

6th December 2020 6 pm Healing and Refreshing: What's it all about – Advent?

Led by Ann Gibbons. Meditation and prayers by Lynda Howells

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Introduction

[Ann Gibbons:]

Hello everyone, and welcome to this healing and refreshing service, 6pm on Sundays at St John's Church Kenilworth. I'm Ann, and with Lynda we will lead you through this time together. Lynda has an Advent-themed meditation for you. And we have a rather special video for you to watch during our time of reflection, and we thank Michelle for making this. Shall we pray before we begin.

Heavenly Father, as we journey through Advent in the lead-up to Christmas, we pray that we will be drawn closer to You, our God, in the knowledge that You will draw close to us, so that this Christmas we can come with awe and be renewed by the wonder of Your birth, and the joy of Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.

Our theme for tonight's service about Advent is "What's it all about?" which you may be thinking is asking a question which we've probably been asking many times to ourselves over the last few months, in the times that we find ourselves living in. But as we come into this second Sunday of the season of Advent, the beginning of the church's year, our prayer for you tonight is for you to come from darkness into light, to come from despair into hope, and into the promise of the prophets' foretelling, the coming of Christ 600 years before being realised, as Jesus is born on Earth. This is in Isaiah chapter 9. Advent is a season for watching and waiting, getting prepared. Advent, a time to lay down the old and look to the new. Let's take a few moments to look at the word 'Advent', accenting each letter.

A is for anticipation, as we get ready to celebrate the birth of Christ.

D, a time of darkness, before the birth of the light of the world.

V is for victory, the promise of a vision of the future.

E is excitement, the looking forward of what is to come.

N, the time to look forward to new life, the sign of hope.

T: we are continually learning to trust in the truth of Jesus, the blossom of salvation.

So how do you plan for Christmas? What is your to-do list in the season of Advent? Do you have more than one list? Several, in fact: one for presents for family and friends, a food shopping list, a list of preparations, things to make: that DIY job that's been looking at you for months, suddenly seems so necessary to get on with. Where does the thought of the coming of Jesus, and times of prayer, fit into all this busy-ness? Is prayer at the top of the list or is praying something we do after we've rushed around a bit, or suddenly think of praying when we are trying to park the car?!

Poem: Advent

I'm going to read a poem now. It's written by Margaret Allcock who is a member of our church. The poem is called... Advent.

Unwrapping Christmas, what comes first?
There's so much left to do.
It always feels that time runs out,
There's no time left for You.

But we can unwrap Christmas by remembering who was born,
Jesus Christ our Saviour, on that first Christmas morn.
We can remember shepherds and angels all around,
And wise men bringing precious gifts to a babe soon to be crowned.

As we start to unwrap Christmas, and Advent's heralds near,
We can leave the world behind us, and all its festive cheer,
And watch and wait expectantly for the coming Saviour King,
And know within our hearts this year, the peace that He will bring.

Hymn: O Come O Come Emmanuel

We're now going to sing our first song. And then after this Lynda will bring her meditation, followed by time of reflection. So we sing that great Advent Hymn, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*.

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| <p>1. 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.</p> <p>2. 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.</p> | <p>3. O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.</p> <p>4. O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.</p> <p>5. O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times did'st give the Law,
In cloud, and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.</p> |
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Meditation: Advent

[Lynda Howells:]

Advent. What's it all about? Advent provides us with the opportunity for a new beginning. New beginnings provide new opportunities for us. We are all on a journey in life. And it's good that we continue to look for new opportunities and fresh starts.

Our world is so lost. But we who love and trust the goodness of God and Jesus can share hope and bring healing. So as we reflect on this time of Advent, bringing hope and light to the world, let us also use this time to be open to what God may want to say to us. So sit comfortably. Be still. Be calm. Breathe out your worries. Breathe in God's love for you, the assurance that He loves you and cares for you, whether you know Him or not. He knows you. And He loves you. He is with you now and forever. And He will never leave you.

