



'Worship at home'

Sunday December 3rd 2023

This Sunday marks the **first Sunday in Advent**, and the start of a new liturgical year.

The word 'Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning 'coming' or 'arrival'. Advent is a time of waiting and preparation, as we anticipate the Christmas celebration of the coming of Jesus. We also think about how we might prepare and be ready for Christ's coming again.

Traditionally, many churches use an Advent wreath, lighting one additional candle each week in the countdown to Christmas. The wreath contains four coloured candles, usually purple or blue, plus one white candle which is lit on Christmas day. Sometimes the third candle is pink, for joy.



Opening

What will set us journeying in search of the Christ this Advent?
How far are we prepared to go out of our way
to look for the signs of His coming,
and to prepare a path?

How will we travel through this season?
will we be burdened by responsibilities and tasks,
loaded with others' expectations, overwhelmed by their needs?
Will we be full of joy or weary of grief?

What will guide our steps in these weeks?
Will we follow a thread of longing,
the hint of an alternative pathway,
the words and music of the gathered community?

Sisters and brothers in Christ, Advent awaits us.
Let us place our feet on the road and begin the journey.
May we find in familiar words, rituals and customs
the birth of the new thing that awaits us.

~ Ann Siddall <http://stillpointsa.org.au/prayer/prayers-and-liturgies/>



Reflect on a time when you have been waiting, perhaps for a holiday, a new school or job, a wedding, or the birth of a baby.

How did you feel while you were waiting?

Did you get impatient?

What did you do to help the time pass?

Many of us do not like waiting. We might feel tired and impatient. Waiting sometimes brings an element of uncertainty and stress. The Israelites had long anticipated the coming of a Messiah as a King who would save them from political oppression and bring them into freedom, fulfilling the ancient sacred covenant made between God and God's people. Some recognised Jesus as this Messiah. After Jesus' ascension, it was widely expected that he would return soon, within their lifetime, to bring God's kingdom to reign. When this did not happen, they too became tired and impatient. They began to lose hope. The author of Mark encourages them, and us, to keep waiting expectantly.

Mark 13:24-37

"But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its

leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will 2

come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house

will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

New International Version

Reflect on the next four weeks of Advent.

What do you have planned?

Is your calendar busy and your schedule full?

Or can you make time to wait and anticipate?

What might you expect, in the waiting?

Sometimes an important part of the waiting and anticipation is the preparation. In Advent, we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christmas. For some, it is a busy time filled with end of year activities, work parties and school concerts. For some, it can be a lonely time filled with memories and missing loved ones. In the church, we not only prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus in his first advent, but we also anticipate the return of Christ as King in his second advent. This brings with it a message of hope, that goes beyond a wish list of Christmas gifts and hope for the turkey to be fully cooked. We live in the in-between time. Christ has already come, and is with us. But we wait in anticipation of Christ's coming again: there is still more to come. When we look around our world and see darkness and distress, it seems like we might be waiting for ever. However, our hope in Christ is a vision that one day the kingdom of God will be fully

realised in our world, when we, and the whole of creation will be reconciled to God. We do not know when this will be, but we are encouraged to live our lives anticipating this as a reality. 3

WAITING
HOPE
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“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” – Desmond Tutu

Advent can be seen as a time of waiting and spiritual preparation. As we live in anticipation of God breaking into our lives in unexpected ways, we look forward with hope to an even more glorious future, as God’s kingdom is fully revealed and all of creation are reconciled in Christ.



Look again at your calendar for Advent.

How might your pre-Christmas activities help prepare you for Christmas?

What could you do in order to make this Advent a time of waiting and spiritual preparation?

Over these coming four weeks, you are encouraged to set aside some time each day to pause, wait, reflect and pray.



Prayers

Name out loud people and situations around the world who seem to experience distress and darkness. Pray that they may know the presence of Christ with them as light and hope in their dark times.



Closing

Come to be our hope, O Jesus, come to set our people free.
From oppression, come, release us, you alone give liberty.
Come release from every prison those who suffer in our land.
In your love we find the reason to live and understand.

Come to build your new creation; show the way of servanthood:
Give new life to every nation, changing evil into good.
Come and open our tomorrow for a kingdom, now so near.
Take away all human sorrow, give us hope against our fear.

Together in Song 688
Words and music from In Spirit and In Truth
by permission the World Council of Churches, Geneva