

## ADVENT & CHRISTMAS, OUR FRIDAY PRAYER THEME FOR DECEMBER



### Planning for Christmas across the Church of England

“An Autumn heatwave may be spreading across the UK, but the Church of England is already preparing for the long winter nights of Advent and Christmas”, *the Church Times* reported on 7<sup>th</sup> October this year ..... they said

“On 1 September, a press release on the C of E website announced its Christmas theme for 2023: “*Follow the Star: Join the song*”. The release explains: “After two challenging Christmases during the pandemic, we returned to the very popular ‘Follow the Star’ branding last year, in line with feedback from dioceses and parishes.” Last December, the theme was “Follow the Star: The Great Invitation” ([News, 1 December 2022](#)).

As before, the theme this year will be used on social media to encourage people to attend services through Advent and Christmas, with a focus on singing — a pastime banned for much of the pandemic, putting paid to choirs and carol services.

New this year is a call to all choirs and worship groups to sing a new version of the traditional English carol “The First Nowell”. There are also daily Advent and Christmas reflections inspired by the words of familiar carols; and a printed “Follow the Star” Advent calendar for families, which includes stickers. [The-First-Nowell-sneak-peek](#)

The call to “join the song” is linked in the material to the praises of the shepherds mentioned in St Luke’s Gospel 2.20 on their return from meeting the newborn Jesus. [Follow the Star: Join the Song - Resources for churches | The Church of England](#)

Three webinars are being organised to help churches make the most of the new resources in services, schools, or at home, with both children and adults.” [1. Explore 'Join the Song' resources](#) [2. Use Join the Song with under-18s this Christmas](#) [3. Christmas 2023's digital resources](#)

### What to expect at church this Christmas | The Church of England



**Advent** marks the beginning of the church year. It is a time for reflection in darkness, for renewal of hope and for a movement towards a beginning.

The season of Advent, as it first emerged in the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries, lasted, like Lent, for 40 days. Later tradition developed the Advent we know today, of four Sundays before Christmas Day. [*In 2023 there are three Sundays*]

It is a season of expectation and preparation as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming of Christ. Church decorations are simple and sparse, and purple is the traditional colour used. Advent falls at the darkest time of the year, and the natural symbols of darkness and light are powerfully at work throughout Advent and Christmas.

**THE people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.**

Isaiah 9.2-7



AD = Area Dean; C = Clergy; IR = Interregnum; H = Headteacher; EH = Executive Head

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
					<b>COVENTRY EAST DEANERY AD Claire McArthur</b>	<b>St Mark – Conventional District C – Phil Atkinson</b>
<b>ADVENT 1</b> 3 <b>All Saints Benefice C – Pam Howell</b>	4 <b>All Saints Primary School H – Cara Page</b>	5 <b>Clergy Wellbeing Group</b>	6 <b>Diocesan Finance Group; DAC (buildings) DBE Board</b>	7 <b>Bishop’s Strategy Integration Group &amp; Core Staff Team</b>	8 <b>Prayer for the many Advent and Christmas carol services planned</b>	9 <b>St Peter, Hillfields C – Matt Spina (curate)</b>
<b>ADVENT 2</b> 10 <b>St Mary, Walsgrave-on- Sowe C – Tom Cook</b>	11 <b>Walsgrave Primary School H – Damien Sowerby</b>	12 <b>Stoke, St Michael C – Claire McArthur</b>	13 <b>St John the Divine Willenhall IR Cathedral Finance Cttee</b>	14 <b>Stretton CofE Academy EH – Leah Baddeley</b>	15 <b>Presence of Christ felt across the Diocese</b>	16 <b>St Bartholomew, Binley C – Jon Taylor; Binley Woods LEP</b>
<b>ADVENT 3</b> 17 <b>St Bartholomew’s CofE Academy H – Mina Sharma</b>	18 <b>St Catherine, Stoke Aldermoor / New Century Park C – Linda Fletcher</b>	19 <b>St Chad, Wood End C – Brian Nash Cathedral Chapter</b>	20 <b>St James, Whitley C – Anne Richards</b>	21 <b>St Phillip’s, Potter’s Green IR Bishop’s Core Staff (9-10am)</b>	22 <b>Joyful Proclamation of our Saviour’s birth</b>	23 <b>Holy Cross, St Mary Magdalene &amp; Church of the Risen Christ, Wyken C – Paul Pavlou</b>
<b>CHRISTMAS EVE</b> 24 <b>For eucharistic services this Christmas Eve, with many Persuaded of God’s love</b>	<b>CHRISTMAS 25</b> <b>For much joy and delight in hospitable homes and community centres</b>	<b>BOXING DAY 26</b> <b>Remembering Stephen, Deacon and first martyr</b>	27 <b>St Alban C – Barney &amp; Zoe Pimentel</b>	28 <b>Simon Betteridge and the Chaplaincy Team, UHCW NHS Trust</b>	29 <b>Remembering Thomas Becket, martyr 1170</b>	30 <b>Mission Hubs and Urban Plants across the Diocese</b>
31		<b>COVENTRY EAST DEANERY Clergy with PTO – Lesley Johnson, Paul Lowe,</b>	<b>Laurence Wickens</b>			Schools included are all Church of England schools. Other schools may be mentioned.