Darkness. Darkness. There is so much darkness. We are surrounded by the dark. Even in the daytime darkness fills the world, Your world, my world, sin, selfishness, greed, our beautiful planet slowly being eroded away. People worn out, crumbling, falling apart under the pressure of image, of how the world says we should look, greed of money, materialism, rush, rush, no time to be, to stop, to look up, to look up at the bright shining stars, the sun, the clouds playing in the breeze. At times I am so sad. I just want to hide, hide away in the dark. Darkness covers me, and I don't have to hide. I can just drown in my sadness, my pain, my self-loathing, as I sink lower and lower into the darkness, my whole being spiralling totally out of control. As a child thinks, "If I am in the dark, I can't be seen." I can hide, surrounded in and totally overcome by my own darkness, that darkness filling my mind, my heart. Heavy, anxious, worried, lost in dark, dark thoughts, pulling me down lower and lower and isolated, totally broken, lost with no hope. I so want this to be my safe place, unseen and untouchable.

But Lord, You never give up on us. Thank You. You call to me, to you [the viewer]. Speak to us in the darkness. You reach out to us.

"My precious child, I love you. Your pain is My pain. And I want to walk through that pain with you."

And I know, I sense, there's something within which is calling me out of the dark, to be in the light, warmed by the bright sun, not stuck in a dark, lifeless place. I'd like to grow and flourish, to be nurtured by the touch of our Saviour's love for each one of us, gently as the butterfly settles on the flower to be fed and nurtured. The light of Christ can reach into every part of our lives, our world, if only, if only we would stop and allow our dear Lord to be the guiding light in our lives.

Light comes in so many forms: a dark night, but the stars sparkle and shine, giving off pinpricks of light: blessing across the sky. Street lights shine brightly, pointing us homewards. Candles on a birthday cake to celebrate our birthdays. Time to light the Advent candle, to remember the coming of Jesus, to reflect on the promise of new life.

Jesus knew the darkness, the desolation. But He also knew that despite this, God's plan for His life was perfect. Darkness would turn into light.

Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord.

The spots of dark which mess with us rob us of our peace, our contentment, our hope, and mess with our hearts. Lighten our darkness, and fill us with Your light.

Your Holy Word is our guiding star and promises us and tells us that Your presence in our lives is our assurance that You love us, and are in control. As a parent comforts a child, so You will comfort us.

Jesus, You are the one true light of God, the one constant light in our lives. Even through the darkness caused by sin and greed, fear and materialism, Your light is always there, however pale or far away You may seem at times, You are with us. Your light shines down from above, reflects, transforms, surrounds us in the circle of light, shows us the way, sparkles and encourages us. We are so loved by our Heavenly Father.

So what's it all about? This Advent, let us just choose to turn around, allow our Father into the dark places in our lives, and allow and trust Him to fill them with the blessing of His forgiveness, His love and grace, that we can each prepare to celebrate the birthday of the birth of Jesus afresh in our lives.

Jesus. The miracle of His conception and His birth. Love, love, love. Jesus, born as a human, a baby growing up into manhood, knowing that He must suffer to save mankind. The most precious gift, which is ours, if we choose Him. If only we would receive His gift of new life. He doesn't need us to be well educated, philosophical, clever. He loves us just as we are. He has no shopping list of do's and don'ts, save for us to love and trust Him.

Time after time, the light shining in my heart flickers, as a candle light disturbed by a draught flickers, flickers through worry, pain and anxiety, fear, anxiousness especially about all those matters I cannot control: my family, my friends, the world, the virus. And this year, never more so. COVID. "Cancel Christmas" someone suggested a little while ago. Cancel Christmas! Have you not heard? Do you not know? The greatest, the most powerful news, to give us hope, peace and joy. The most precious gift? Jesus. Jesus is Christmas. We all have the choice to believe and receive this gift for ourselves, to celebrate the birth of the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He entered the world born of a young woman, Mary. Born not into a royal household, but into an ordinary family. Born as a refugee in a stable. And yet He was and still is our Saviour, our peace, our hope, our assurance of eternal life, if we so choose. "Cancel Christmas" they said. I wish I could answer what this is all about.

