

ADVENT REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS



We live in the in-between period of our salvation, between the two comings: the first was when Christ came to Bethlehem; (another will be when he comes again to meet each of us at our own moment of death); his second coming will be when he comes again to take his Bride the Church at the end of time. This is the heart of the tension of Advent, waiting in expectancy since Christ, risen from the dead and now present among us in mystery, will be

revealed to everyone on the Last Day as the glorious Son of our heavenly Father. We wait, with joy and pray in hope trusting in his power to save us. It is our Christian hope that makes us joyful.

[Old and New Testament promises and prophecies.](#)

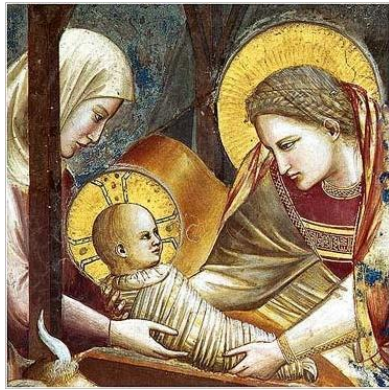
Jesus Christ is not confined to the New Testament. His coming was anticipated by men and women who lived before the New Testament books were written: *"a feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to wonder whether John (the Baptist) might be the Christ himself "* (Luke 3:15).

Throughout the Old Testament, a divine 'watermark' predicts and reveals the nature of Israel's coming Messiah. This first part of the Bible isn't just God's message to the Jewish people or an account of their history. For Jesus himself, these scriptures explained his birth, the work he was to accomplish, the glory awaiting him and all those who come to God through him. Our understanding of Christ is diminished if we do not discover him in the Old Testament scriptures as well as throughout all the gospels and epistles of the New Testament.

The Old Testament foretold that the Messiah would be Jewish, born in Bethlehem in the royal line of David the king, of the tribe of Judah. These are clear and detailed prophecies. Solomon was the immediate successor of David, but he was not born in Bethlehem. He certainly built a temple for God, but his throne was not established forever. Micah's prophecy, about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem, was written at least two hundred years after the death of David. About seven hundred years later Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a few miles from Jerusalem in the land of Judah.

The wonderful message of Jesus Christ gave comfort and healing to ordinary men, women and children, and they were astonished at his teachings. All kinds of people, high and low, rich and poor, sick and healthy, came to him and were cradled in his words of care and salvation. This was exactly what the Old Testament prophets had foretold of him: *"The Spirit of the Lord God is on me: for Yahweh has anointed me, he has sent me to bring the news to the afflicted, to*

soothe the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, release to those in prison, to proclaim a year of favour from Yahweh." (Isaiah 61:1-2).

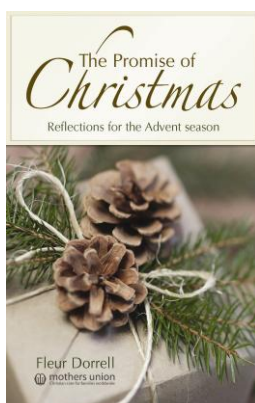


Jesus' miracles were not simply the extension of his teachings; they were living evidence that he was Son of God, bringing to men, women and children a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven. The climax of Jesus' life was his crucifixion, foretold a thousand years before he was even born. His resurrection, the final miracle that crowned everything that had gone before, came to his followers as a joyful surprise, even though that, too, was foretold.

Jesus used the Old Testament prophecies as powerful evidence when he spoke to the apostles after his resurrection: "everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, was destined to be fulfilled." He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures (Luke 24: 44-45). These are significant words. Jesus took his followers back to the three main parts of the Old Testament - the books of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. He showed how in those scriptures there were truths that were fulfilled in his own life-story.

After his resurrection, Jesus also commanded the apostles to go out as his witnesses to preach the gospel throughout the world. As part of their preaching, they used those same Messianic prophecies: the history of Jesus written before it happened. Jesus Christ is the bridge between Eden and the promised, glorious end. He is the means by which God fulfils his mission of mercy and salvation. Those Old Testament prophecies are part of that story of God's great plan of redemption. The covenant, which dominated all human history, finds its culmination in Christ.

In his birth Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes but in his second coming he will be wrapped with a robe of light. His life on earth culminated in his sufferings on the cross and his death; one day he will return in glory with his angels. The Jesus who ascended to heaven is the Christ who is coming again to reign on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. He who wore the crown of thorns will wear the crown of glory. Those promises will be fulfilled as surely as the prophecies about his first coming were fulfilled on that first Christmas.



*Taken from:
The Promise of Christmas: Reflections for the Advent Season,
Fleur Dorrell, BRF Publishers £4.99.*

First Sunday of Advent – Light a candle for Christ in our hearts

Stay awake. Advent is a time of waiting and watching for the second coming of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is our constant help that we may always be on our guard and remain awake so that we are prepared for the last day. The best preparation is a good life lived in the knowledge that God is our father and we are the work of his hands.

Prayer

All powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at the coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.

Father in heaven, our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word.

Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth.

Amen

Second Sunday of Advent – Light a candle for Christ in our homes

Prepare a way for the Lord! We prepare each day of our lives for the coming of the Lord. We have to straighten out those things in our behaviour which prevent us from living holy and saintly lives. The new heavens and the new earth where God reigns are what is promised to us and that is why we should always try to be hopeful.

