



Light your own candle each week for the duration of your worship time.
Take a moment to focus yourself on God amongst the noise and busyness of this Christmas Eve.
Can you sense anticipation in the air?

Prayer

God is right here, present, with, incarnate, and ever so real.

As we celebrate the meaning of Christmas, and tell the story in readings, carols and reflections, Listen for the Holy Spirit speaking to us today, Lord God.
Help us to see something of your coming here, by your Spirit, Christmas God. Advent God, as we wait for your coming, travel with us to the manger in our minds and imagination, Bringing us, our world, our hopes and our fears. Come into this space, by your Spirit, Christmas God. Amen

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - Like a candle flame by G Kendrick

Verse 1 -

CCLI5044394

Like a candle flame
Flickering small in our darkness
Uncreated light
Shines through infant eyes

Chorus -- God is with us, alleluia (Men)
God is with us, alleluia (Women)
Come to save us, alleluia (Men)
Come to save us (Women)
Alleluia! (All)

Verse 2 -

Stars and angels sing
Yet the earth sleeps in shadows
Can this tiny spark
Set a world on fire?

Verse 3 -

Yet his light shall shine
From our lives,
Spirit blazing
As we touch the flame
Of his holy fire



https://youtu.be/cZGVOKjn_V8?si=7EOE793BUaYOLmJ7

Prayer Of Adoration And Confession

God of love, as Advent turns its final corner, we hear familiar passages pronouncing the coming of our saviour: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace.

Your son, our saviour, born of Mary. We praise you, God, for these familiar words, for all that Jesus was then and is now in our lives: bringing light to dark places, a light that will never be extinguished, a beacon of hope in an otherwise dark world, a light that can brighten the darkest of hearts.

As we wait in eager anticipation, may our bodies feel the same flutter of excitement felt by Elizabeth, may our hearts sing with the same joy and praise as Mary's voice.

We know that at times we have wandered away refusing to acknowledge the love of Christ in our words and actions, failing to bring light to those in dark places. not sharing the same hope of the prophets.

Forgive us, God, have mercy, Lord, grant us your peace once again.

As we gather in worship in our churches, our halls, our homes, may we once again, in these closing hours of Advent, be the beacons of hope in our communities, the bearers of Good News, the creators of welcome for all, the people you want us to be. Let our souls magnify your love. **Amen.**

Reflections

A Time Of Waiting. Advent is a time of waiting. Waiting in anticipation. But what are we waiting for?

Hope, perhaps? Hope for the future. Hope for us all. Hope for a better world. Hope for a world in which all are treated fairly and equally. Where all feel that they are included in the love of Christ soon to be born.

What might this look like if you are questioned or denied, your colour makes you stand out your physical 'abilities' make you feel left out your history clouds judgements?

What might it look like if we see beyond all these to the beautiful child of God in each of God's beloved?

Christ came that we might know life in all its fullness, each of us, no one beyond the limits of God's love.

Let us be less than patient on our waiting for this to be known and felt by all. The Christ child is coming soon, very soon. Let our hearts be open as we rejoice to ALL of God's beloved.

Reading: Luke 1:46b-55

Reflection: Mary's joy based on Luke: 1:46b-55

For the first time I can walk with pride. At home too many people turn their backs, whisper behind their hands, gossip my shame in their doorways and pull their children to safety for fear of contamination.

But here - here I can cast aside the cloak designed to conceal but fooling no one.

Here I may stroke the swelling of the child within me, smoothing my dress over my belly, watching the fabric curve around the shape of the promise that is to come.

Here I may wait for those first flutterings of another life.

Here I may watch my body change as it prepares itself for birthing.

Here, safe with Elizabeth, whose own miracle is evident, I can talk of wonders and strange happenings.

Here with the cousin whose child kicked out with the excitement of our meeting, I can rejoice.

And here, as I feel the joy rising in my soul,

I can spill out my song of gratitude to God and all the promises that have been made for this new life. Here, as I echo Hannah's words of old, I know that something is happening that will change

the world. And this God-given child is only the beginning.

How are you when it comes to waiting?

Do you like today, or just want it to be over?

Can you sense the anticipation in the air? See it in the eyes of the children, feel it in the hurried last-minute preparations, hear it in the whispered conversations about stockings and mince pies and who is coming over when?

Christmas Eve is a precious time, a time of waiting and preparing, a time of readying and hoping, a time for family and candles and stories and possibility... All of which can be helpful to us in our Christian discipleship.