I pause, I look at the flickering light, the candle. I remind myself, this is God's promise to me, to you: the light, the perfect light of Jesus will never be extinguished, but will shine, radiating from above, surrounding us, taking away the shadows.

Lord of all creation of Heaven and Earth, this Advent bring to birth in us the light we need to help us through the dark times.

So in the silence of our hearts let us confess our sins, thoughts, words and deeds which hurt others, and cause pain to our Heavenly Father.

May soft showers of God's love for each one of us cleanse us from our sins day by day, allowing us to live as God's forgiven people.

We are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus. He has given each one of us the perfect gift of new life. But what gift, if any, are we choosing or want to give Him?

Your Holy Word holds promises of love, hope, encouragement and light. Precious Lord, this Advent, where there is darkness in us, please bring light and guide us through the darkness. As a torch when lit and held in front will guide our way in the dark, so too, Lord, will You light and guide our way when we open our hearts and give You a hand. Guide us.

Just as a rocket, when the blue touch paper is lit, bursts into life, bright light, streaming forth, light bursting into the darkness, God sent His Son Jesus, born as a helpless baby, to shatter the darkness, to bring hope, light and new life to all mankind, to save the world. That helpless baby grew up knowing He would give His life to pay the price of our sins.

So are we willing to find out what it's all about, to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Saviour, the Messiah, not to keep Him as a baby, but to worship Him, to reignite and light the blue touch flame of our hearts, Lord, that we may become beacons of light to You in the darkness.

God speaks to each one of us, "My children, come, come to Me just as you are. I love you. You are precious to Me. Let Me be in the shadows of your lives, the dark places, to share your good times and your sad, share your fun and your happiness. Don't shut Me out or keep Me locked away for emergencies like a first aid box. I want to walk with you, hour by hour, day by day."

So this year, what will our plans be for preparing for Christmas? Especially through the fog of this pandemic, the mist of uncertain times, of what we can do, where we can go. Who is guiding us? Who do we listen to? Everyone, so many, have their own opinion of which way to go. And at times, it seems as if we're all trying to step through treacle, our minds and our emotions pulled down into sticky, uncontrollable messes. Is there a way out? Who can we turn to? What is it all about? It's about receiving, receiving the gift of new life, through meeting with Jesus and trusting Him.

As we journey towards celebrating Christmas Day, the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ, may we be filled with the glory and hope He gives us as we sparkle and shine, carrying light in the darkness, filled with the joy Father God wants to bless us with.

