

Waiting and Longing

A daily prayer practice for Advent

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Introduction

'Everywhere, at any moment, Christ comes in.'

J A T Robinson

That's what the Advent journey encourages us to expect. In Advent we practise the discipline of opening our hearts to the presence of Christ in our midst, we wait for a glimpse of the truth that he is with us, we long to experience the joy of his presence and the wonder of the love of our God who became flesh and dwelt amongst us and whose Spirit is with us now encouraging us to join in the living of God's Kingdom now!

Preparation

- ◆ Arrange a simple Advent ring of four candles with a fifth, larger white one in the centre. Blue or purple candles are often used, but you may have your own reasons for picking different colours!
- ◆ Decide how you are going to light the candles.
- ◆ Familiarise yourself with the tune for Psalm 42 (see page 2).
- ◆ Choose seating that will be comfortable during meditation.
- ◆ You might like to choose appropriate music to begin and end.

Opening Responses

For the darkness of waiting,
of not knowing what is to come,
of staying ready and quiet and attentive,
we praise you, O God:

For the darkness and the light are both alike to you.

Affirmation of faith in God's presence

The Psalmists prayed:

Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your waterfalls;
all your waves and your billows have washed over me.
By day you lead me in steadfast love;
at night your song is with me,
prayer from the Heart of my heart.

Psalm 42:7-8

You knit me together in my mother's womb ... My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Psalm 139:13, 15

St Paul said:

'In God we live and move and have our being.'

Acts 17:28 [quoting the Greek poet Epimenides]

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

Christ promised:

Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:20

Light the main candle, recognising the presence of Christ.

We declare:

Christ is here!

The Spirit is with us!

Pause

Meditating on Scripture

Week 1: Longing for the light of God's presence

Let us know,
Let us press on to know the LORD;
His appearing is as sure as the dawn;
He will come to us like the showers,
Like the spring rains that water the earth.

Hosea 6:3

As the sun is constant, so too is the love of God; it is we who, like the earth, sometimes turn away and sometimes turn towards God. My waiting is for my own readiness to see the light.

*Silent contemplation follows the scripture reading
(see Suggestions for Contemplative Practice on page 10).*

Week 2: Longing for the lover of my soul

I sought him but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
I will rise now and go about the city,
In the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but found him not.
The sentinels found me,
As they went about the city.
'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?'
Scarcely had I passed them,
When I found him whom my soul loves.

Song of Solomon 3:1b-4

My soul searches restlessly for the love of Christ, to know him and be one with him.

Silent contemplation

Week 3: Longing for that which is promised

I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Isaiah 42:6b–9

It is the coming of the kingdom of Shalom, the reign of the Prince of Peace, for which I long, on earth as in heaven.

Silent contemplation

Week 4: Longing for the Christ Child

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of the Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Luke 1:41–45

Fruit of the womb, the Human One, brother, friend, child; with a mother's longing to see her unborn, so I long to know you more deeply, my Christ.*

Silent contemplation

* See Notes on page 11.

Candle lighting of the Advent ring (the four smaller candles)

Be the change you want to see in the world.

Mohandas Gandhi

The kingdom within:

Once, Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you.'

Luke 17:20-24

Bearing good fruit – through the reign of the Lamb in our hearts:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22:1-7

Living in the light

(based on Hosea 6:3 and Revelation 22:1-7)

Light through rain clouds stirs
memories of deeper love;
I long for your warmth.

Sunshine and rain wake
seeds deep within my earth-heart;
I hunger for light.

The light of the lamb,
living water of cleansing,
heal me, make me new.

Amen.

The first candle is lit.

Pause

Embracing the lover

(based on Song of Solomon 3:1b-4)

I seek longingly
in the city streets and squares,
you whom my soul loves.

As I search the streets,
let me see you in the eyes
of the people there.

Let me hold you and
bring you within my own house,
my love, my dear one.

Amen.

The second candle is lit.

Pause

Acting on the promise

(based on Isaiah 42:6b-9)

Hand in hand with God,
healing touch, words which set free
flow out from your heart.