Can you make a conscious effort today to prepare some room in your heart for Christ, as well as in your home for guests or in your car boot for presents? If you are cooking, can you use the time to think about the ingredients you need in your life to make your home and your life a better, safer, fairer place? If you are wrapping or packing presents, can you pray for the people you are giving them to - that they might know something of the presence of God as well this Christmas?

Christmas is a season of contrasts. Most of us will know a mixture of joy and sorrow over the coming days, of laughter and lament, of blessing and of heartbreak. For whilst we know there are very good reasons to rejoice at God's Incarnation amongst us, we may also be struggling with pain or depression, grief or isolation, economic challenge or debt.

As we hear the word's of Mary's song of praise as her world is turned upside down on the first Christmas, perhaps you notice the wonder in Mary's voice. Let's read between the lines a bit too:

- Mary is astounded that God has chosen her - a lowly servant, not, she might be thinking, a royal princess.
- She can't get over what this powerful and holy God has done for her - an ordinary young woman.
- She rejoices that those who are proud are being scattered - perhaps she has in mind the religious leaders, or the self-righteous individuals who may have shunned her for her pregnancy.
- She somehow understands that this child to whom she will give birth will turn the world upside down, bringing down the powerful and lifting up the lowly
- Humble as she is, and hungry for more of God, she is the one who has been filled with goodness - whilst those already full of their own wealth or self-importance can receive nothing more.

Mary's song of praise is both beautiful and subversive. It is a mandate for revolution, for building a kingdom of justice, peace and dignity for all - especially those who have been over-looked. It couldn't be a better prescription for what Christmas can be.

Can your Christmas be as equally transformative this year?

Let us respond in prayer,

God of Justice, forgive me when my Christmases become more about what I can get than what I can give. Forgive me when my personal Christmas stories eclipse the Christ child from the centre. Forgive me when I indulge my Christmas lunch with little thought for those who are going hungry. Forgive me when my Christmas tree is dressed more extravagantly than my poor neighbours. Come, God of justice, to who all who need you to visit them this year. Come, that a world of poverty, pain and brokenness might catch a glimpse of the Christ light at the manger-side.

Come, that I may see what I mine to do, Lord God, Immanuel.

Thank you, God, for all those Gabriel's who delight and astound us with your good news. We praise you for the richness and complexity of the world in which surprise and joy constantly await us. Too often we close our minds to new or fresh starts. Too often we bring your Kingdom down to our level. Too often we fail to grasp how much you cherish us. We pray for those who live in conditions of such want, exclusion, fear or bigotry that they have little

chance of being surprised or of living in hope. We pray for ourselves when we are crabby or feel sorry for ourselves. We resolve to take nothing for granted, to see nothing as unchangeable; not people, not systems, not your Kingdom. Give us a passion for your Gospel and a vision of your Kingdom in which all are included.

We pray today for all people for whom Christmas will lack the comfort and peace we wish for each other, remembering also those who will be working on our behalf as we celebrate this festival. We pray for those who are unable to share the joy of the Christmas season: For the lonely, the isolated and the lost who live upon our streets, and for all who seek to care for them. For the broken hearted and bereaved. For those in relationships without love, and those missing a partner for the first time.

Hear us for those whose energy for life makes no space for wonder, worship or reflection; for those whose feeling for life's mystery is blocked by pain or despair; for those who are bowed low with the care of others; and those suffering the outcomes of natural disaster or war. We pray for those spending their first Christmas in a new home and all those born into our neighbourhood this year; for new arrivals to this area from other parts of this country and from other lands - for refugees and asylum seekers;

for those in our hospitals and those in prison and police cells. Hear us for all who bear sad tidings at this time of joy, and those facing difficult tasks at this season of feasting.

For those who are working to maintain essential services, for those employed in the police, ambulance and fire services - whose alertness works for the common good. And for those who are far from home - whose longing for home cannot be fulfilled at this season of gathering.

Amen.

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 287: No wind at the window

1 No wind at the window,
no knock on the door;
no light from the lampstand,
no foot on the floor;
no dream born of tiredness,
no ghost raised by fear:
just an angel and a woman
and a voice in her ear.

2 "O Mary, O Mary,
don't hide from my face.
Be glad that you're favoured
and filled with God's grace.
The time for redeeming
the world has begun,
and you are requested
to mother God's Son."

