

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

Sunday 28 November 2021

Advent 1

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. Sunday marks both the start of a new Church Year and the beginning of our Christmas countdown. Advent is here! I love Advent! Do you? It is a time to look forward in hope to two God-given gifts: firstly, to Christmas and the coming of his Son and, secondly, to Christ's return when the world will be as it was designed to be. As you prepare to journey with the first of this year's Advent Prayers and Reflections, I invite you to pause for a moment to think about your hope for Christmas. When you are ready, offer this to God in prayer. Trust in his loving response.

May God bless and guide you through Advent and on into Christmas.

Every blessing,

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An Advent Hymn of Invitation

As you sing or read the opening verse of O come, O come, Emmanuel, think about the people crying out for freedom. Pray for them. Pray that God will be with them as Christmas approaches. How might God set you free this Advent?

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.

from the Great O Antiphons (12th - 13th century)
trans. John Mason Neale (1818-1866)

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Ever ready!

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence, and feel his love.

If you are indoors, you may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love, here, in your room. You may also wish to have a cross in your palm, or on the table, and a bowl of water ready for the time of confession.

O God, you search me and you know me.

All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.

You know the journeys that I take
and the places where I rest.

You know all that is on my heart,
and the "to do" lists and worries
that are cluttering my life.

Help me to let go of them,
for a while, as I spend time in your presence. **Amen.**

LETTING GO

If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets, with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, or times when you have failed to pay attention to God's presence, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And, when you are ready, reflect on the opening words of our hymn.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!

Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence praise,
in deeper reverence praise.



If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water and make the sign of the cross on your palm.

Feel God's forgiveness. God welcomes you back into his loving presence as his beloved child. Abide in his love. May this inspire you to be attentive to God's guiding as you journey daily through Advent.

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER **(The Collect)**

Across our villages and the worldwide Church, this prayer is being said today. Add your voice to this earthly circle of prayer to our loving Father.

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Our prayer for this first Sunday of Advent reminds us of the dual purpose of Advent: to celebrate Christ's coming into our world and into our lives, and to look forward in hope to his return. It is a call to be ever ready. Waiting at the best of times is hard to do. Waiting without knowing when something will happen is harder still. And yet, this is what God invites us to do as we look forward in hope to Christ's return. We do not know if this will be in our lifetime. We just have to live as if it will be.

Take a moment to contemplate this question, 'How hopeful am I feeling?'

Offer your response to God's loving attention.



LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Be alert!

Jesus said, 'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'

'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

Luke 21:25-36

Setting the scene

Jesus is in the temple in Jerusalem speaking to his disciples about what is to come. It is Holy Week and Jesus has overheard some of the pilgrims talking about the beauty of the temple. It is his cue to talk to his team about what will happen in some of their lifetimes: the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. And, to talk to them about what will happen sometime in the future. When? Who knows? Only God knows.

When he leaves them in charge, they will have to live and work and worship as if every second counts. He may return at any time.

It feels a bit like leaving your teenage children in charge of your home for the first-time. But, with one big difference, you're not telling them when you're going to be back! You do expect to see the house looking pristine when you return. If not, there will be trouble! Your teenagers have two choices... do nothing and miss out on the freedom you are giving them. This is to live in fear of making mistakes. Or, do what they want to do, but do so mindfully and caringly. When you return, the house will look as it should do and the children will have had a great time. And, it is this latter route that Christ wants us to take in life. To live freely without fearing his return. To live lovingly and caringly and, in so doing, make life on Earth more as it should be, as God would love it to be.

If we can do this, we will be ever ready for his return.

We will not fear Christ's return. Instead, we hope for it.

And, if this is not to be in our lifetime, so be it.

When we come to the end of our life, we will face our dying and death knowing that we have lived our lives as best we could for the one who lived and died and rose again for us: Christ our King.

Take a moment to contemplate this idea of living life in readiness, and without of fear of what might happen in the future.

Offer any fears that you may have to God in prayer and wait on his words of comfort and hope. Listen for him. Let him cleanse and lighten, refresh and brighten the house of your heart.

The house of our hearts

Brothers and sisters, it is now the season of the Lord's coming, and we must use the time to prepare ourselves by our spiritual devotion. We must strive to enter the house of our hearts, open the windows, and notice what is seemly and what unseemly in that house. We must brush away the cobwebs, sweep the floors, clean out the dust and the dirt, strew the clean floors with freshly gathered rushes, fragrant herbs, and sweet-smelling flowers.

Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141)

I love this image of our inner life - which shapes and fuels our outer life - being like a house. Many of us have a weekly housework routine or have someone who comes in to do this for us. Yet, even with all of this cleaning, a cobweb can be woven quietly high up in a corner of a room or stains be ground into the carpet of a high footfall area of our house. It is difficult to keep our house show home clean and ready for critical inspection.

And, it is just the same in our spiritual and faith life. We keep it fresh and inspiring by having seasons like Advent and Lent when we can pause to take a close look at our daily walk with God. How might you refresh and revive your daily or weekly routine? As you work through the list below, invite God's Spirit to help you undertake an Advent clean.

How is...

- ☆ My prayer life
- ☆ My daily bible reading
- ☆ My sense of God's presence with me
- ☆ My trust in his love for me
- ☆ My hope for the future
- ☆ My desire to love others as he loves me



What one thing is God inviting you to focus on as journey on through Advent to Christmas? It might be a specific aspect of your faith life which is a real blessing to you or your family. Or, it could be an aspect that both you and he feel is in need of a fresh look.

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some prayers for Advent 1. Feel free to add your own.

Heavenly Father, as Advent begins,
I open myself to your cleansing and refreshing Spirit.
Come into the house of my heart,
come and sweep me clean. Fill me with the fragrance of your love,
and lighten my dark corners with your eternal hope.
Father, hear my prayer.

Father, as I look forward to Christ's return,
help me to trust in his heavenly rule. Planet Earth is safe in his hands.
May it also feel safe in the hands of your world's leaders.
May your kingdom come and your will be done in them,
and through them. May each action and each decision lead us
closer to the vision that you have for your world. I pray for...
Father, hear my prayer.

Father, in hearts and homes, we are getting ready for Christmas.
We are looking forward to spending time with our family and friends.
May this hope become a reality for everyone in this benefice.
I pray for those who are facing Christmas on their own,
or without a loved one who is so very dear to them. I lift up to you...
Father, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

O God, you search me and you know me,
all my thoughts and my feelings are open to your gaze,
you see the paths I will take before I take them.
You are my light in the darkness and my delight in life's joys.
You are always at my side. Bless my loved ones too, I pray. **Amen.**