Hand in hand with God,
you lead the way to Shalom,
wine-blood spilt for love.

Hand in hand with God,
hope-beacon to a dark world,
Christ, enlighten me.

Amen.

The third candle is lit.

Pause

Giving birth to the Christ within

(based on Luke 1:41-45)

Grow in me, love-child,
grow and fill me with your life,
make my soul your home.

Grow in me, Christ-child,
be born of tears and pain, in
unshakeable love.

Reach fullness in me,
open me and live through me,
my body is yours.

Amen.

The fourth candle is lit.

Pause

Closing prayer

I pray

Not only *come, O Lord,*
but move me to let you in,
for already you stand at my door, knocking,
your presence immediate, urgent, powerful;

Not simply *be with me,* my God,
but let me feel your presence always,
for you are always here;

Not so much *hear my prayer,*
but give me words which resonate
with the energy of your love,
for you are the eternal listener to our souls' song;

Not always *help me,*
but let me learn to see your working in my life;

Not *give me,*
but humble me,
that in my lowliness
I may fall no further;

Not *protect me*
but immerse me in life,
and let me love and give and learn to follow
the driving, compelling power of your wild Spirit;

Not necessarily *save me,*
but let me understand that
like the ocean holds the swimming seal
so you hold me,
always and completely,
and in you alone can I safely lose myself
and so find you.

Amen.

Suggestions for contemplative practice

To spend some time meditating on the Bible reading, we offer the following suggestions:

Spend whatever time on this that feels comfortable for you.

Sit in such a way that you can be both comfortable and alert. It may help to have your back straight, with both feet on the ground. Let your shoulders drop.

Be aware of the chair under you, supporting you, the floor under your feet. Let the chair and the floor take your full weight. Watch as you let the tensions drain out of you.

Focus your attention on your breathing ...

Don't change it ... just notice it ... your lungs expanding and contracting, the feel of the air through your nostrils. When your attention wanders, just gently bring it back.

Now focus on the deepest place within you ... the very centre ... the core of your being. Go into that place ... and be still ... listening as if to something very subtle.

Ask God to take you through the Bible passage you have read. Or take a phrase or just a word from the passage and gently turn it over and reflect on it.

You could now ask God for what you most desire. Speak with God about it.

— or —

Sit in silence with the chosen phrase or word.

When ready, let your attention come gently back to the room. Take your time.

Notes on 'the Human One' (see page 5)

The phrase used in the prayer for Week 4 on page 5, 'the Human One' (in place of the more familiar 'Son of Man'), comes from *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (OUP 1995).

The title for Jesus, 'the Son of Man', is found frequently in the Gospels and almost nowhere else in the New Testament. With a single exception, only Jesus uses the term, and always, in Gospel contexts, to refer to himself. The title has a complex history, but it is not possible to show that the use of the term in Judaism has influenced its widespread use in early Christianity. The Greek term, whose literal translation is 'the Son of the Man', is clearly enigmatic, but in the Gospels it takes on its meanings from the contexts in which it is used. The term may easily be misunderstood, however, as referring to a male offspring, 'the son' of another male being, 'the man'; hence this version uses 'the Human One' as a formal equivalent to 'the Son of Man'. 'The Human One' is clearly a title of a non-androcentric form, and is also open to the many nuances of interpretation that are possible in the original Greek term. No gender is ascribed to that term.

See also: Walter Wink, *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man* (Fortress Press 2002), reviewed in depth here:

www.crosscurrents.org/EllensonWinksummer2003.htm

'The son of the man' is the expression Jesus almost exclusively used to describe himself. In Hebrew the phrase simply means 'a human being'. The implication seems to be that Jesus intentionally avoided honorific titles, and preferred to be known simply as 'the man', or 'the human being'. Apparently he saw his task as helping people become more truly human. (page xi)

Alternative to the sung Psalm on page 3

De noche iremos (Taizé)

♩ = 60



By night we hast - en in darkness, to



search for the liv - ing wa - ter; on - ly our thirst leads us



on - ward, on - ly our thirst leads us onward. By