3 This child must be born
that the kingdom might come:
salvation for many,
destruction for some;
both end and beginning,
both message and sign;
both victor and victim,
both yours and divine.

4 No payment was promised,
no promises made;
no wedding was dated,
no blueprint displayed.
Yet Mary, consenting
to what none could guess,
replied with conviction,
"Tell God I say yes."

CCL15044394

<https://youtu.be/A4ORuvTSjwA?si=DOJdQILUDifdrAVP>

Go in peace and discover the Prince of Peace at work in the world.

Go with grace and learn something from the Wonderful Counsellor.

Go in love, and meet with the Creator God, made known in a baby, lying in manger.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day.

Rev. Susan Thorburn, sthorburn@churchofscotland.org.uk

If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you.

Christmas Day - Thought for the day

Read Luke 2: 1-8

Thoughts: Wake up, wake up! It's Christmas morning, Christ's eternal day is dawning! Play this song and give thanks for Christ, born in our hearts again this special, precious morning: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hey6l95DAdM>



Tuesday 26th December

Read: Luke 12: 33-34

Thoughts: On this second day of Christmas, 'Boxing Day', many countries have traditions of giving gifts to those in need - it may be that the name of the day comes from the 'alms box' that would stand in churches for gifts to the poor. And there are people living in poverty in our world, and it is likely there will be some in your local community or at least the nearest town.

Or it could have been given the name 'Boxing day' because the food left after Christmas Day in the big houses was often boxed up the day after and distributed to the parish poor.

Today what support networks are in place for them, and are there things you could do to help? As you pray into issues around poverty and injustice, you might like to look up the work of local charities responding to issues around debt, homelessness, poverty and other issues you are aware of in your local area. Pray for them too, and the work they are doing to respond.

Listen: <https://youtu.be/uy2JNivFjOE?si=BM0E-dczTwuRT9eW>

Wednesday 27th December

Read: 1 Chronicles 29:13

Thoughts: On this third day of the Christmas season let us give thanks for the riches we have received.

Listen: <https://youtu.be/PYRgB26rPIs?si=uGgZ1oqouaVQiEZt>

Thursday 28th December

Prayer: Living God, on the fourth day of Christmas,

I pray for all who feel isolated in the communities and towns around me.

I pray for those in my own family or networks who may be feeling the effects of loneliness during this winter season. God of love, show me how to be an answer to my own prayer - how to pick up the phone, or make a visit, In Jesus, name, Amen.

Listen: https://youtu.be/cZGVQKjn_V8?si=9RwH_muKcwbtX42I

Saturday 30th December

Breathe out the old year.
Breathe in the hope of the new.
Breathe out the past.
Breathe in what is yet to come.
Breathe out all the hurts we hold.
Breathe in the healing waiting for us.
Breathe out...

Pause

And breath in the spirit of renewal.

As a new year beckons, we offer these our gifts.
Not simply of money but of our lives, our work and our presence.
Wherever we are, however, we worship, we dedicate ourselves to doing all we
can
to build your Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.
Amen.

Wave goodbye to the old year
and embrace the new -



full of hope, dreams, and good
health.

Wishing you a happy new year
full of joy!

Worship At Home
31st December 2023



from the Vine weekly worship material for 31st December. Used with permission.

Call to worship

In the beginning was the Word.

Let your presence be known to be me now, dear God,
by the grace of the words, the music,
the silence and the reflection of this time of worship.
As you were made known to us in the presence of Christ,
May I know your presence amongst me this day,
In Jesus' name I pray,
Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Readings: Luke 2:22-40 - [Click for reading](#)

Reflections on the reading

Simeon and Anna are similarly blessed by their encounter with the infant Jesus - 'newness' reaches them, in their old age.

As we stand on the cusp of a new year, today's Gospel story bring to mind a line from Psalm 85:

I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people.
But let them not return to their foolish ways.

Do you start the year with the best intentions, and set yourself the loftiest of goals? Are you going to lose half your body weight by May? Or start a punishing gym routine? Are you going to start keeping a journal, committing to at least five full pages per day? In the vast majority of cases, it's not too long before we "return to our foolish ways," and settle back into old habits.

No doubt, we all have improvements we can make to the way we live, and it's good to use the beginning of the year as an opportunity to do just that; we have a 'clean slate', and a duty to begin a new year on the right footing. However, how many of us set the bar far too high?

