

Advent and Christmas Reflection



Comfort
and Joy



**THE GOOD SHEPHERD
LOUGHBOROUGH**

Advent Sunday – 29 November - Faithfulness

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

Isaiah 64.4

Reflect How are you feeling about Advent and Christmas this year – excited, apprehensive, disappointed? Whatever word you choose it is likely that it is actually how you feel about Christmas and you have bypassed Advent all together. In this particular year for some people they are looking for the ‘comfort and joy’ of Christmas right now – Christmas trees were popping up right at the beginning of November.

Pray that during this Advent you will find the time and space to encounter God.

Act As preparation for Advent why not make an advent ring using the one attached. Colour it in, cut it out, and place it on a plate, adding 5 tealights and lighting the first one. Now you are ready for your journey though Advent, lighting another candle each Sunday. Remember that you are not travelling alone – there are people all around you – and God is with you, the one who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.



Questions for reflection during the week:

- In the bible passage for this week, Isaiah 64.1 – 9, we are reminded how Israel continued to ignore God even though he was constantly trying to act on their behalf – they were unfaithful to him. How does this passage make you feel?
 - Advent is a time to renew our energy, gather our strength and take a fresh look at our lives of faithfulness as we await the coming King, both in the celebration of Christmas and when he returns for the second time. How do you feel about preparing things?
 - Can you imagine yourself as a piece of clay that God is trying to mould? What are you willing to let him re-shape?
 - How might your faith deepen in these days?



Advent 2 – 6 December – Hope

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Isaiah 40.3

Reflect The importance of preparing yourself for God when he appears is a theme that runs throughout the bible. Going into the wilderness was one way of preparing, since it removed distractions, allowing people to focus on God whom they waited. Most of us can't go into the wilderness but perhaps living through a pandemic is not that dissimilar. What are the important things right now that keep you going? Can we make more space for them? Can we make more space for God?

Pray that during this Advent you might feel the love of God and the hope Christ brings.

Act What do you hope for? In whom lies your hope? As we walk towards Christmas what is on your heart? Write these things on a star(s). You can use the ones in the envelope or make your own.

If you are able, you can then bring the star(s) to church when it is open and they will be attached to our Tree of Hope, otherwise why not hang them on your own Christmas Tree or put them up some where in your home so that you can be reminded of your hope every time you see them.



Questions for reflection during the week:

- This week's passage – Isaiah 40.1 – 11 is perhaps familiar with its *comfort* refrain at the beginning, read it again, what comfort does it bring you to know God is 'on your case' so to speak – trying to gather you like a shepherd would gather a lamb close to his heart?
 - What are you hoping for? Does it sometimes feel as though you have a future without hope? The verses show us that God has a plan that will ultimately reveal his glory and save his people – how does it feel to know that God has his plan that he has already put into action – what difference might it make to the hope you have?
 - Will you share that hope with others?
 - Who can you take the Good News to this week?



Advent 3 – 13 December – Joy

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

Isaiah 61.1 - 4

Reflect Joy is different to happiness. Being happy is a fleeting feeling in which everything is good and uplifting. Joy, however, is a deeper-rooted sensation. Given by God, we can experience joy even when we are struggling. Joy and sadness can be companions on our journey – one does not exclude the other. Spend some time thinking about what gives you joy?

Pray that even in the darkest times of your life you may feel a sense of peace and joy.

Act create some joy making *Christmas Biscuits*

Ingredients:

250g Plain Flour
200g Butter
100g Icing Sugar
2 egg-yolks

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 170C/325F/Gas 3.
2. Place the flour, butter, icing sugar and salt into a bowl. Using your fingertips, rub the ingredients together until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs.
3. Add the egg yolks and mix until a dough forms.
4. Turn out onto a lightly floured work surface and roll out to a thickness of about 0.5cm/¼in.



5. Cut out shapes using shaped cutters, perhaps the one enclosed, or about any 1½ - 2ins across or mould into Christmas season shapes by hand.

6. Bake the biscuits for 10-12 minutes, or until light golden-brown and crisp. Remove and transfer to a wire rack to cool.

7. When cool using icing made by mixing 100g Icing Sugar plus a tablespoon of water and maybe a couple of drops of food colouring to decorate your biscuits.

8. Make a cup of tea and taste your creation – who might you share some with?



Questions for reflection during the week:

- This week's Bible passage, Isaiah 64.1 – 4 and 8 – 11 reminds us God wants the very best for us, good things no matter who we are. In v3 Isaiah says that God wants us to wear '*a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair*' – what might that look like for you? Can you imagine putting on a coat or a jacket that always made you 'sing' for joy? What would other people think?
- During this week what joy might you bring to another person's life? Sharing your biscuits perhaps, writing a note, telephoning them? Will this be easy to do? If not ask God to help you.
- Isaiah is certain that the things that have been hard and difficult in the past, v4, will be rebuilt and renewed. What might you do to bring some joy into the devastation of this pandemic – the struggles with finance, employment, mental health and well-being? Ask God to show you what role he wants you to play in our community as we move into 2021.



Advent 4 – 20 December - Love

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you."

Luke 1.26-28



Reflect What do you think Mary felt when the angel addressed her as 'favourite one'? Perhaps she was scared? Or perhaps curious what this was all about? Mary was young, but she was wise; wise enough to hear God speaking to her. Can you imagine God looking at you with tenderness and love and address you today saying 'Greetings, favourite one! The Lord is with you.'

Pray for the gift of discernment so you can sense God speaking to you through situations or people in your life.

Act Spend some time colouring in the nativity scene stable and characters attached and then cut them out and assemble them in a place where you can see them, or build your own with some Lego. You might like to re-read the story of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2.1 – 20.

Questions for reflection during the week:

- Can you remember back to when you first knew that God loved you? What did it feel like? Does it feel the same today? If not ask God to help you.
- Who do you know who might find it hard to realise that God loves them? How might you help?
- We hear this part of the Christmas story every year – the narrative relies on Mary's yes to God's request. Are there things that God is asking of you right now – what will you say?
- Can you put your trust in God like Mary did? Ask the Holy Spirit to help.



Christmas Day!

Today is the day to light all four advent candles around the edge of your ring and the one in the centre as we recognise Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1.1 - 14



Reflect Today is a day of rejoicing wherever you are. Can you ponder God's love for you? Think about the gift that God has given to us.

Pray for peace. For peace in the world, peace in our community and our homes, and for peace in your own heart and mind.

Act Rejoice in fact that you are loved. Just the way you are. Start using the Comfort and Joy reflections from the Church of England – download the free app here: www.churchofengland.org/ComfortAndJoy



...Now to the Lord sing praises,
all you within this place,
and with true love and brotherhood
each other now embrace;
this holy tide of Christmas
all other doth efface.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy.

Traditional



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