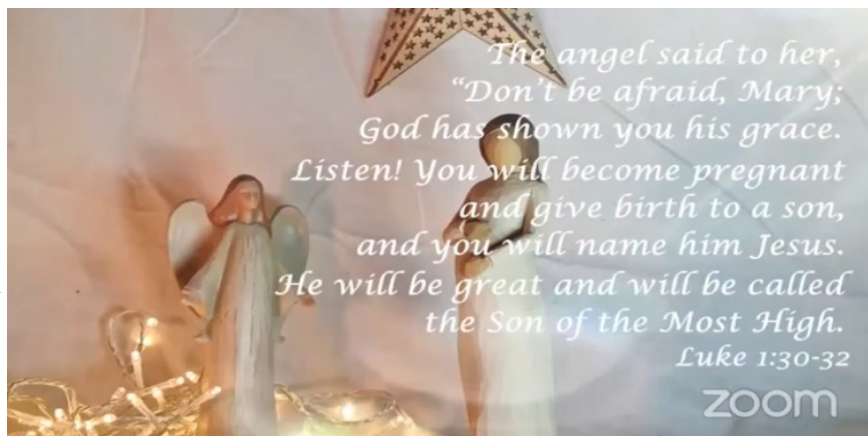
Amen

Advent Video

30 The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has shown you his grace.

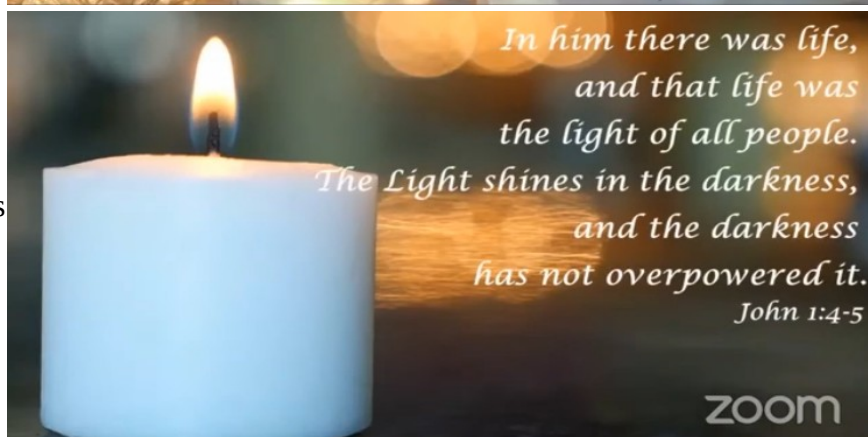
31 Listen! You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

[Luke 1:30-32a, NCV]



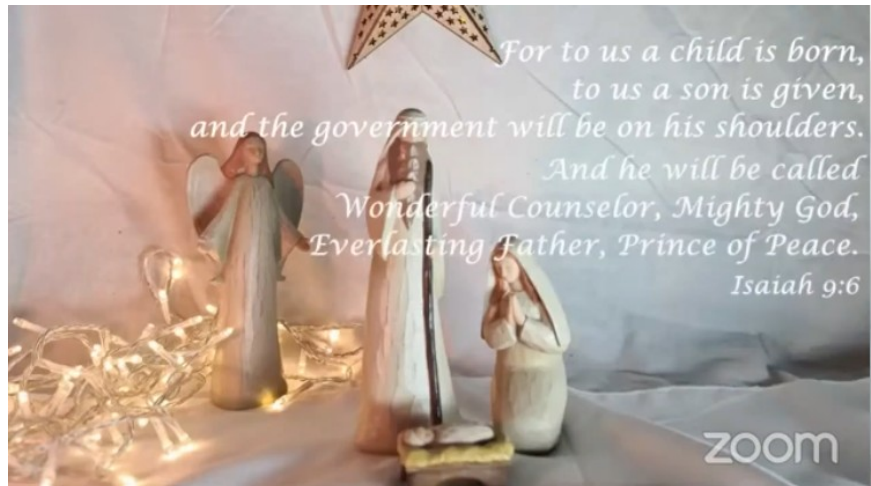
4 In him there was life, and that life was the light of all people. **5** The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it.

[John 1:4-5]



For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be
on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.

[Isaiah 9:6, NIVUK]



‘The virgin will conceive and
give birth to a son, and they will
call him Immanuel’

[Matthew 1:23, NIVUK]



Again Jesus spoke to them,
saying, “I am the light of the
world. Whoever follows me will
not walk in darkness, but will
have the light of life.”

[John 8:12, ESV]



[Ann:]

Thank you, Lynda, for that amazing meditation, and Michelle for that beautiful video, which we hope you all enjoyed.

Hymn: Longing For Light

Our next song is Longing For Light. And then Lynda will lead us in our prayers.

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Refrain:

Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Refrain

3. Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Refrain

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Refrain

5. Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Refrain

Intercessions

[Lynda:]

We now have our prayers.

Father God, we thank You for the freedom we have to come together to be with You to say thank You and to bring our prayers to You, knowing that You love each one of us, and You're always ready to listen and care for us.