Prayer

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy, so that we may share his wisdom and become one with him when he comes in glory, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever, Amen

Father in heaven, the day draws near when the glory of your Son will return to our waiting world. May the lure of greed not impede us from the joy which moves the hearts of those who seek him. May the darkness not blind us to the vision of wisdom which fills the minds of those who find him. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Amen

Third Sunday of Advent – Light a candle for Christ in our country

Rejoice, the Lord is coming soon! He sends his own Son to save us. Joy and gladness are ours and the time for sorrow and lamenting is over. Christ is standing at the gates and we know he is the one for whom we have been waiting. Do not lose heart. Take courage! Your God is coming!

Prayer

Lord God, may we, your people, who look forward to the birthday of Christ, experience the joy of salvation and celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving.

Father of our Lord Christ, ever faithful to your promises and ever close to your Church: the earth rejoices in hope of the Saviour's coming and looks forward with longing to his return at the end of time.

Prepare our hearts and remove the sadness that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope which his presence will bestow, for he is Lord for ever and ever.

Amen

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Light a candle for Christ in our world

'God is with us!' God sent his only Son on earth to be born of human stock. His name is Jesus and his mothers' name is Mary. He is the Saviour of all the world, and through him we are called to real holiness of life.

Prayer

Lord, fill our hearts with your love, and as you revealed to us by an angel the coming of your Son as man, so lead us through his suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever, Amen

Father, all-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan.

Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces his glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for his coming.

Amen

The Meaning of Advent

Advent then is dedicated to the last things, to death, judgment, heaven and hell, but above all to Jesus' glorious coming to complete his Easter work. The Church goes so far as to set aside an entire liturgical season to the end of the world and the final coming of the Lord, so important a part of the faith does she consider these truths.

It is both terrible and comforting to dwell in the inconceivable nearness of God, and so to be loved by God that the first and last gift is infinity and inconceivability itself. But we have no choice. God is with us. (*Karl Rahner*)

Now we more readily see the truth: Advent is really a continuation of the church's autumn season, her preparation for the Saviour's return. In this light Christmas and Epiphany are one great feast oriented to the Parousia. (*Pius Parsch*)

[Waiting and Expectation](#)

We live always during Advent. We are always waiting for the Messiah to come. The Messiah has come, but is not yet fully manifest. The Messiah is not fully manifest in each of our souls, not fully manifest in humankind as a whole: that is to say, that just as Christ was born according to the flesh in Bethlehem of Judah, so must he be born according to the spirit in each of our souls. (*Jean Danielou*)

Expectation – anxious, collective and operative expectation of an end of the world – that is perhaps the supreme Christian function and the most distinctive characteristic of our religion. Historically speaking, that expectation has never ceased to guide the progress of our faith like a torch... We persist in saying that we should keep vigil in expectation for the Master. But in reality we should have to admit, if we were sincere, that we no longer expect anything. The flame must be revived at all costs. At all costs we must renew in ourselves the desire and the hope for the great coming. (*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*)

[Hope in Advent](#)

You must be men and women of ceaseless hope, because only tomorrow can today's human and Christian promise be realised; and every tomorrow will have its own tomorrow, world without end. Every human act, every Christian act, is an act of hope. But that means you must be men and women of the present, you must live this moment – really live it, not just endure it – because this very moment, for all its imperfection and frustration, because of its imperfection and frustration, is pregnant with all sorts of possibilities, is pregnant with the future, is pregnant with love, is pregnant with Christ. (*Walter J. Burghardt*)

At Advent we should try the key to our heart's door. It may have gathered rust. If so, this is the time to oil it, in order that the heart's door may open more easily when the Lord Jesus wants to enter at Christmas time!
Lord, oil the hinges of our hearts' doors that they may swing gently and easily to welcome your coming. (*Prayer of a New Guinea Christian*)

[Further Prayers for Advent](#)

[Come Emmanuel](#)

Come Emmanuel:
Disperse our darkness with your light;
Disperse our insensitivity with your compassion;
Diffuse our selfishness with your justice.

Come Emmanuel:
God with us in the mystery of a humble birth.

God with us in the horror of the cross.
God with us in the explosiveness of the resurrection.

Come Emmanuel:
Come, forgive our insensitivity;
Come, heal our divisions;
Come, plant seeds of love.

Come Emmanuel:
Come to our world;
Come to our Church; keep on coming into our lives,
To change and transform and renew.

Keep on coming. Emmanuel,
Today and always. *Christine Jones*

Expectant God

The heavens can no longer hold your abundant love,
so you pour out the gift of your embodied self
relinquishing the beauty of your majesty,
to adorn the pale colours of our humanity.
Choosing to enter into this world in a place of scarcity and need.

Reveal to us this hidden world
of poverty,
of refugees,
of suffering.
As you choose this as the place of your birth
let us choose this to be the place of our rebirth.

Rebuild us,
transform us,
make us anew.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen *Kieran O'Brien*

Make us aware

Merciful God forgive
that we fall asleep
when you call us to watch and pray.
We fail to see the signs of your coming.

Christ our Saviour forgive
that we are not watchful
we do not choose hope
or plant the seeds of hopefulness.
We fail to see the signs of your coming.

Forgiving Spirit forgive
that in the rush of the Christmas season
we forget to stop and listen for the sound of angel voices
we forget to stop and look for a star
to guide us to Christ.
We fail to see the signs of your coming.

God over all
Christ within us
Spirit around us
hear our prayer
and send your messenger
of peace to us and to your sleeping world. *Kate McIlhagga*

[Advent Blessing](#)

Hold your light out to the world
and let the people of all nations
feel the warmth of God's love
as they encounter the Word made flesh
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Follow, where the Spirit of hope leads us.
Listen, as the Child of peace cries for us.
Rejoice, as the love of God embraces us
and let us go
with hope, peace and love in our hearts
and the blessing
of Creator, Child and Spirit for ever within us.
Richard Becher