In today's reading, Simeon and Anna encounter a radical change in their lives very late - but it doesn't motivate a 'fad diet' in them, rather a deep contentment with who they are and their ministry coming to an end.

I can't help but feel that our shame takes the wheel at this time of year. We use the notion of, 'New Year, New Me' to pick ourselves apart and jab at the aspects we're ashamed of. These things become sticks we can beat ourselves with, driving our self-esteem into the ground as we bemoan our apparent lack of willpower.

As we prepare to welcome 2024, perhaps it's time to pause and take stock. Let's take a moment to hear this verse from the psalmist again:

I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people.
The Lord speaks peace to his faithful people.

Peace. Peace be with you. My peace I leave with you. May the Lord look upon you with favour and grant you peace. Let us learn to be at peace with ourselves. Let us learn to be at peace with one another. Amen.

Hymns to listen to and sing to:

CH4 320 – Joy to the world, the Lord is come! - <https://youtu.be/vZhqpb97y7Q?si=Qvw5t9OX8oKuCu8>

CH4 324 – Angels, from the realms of glory - <https://youtu.be/nbaRHpf5Y7Q?si=4wC6MhVLEAhhNv43>

Blessing

As you go out into this new year, may you be encouraged and inspired by your encounter with the Spirit of God, As you face difficult times and joyful moments in 2024, may God be your guide and your companion and may you know the miracle of Immanuel, God with us. Amen.

Thoughts for the New Year

Monday 1st January 2024

It is New Year's Day! Happy New Year.

Amongst whatever other traditions and plans you have for today, perhaps you could spend a bit of time thinking about what a 'mantra' for this year could be. A mantra is a very short sentence or phrase that you can say over and over again, in this case it would be helpful if it is something that helps you to focus on God, or be attentive to God's work in your life.

Some suggestions include: 'I know that I am loved', 'what is mine to do?', 'I am blessed indeed', 'be still and know', 'a peace that passes understanding' or 'show me'. Whatever you settle on, write it down somewhere where you will see it several times in the day, and encourage yourself to say it, perhaps even out loud.

Tuesday 2nd January 2024

This new year, Lord, My hope is in you. You share our sorrows, worries, weep with and love all. Born in a manger. Taught peace, love, understanding. Crucified on that cross. Kyrie eleison. Amen.

Wednesday 3rd January 2024

Light a candle. Ring a Bell. Out with the old and in with the new.

Jesus, you are the light of the world. Today, pray about the places you experience darkness in your life, that Jesus' light might shine divine light into those spaces and places.

Thursday 4th January 2024

Today, on the eleventh day of Christmas, you might like to pray this prayer: God of all grace, Thank you for all that we have received - thank you that everything we have is gift. Help me to appreciate all that I have and am. Help me to live from a place of grace. Come amongst me, God of all grace. Amen.

Friday 5th January 2024

Today is the Twelfth Day of Christmas - the final day of the Christmas season. How has the season been for you? How have you made time and space to appreciate the story of God-with-us this year?

Take some time now, to check in on yourself, your body, your mind, your soul. How are you doing? No, really? Spend some time in quiet prayer and offer up your reflections to God.

Saturday 6th January 2024

Today is Epiphany.

In Western Christianity, this day is traditionally the one in which we celebrate the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus.

The Magi

Exotic creatures they were - like bright butterflies in a wasteland.

Travel-stained, rich robes they wore and carried instruments for star-gazing and tables for calculations.

Carrying gifts, they came, with jars of incense and boxes of gold and myrrh. Strange presents for a child.

But strangers they were and their behaviour stranger still.

Bringing wealth that may never be spent.

Kneeling to a child in worship, offering incense far too expensive to use in the household of a carpenter.

And myrrh for anointing at death for a child so young?

Why pre-empt the end of a life hardly begun?

Abruptly they left, those foreigners, sensing the unease at their presence and acutely aware they could bring danger.

Back to their distant lands they went, to their charts and ancient wisdoms.

Did the studied stars tell of his future - the child they called a king?

Or did they never know the gifts he left in place of theirs - and that the myrrh they left remained unused?

©Marjorie Dobson

Read: Matthew 2: 1-12

Listen to:

We three Kings - <https://youtu.be/EOBJonwPCds?si=x-UDZyRHytXdCSrp>

Wise Men seeking Jesus

https://youtu.be/3OObBrNPxlw?si=IPjVAIO_vXIzMQGq

We have come
to worship the
baby, born to
be King. Join
us this New
Year.