# PRAYER DIARY



**Coming up – the Theme for the final month of 2023 includes an understandable focus on Advent/Christmas. Plans for 2024 are yet to be confirmed. Do consider sending me your prayer suggestions, and any other jottings. It will be published on 20 December.**

**BEING HEALTHY CHURCH**  
**“The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little” (2 Corinthians 8.15)** How could your church or small group put this verse into effect this Advent and Christmas. From Ruth Grayson’s excellent booklet ‘Reviving Advent, Reclaiming Christmas’ (2015, Grove Booklet SL134)

## SPECIFIC DAYS IN DECEMBER 2023

**1 – Coventry East Deanery** Area Dean, Claire McArthur; Lay Chair, vacancy; project to develop the full potential of the Ball Hill area [Destination Ball Project](#); the refugees coming to live in our parishes and the impact this has on our local schools, that they are truly welcomed and provision made.

**2 – St Mark, Conventional District – C – Nathan Leigh, Rachel King, Ros Williams; St Mark's Academy - Jonny Davies; Lou Peet (Youth)**

**3 – ADVENT 1 - All Saints Benefice – R(PTO) Mick Harling** We thank God for our relationships with All Saints School, Bluecoat School, and Gosford Park School; our two churches' Stay & Plays, Messy Churches, and Senior Social. We would like prayer for increased outreach into our community, growth of small groups, and funding for necessary fabric works.

**4 – All Saints Church of England Primary School**

**9 - St Peter, Hillfields – R John McCoach**

**10 – ADVENT 2 - St Mary, Walsgrave-on-Sowe – R Lorraine Baker, Ste Baker, R(PTO) Anthony Thistlewood** We are thankful for all the new relationships formed with families over the last year. We pray that our new vision of 'Growing Love and Faith that Transforms Lives' would be lived by all who call at St. Mary's home.

**11 – Walsgrave Church of England Primary School –** We are thankful for all our hard working teachers and staff at Walsgrave. We pray that our church assemblies, services and lunch clubs would help young people to flourish in their faith.

**12 - Stoke St Michael Church – C Dan Bennett, R(PTO) Ann Brown, Janet Pocklington, R – Chris Dronfield, Sue Morris, Suzanne Sapiano** pray for our new Green Growther's project. Our new space to breathe service and thanks for the joy of our wild messy church.

**13 – St John the Divine, Willenhall** interregnum

**14 – Stretton Church of England Academy**

**16 - St Bartholomew, Binley/Binley Woods LEP – C James Bremner, C (Assoc) Richard Bromley PTF Lynn Moakes, R(PTO) Greg Sampson** Thanking God for all of our 250th Anniversary celebrations, and for our Family Breakfast Church, a family friendly service in our church hall on the 2nd Sunday of each month. Please pray for the plans for a young people's discipleship group and a Community Cafe.

**17 – ADVENT 3 – St Bartholomew's Church of England Academy**

**18 – St Catherine, Stoke Aldermoor & New Century Park C (Assoc) Julie Watkins-Wollner** we ask for prayers for us to honour God and work together in our community outreach over Christmas, giving thanks for our Community Garden and for our relationship with Aldermoor Farm Primary School to flourish.

**19 – St Chad, Wood End** for our Advent Show on Friday December 8th. We have "Springs Dance Theatre Group" coming to present the story of the Magi. It's an outreach event, free for anyone in the church and the community.

**20 - St James, Whitley** for our continued shawl ministry [Prayer Shawl Ministry](#)

**21 - St Phillip's, Potter's Green** giving thanks for all those that have supported us through our interregnum, and we are enjoying having Ros Williams (from St Mark's) with us - she has been a real blessing to us. Ros is moving to Ipswich as an Associate Minister

**23 – Holy Cross - Caludon, St Mary Magdalene & Church of the Risen Christ, Wyken – C (Associate) Liz Harris, C Sam Millward, R(PTO) Margaret Robinson**

**24 – Christmas Eve**

**25 – Christmas Day**

**26 - St Alban, – C Jacque Ayton**

**27 – University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust** chaplaincy team at Walsgrave Hospital [Spiritual Care - University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire \(uhcw.nhs.uk\)](#)