When we pray, one of the things is that we put our trust in You, Father God, praying for guidance, wisdom, strength and courage, to be filled afresh with Your Holy Spirit, to be Your servants, as Jesus showed us and taught us. We bring our prayers to You now, Lord, prayers to say thank You, prayers for You to be with us in our joys and in our sorrows, and prayers for all those on our hearts, especially those who are ill, or struggling in any way.

Lord in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for our government and for all in authority, who are seeking to guide us through this pandemic. At the moment, there's a lot of frustration because of the different tiers we've been put in. Oh, Lord, help us to be patient, and to be obedient as to what is asked of us. We may not understand or agree. But we ask You, please, to help us through this. Help us to be supportive and to pray for all who are prepared to try and find a way through these very difficult times. And we thank You for all the research is involved in finding a vaccine to combat the COVID-19. And we ask that it will be available for the poorest countries as well as the wealthy.

Lord in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Advent is a time of preparation. Most families are trying to make plans for Christmas. We pray for wisdom, for kindness and understanding in the way families are planning to be able to meet up.

Lord in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We remember our young people wherever they are, whether at school, college or university or working, especially as universities, Lord, are preparing to come home for Christmas, keep them safe. We pray for them and support them through these difficult times. Help us to be kind to them, Lord, and not judging them. We pray for them.

Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let us think for a moment about all those known to us who are suffering in any way, whether it's through illness, bereavement, just life, the cares and the worries, anything which stops them from being at peace.

Oh Jesus, You are our Shepherd. You are always there for us, always ready to listen, to guide, to protect us. Thank You. And we pray, Lord, especially for all those who are in distress, for healing them at the point of their need. We pray for all who are ill at this time, whether in body, mind or in spirit. We pray for all who care for them, their families, their carers, their doctors and nurses, all who work in hospitals and care homes and agencies who care for people that live in their own homes.

We pray, Lord, for all those known only to You, for Your blessing on them. And we ask that the peace of Jesus would fill them now, in whatever situation they're in, that they will know that they are loved by Father God.

Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Father God, we pray for everyone who is lonely or anxious, especially with this COVID, Lord, those who are isolated. Send Your angels to them, we pray, to comfort them and reassure them that they're not alone. You are always with them.

Lord in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We thank You, Lord, for everyone who watches this service. And we pray that they will be refreshed and equipped, able to share the hope and promise of Advent as they go about their daily lives.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Hymn: Shine Jesus Shine (Lord, the light of Your love is shining)

1. Lord, the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth You now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain:

Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth Your word
Lord, and let there be light

2. Lord, I come to Your awesome presence
From the shadows into Your radiance
By the blood I may enter Your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain

3. As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story
Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain

Blessing

[Lynda:]

So, a final blessing¹. This is for each one of you, each one of us.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me and above me.
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me.
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

Thank you for joining us tonight, and we wish you all the joys and blessings of a very Happy Christmas. Bye.

¹ From St. Patrick's Breastplate, attributed to St. Patrick: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Patrick%27s_Breastplate

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Veni Emmanuel) – original 8th or 9th century Latin words translated by John Mason Neal 1818-1866 (published 1861) – Public domain

Longing for Light, We Wait In Darkness – by Bernadette Farrell. Copyright © 1993 Bernadette Farrell. Bernadette Farrell is a British Catholic hymn writer born in West Yorkshire in 1957. Since the 1970s, she has become well-known across all Christian denominations for her challenging texts and memorable melodies. She says, however, that “writing wasn't my intention or plan. It was a practical response to the needs around me” – as this hymn demonstrates.

Bernadette's personal commitment to social action is seen in her work as a community organiser for South London Citizens, part of Citizens UK – an organisation that seeks to empower groups and individuals to work together to change their communities for the best. (from <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/hymns/longing-for-light-we-wait-in-darkness-stf-706/>)

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