a God who is with us, present to us, amongst us, changes, shapes and inspires your day.

Thursday 7th December

- Today, some traditions mark as the Saint Day for Ambrose of Milan, who served as Bishop of Milan in the 4th century. He is traditionally credited as having written the 'Te Deum' hymn, though that is now historically disputed. Perhaps today you might like to pray a modernised and translated version of the first few lines of that hymn, which is at least 1,600 years old...
We praise you, O God : we acknowledge you to be the Lord.
All the earth worship you : the everlasting parent of all.
To you all Angels cry aloud : the heavens, and all who call the heavens home.

Friday 8th December

- Are you going to a Christmas Party this weekend? Or aware of someone who is? Are you making plans for meeting up with people you don't usually see at this time of year?
- Take time today to pray for people making connections, for conversations and reunions – either your own or those that will be happening in the communities and houses around you.
- Pray that God-with-us, Immanuel, will be made real this Christmas. You might like to pray this prayer for someone specific. It might be you.

Saturday 9th December

- This week, take a moment to notice some fairy lights somewhere near you – perhaps in a shopping street after dark, perhaps you have some up in your house or at a neighbours already.
- Just use this moment to pause, to look at the lights, and to think about the ways that light is breaking through in your life. It might seem small, but focus on that, and give thanks for it, for the string of lights, the line of blessings, and all you have received.