C = Clergy R = Reader PTF Permission to take funerals H = Headteacher

## Associations with saints remembered in Advent .....

**1 December** Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures — I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul: I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father. **Charles de Foucauld, Hermit in the Sahara, 1916**

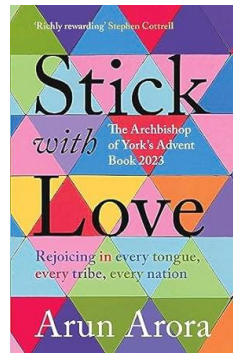
**4 December** Ceaselessly we bow O Christ our God Before your cross That gives us life; And glorify your Resurrection, Most powerful Lord, When on that third day You made anew the failing nature of Mankind, Showing us so clearly the Way back to heaven above; For you alone are Good, The Lover of the Human Race. **John of Damascus, c 749**

**14 December** by dark of blessed night, in secrecy, for no one saw me and I regarded nothing, my only light and guide the one that in my heart was burning. This guided, led me on more surely than the radiance of noon who was to me well known, and in a place where no one came in view. **John of the Cross, Poet, Teacher of the Faith, 1591**

## PRAYER JOTTINGS – DECEMBER 2023

- Lord, help me to learn how I may receive you at Christmas, and so to know how to prepare myself for you during Advent. Help me to find ways to spend less time on myself, and more on you. Help me to apportion my money appropriately so that you receive the best I have to give. And help me to prepare my own life so that I live with your continued presence in me, once Christmas is over. Like the psalmist, I pray for ‘my heart and flesh to sing for joy to the living God.’ In so doing, may my longing for you be truly satisfied. Amen.’  
**From Ruth Grayson’s ‘Reviving Advent, Reclaiming Christmas’, Grove Booklet S134 (2015)**

- This year’s Advent Book by Arun Arora approaches the season through **stories** – the stories of saints resonate with the love of God, and remind us of the importance of grace in our own lives, and especially faith in times of trial. It also causes us to reflect on **relationships** – and the special connection we have with others who represent ‘every tribe, tongue and nation,’ but also the sadness of difference and ‘otherness’ which is a source of conflict. Yet in considering the ‘last things’ (and the return of Jesus) during Advent, we are reminded of the vision of ‘diversity and unity, mirroring the very life of God’ in the pages of the book of Revelation! Above all through the threads of the lives of saints we see that their lives reflect meaning and purpose ‘**through Christ himself.**’ *Like them, our lives can be shaped and formed in response to Christ, this Advent and Christmas.*
- Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell says in the preface,  
***‘May you discover this Advent a renewed appetite for the transforming love of God and a fuller understanding of what it is to be a disciple committed to responding to that love.’***
- ‘**Stick with Love**’ (SPCK, 2023) issues a real challenge to us to go deeper in our journey of discipleship this Advent. Here are three brief but special examples from the book .....



- Role Models** - the rap artist **Stormzy** is a surprising inclusion alongside the well-known Saints in Arun Arora’s book, and centres on this memorable and astonishing Gospel song at Glastonbury in 2019 [Blinded by Your Grace, Pt. 2](#) Discussion lingers on other language used by Stormzy, which for some goes against his being a good role model. What do you think?
- Generosity** - On refusing to burn a sacrifice to the image of a Roman emperor, **Lucy of Syracuse** (remembered on her feast day, 13 December, the shortest day of the Julian calendar) was martyred in 304AD at the age of 21. Her faith had caused her to give her dowry to the poor. In Latin, her name means ‘light’, and this day became associated with ‘the one true light.’ In Sweden the Lucia celebrations mark the presence of light on the longest night .....
- The Rights of the Child** – **Eglantyne Webb** (remembered in our lectionaries on 17 December) founded the Save the Children Fund in 1919, to provide food, clothing and medical care to children in need – today it operates in more than 100 countries across the world. Her Declaration on the Rights of the Child, written to world leaders in 1924, was adopted in 1925, and developed by the United Nations in 1959. Following Christ, she “helped usher in the kingdom of God.”

**“His life brought light to everyone” (John 1.1-5)**

- In the beginning the Word already existed.**  
**The Word was with God, and the Word was God.**  
<sup>2</sup> **He existed in the beginning with God.**  
<sup>3</sup> **God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.**  
<sup>4</sup> **The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.**  
<sup>5</sup> **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.**



- Each month we focus on a different Deanery; this month it is **Coventry East Deanery**. In 2024 we will again be praying for all the churches and deaneries across the Diocese. I look forward to receiving updates from area deans and clergy, and anyone else with specific prayer requests.

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