

twelvebaskets



ADVENT 1B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Advent 1 - Year B
3rd December 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness OR

89 STF – Strength will rise as wait upon the Lord

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

625 STF – Deep in the darkness a starlight is gleaming OR

173 STF – Into the darkness of this world

Readings: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Hymn:

177 STF – Lo, he comes with clouds descending OR

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

494 STF – Come thou fount of every blessing OR

639 STF – Through the love of God our Saviour

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

317 STF – At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

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Call to worship

(You may wish to use your own liturgy for lighting Advent candles at this point in the worship).

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

Come amongst us, Immanuel God,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness OR

89 STF – Strength will rise as wait upon the Lord

Opening Prayers

Light of the world,
This Advent season comes to us 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.

Lord of love,
In a world where many are living in poverty, and the corridors of power are a closed shop,
run by a wealthy, privileged few,
Remind us of the miracle of Christmas again.

Forgive us for the times when we play our part in supporting injustice and propping up
systems of oppression.

Thank you that, by your grace, we are already forgiven, loved and set free.

Help us to put communities in the driving seat of change around the world, and to do
something extraordinary with our simple gifts this Christmas time,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can – you can order an Extraordinary Gift for someone this Christmas at allwecan.org.uk/gifts

All Age Talk

Materials needed: Large world map or poster of Bethlehem, small toy figures that could represent Mary, Joseph, and a donkey, an advent calendar containing small treats/sweets.

(Gather the children around the world map and ask where Bethlehem is, or display a picture/poster and ask people to guess where the picture shows).

Today, we are going on an exciting Advent adventure - a journey to Bethlehem. Are you ready to explore and learn about the special season of Advent?

Great! Advent is a time when we prepare for the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. We're going to follow the journey of Mary and Joseph as they travelled to Bethlehem, just like in the Christmas story.

But we won't be making the entire journey in one day. Instead, we'll take it one step at a time, just like how we celebrate Advent, one day at a time.

Place the advent calendar at the front of church.

Can I invite a volunteer to come and place Mary, Joseph and the donkey on Day 1 of our advent calendar please?

They are beginning their journey to Bethlehem. What do you think they would have taken with them?

Give time for answers. Ask people if there is something precious they want to 'carry with them' this advent...

Each day, when people are using this building, we'll move a step closer to Christmas, and move our people along one day at a time. As it's already the 3rd of December (and because Advent calendars tend to go on the month, not the actual start of advent!), we can move it along 3 steps already – would someone like to do that with me?

Move the steps, open the doors and share the sweets or treats in the calendar.

As we journey, we'll hear more about their journey and reflect on our own. Let's use our imagination! What do you think Mary and Joseph saw on their journey? How might they have felt as they got closer to Bethlehem?

(Give time for people to share their thoughts and ideas.)

Remember to open an envelope each day during Advent, and we'll keep moving Mary, Joseph, and the donkey on our map.

On Christmas Eve or during a special Advent service, we'll celebrate the arrival of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. And we'll welcome the Christ-child!

Amen.³

Hymn:

625 STF – Deep in the darkness a starlight is gleaming OR

173 STF – Into the darkness of this world

Readings: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Hymn:

177 STF – Lo, he comes with clouds descending OR

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Reflections on the readings

The waiting time begins! This special season of Advent begins today, and many of us will be turning our attention to Christmas shopping lists – have you already bought presents for people? Or are you not even planning to start for another couple of weeks?

Usually, friends and family have different approaches to this and whilst some enjoy surprises, others issue ‘hints’ around now, making sure I choose something they really want – indeed some have been known to send precise descriptions, including make and model number!

I’m not being critical of this approach (at least it avoids waste and the ‘clear out’ of unwanted presents in January!), but I’m not sure it’s the point of gift-giving, or particularly theological sound. Christmas, and particularly the incarnation of Jesus, is a time of surprises – even shocks!! Although the annual rituals - such as Advent calendars and candles – can make it all feel familiar and cosy, it is really quite the opposite. Advent is a disruptive season!

The Bible readings for Advent Sunday act as a reminder of that. Isaiah appeals to God to ‘tear open the heavens’. The prophet envisages the coming of God causing mountains to quake, brushwood to burst into flame, water to boil and whole nations to tremble! God is doing ‘awesome deeds that we did not expect’.

Then, in the gospel, the words of Jesus are even more dramatic and disruptive: the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will be falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken...

How does that resonate with your plans for Advent? Are you prepared to be so disturbed? Isn’t it all going just a little too far?

Would you rather have a soothing message of peace and hope instead of all this drama and disruption?

Perhaps, but that is rarely the Jesus-way. He’s hardly ever ‘meek and mild’ is he?! In Mark 13, we see so many calls to action:

1. Learn the lesson of the fig tree.
2. ‘Beware, keep alert’
3. ‘Keep awake’
4. ‘Be on the watch’

So, why do we need to be vigilant in the Advent season?

Isaiah speaks of a context where people have stopped calling on the name of God, where ‘no one attempts to take hold of you’ (v7). There is a distance between the people and the God they worship (or largely ignore – perhaps not unlike our time?) In Isaiah’s time, and surely today too, people have distanced themselves from God by doing their own thing.

I have distanced myself from God by doing my own thing. Have you?

Whenever I put myself first, disregard the needs of others, fail to pay attention to the voice of God, I am inevitably putting distance between me and God, and as a result, distance between me and other people.

A sixth century monk, Dorotheos of Gaza, suggested that we are all like the spokes of a wheel of which God is the hub. As we draw closer to God, we draw closer to each other too and become community in a real sense.

Might that become your experience during these weeks of Advent as we prepare ourselves for God coming even closer, for God breaking into human life, not just once, two thousand years ago in Bethlehem, but again and again and again. For whilst the season of Advent is in part a season of preparation for Christmas, it has a much broader meaning in our church calendar.

Advent calls upon us to be ready for Christ to come into our lives today, tomorrow, the next day AND to be on the lookout for the day when Christ will return to the world in glory and what God started, God will also finish. We don't know when that might happen, hence the message to stay awake, to be alert.

Advent is disruptive, and our world has been full of disruptions in recent years. As we prepare to retell these stories about places in Palestine, we continue to pray for the people affected by conflict and war – a disruption most of us cannot even imagine. But we recognise too, that God works in the midst of disruption, and calls us out of our all-too-comfortable lives to seek to follow, to be advocates for justice and peace.

Alongside all that disruption we hold onto the grace of God of which Paul speaks in his first letter to the Corinthian church. Paul makes a promise to which we too can hold as we look for God to tear open the heavens and come to us afresh; 'God is faithful' and 'will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Stay alert to that – these are exciting times.⁴

Hymn:

494 STF – Come thou fount of every blessing OR

639 STF – Through the love of God our Saviour

Prayers of intercession

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

Gracious God, we 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, we 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.

Holy Spirit, during this season of Advent, we seek to cultivate understanding and unity among people of different faiths and backgrounds. Help us to bridge divides, promote dialogue, and foster respect and love for one another.

Heavenly Father, we pray for the spreading of the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. May your Word be a source of hope, transformation, and salvation for all who hear it.

⁴ Reflection written by Jill Baker

As we embark on this Advent journey, may our prayers and actions reflect the love, hope, and peace that Christ brings to the world. In His holy name, we pray.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of every season,
God who is Immanuel,
Come amongst us, by your grace,
And use our gifts for the building of a grace-filled world
In which justice and peace reign over all.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

317 STF – At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

May we go out disrupt all that is wrong, unjust and hateful in this world.
May we nurture and plant seeds of love.
May we celebrate your coming amongst us, Immanuel.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker