

## Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December 3<sup>rd</sup> in Advent

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

In God is all meaning and all life,  
In God is hope.  
God's love is unconditional,  
accepting and empowering,  
in God there is no fear for God is love,  
with our whole being let us praise God  
and seek his wisdom for our lives.

### Advent ring - Love

You are with us, Emmanuel,  
our hearts beat within your presence,  
until, in the fullness of our humanity, our hearts beat as one.

Here in this place we wait,  
an advent people,  
visual signs all around,  
eternity effervescing in each moment, each heartbeat, and each star.

Come we cry, yet you are here.  
Open our eyes we cry, yet we fail to see.  
Messengers come and messengers go and still we wait,  
engaged with the world we miss the creator.

Stop and think - How have you experienced love this week?

Light the candle and say,

'We light this candle for the love we because of the message of Jesus,  
and as a prayer for those people who do not feel loved.'

Eternal God may your love fill the world.

Reading Luke 1: 26-33, 38-39, 46 – 55 ([JB Phillips](#))

Song [Thorns in the straw Graham Kendrick](#)

Readings Isaiah 35:1-10  
James 5:7-10

### Reflection

Isaiah 35 gives us a vision of a special place – a land protected by God, a place away from harm and want. It is a place we all long for but we also know that God does not protect in that way. Much of Isaiah is prophecy in style, although we know it was written long after the time it is prophesying about and so really it is an explanation for what has happened. There is also a lot of lament in Isaiah which often preceded the prophecy. Lament is natural and there is much lamenting in the world today.

Poem – Lament, taken from A Quickening by Rosemary Hector ([read here](#))

The Quickening takes a sideways look at the events of the Christmas Story reminding us that it is story, but with a truth woven deep within. Although God does not protect in the way this passage from Isaiah implies, God does sustain and living in God gives strength and courage. Jesus demonstrated this strength and courage and call upon us to use the same strength and courage to make a difference in the world. We are to play our part in bringing closer the kingdom, not a protected place for the privileged but a place of peace and safety for all people.

In Luke 1 we have a rollercoaster of events with miracles at their heart. Stories of angels, and unexpected pregnancy, od disbelief and suspicion but through it all we sense courage and strength. In the famous

passage we call the Magnificat we see an outpouring of praise and yet we are also left with questions. How did Mary know what God had done? She could only speak of things she personally knew of, or had heard of through her faith. There were plenty of examples in the story of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament which were almost the opposite of what Mary is singing but she had this quiet confidence in God.

Mary has just experienced something amazing, some might call it an out of body experience, and because of this her heart is full of love, hope and celebration and so she remembers all the good things God has done. Whilst we might wrestle with the 'God has done' bit we can certainly empathise with Mary's experience of love and hope and celebration. Indeed these things are the bedrock of worship but so too is lament. Mary could have responded quite differently and in Matthews gospel we are invited to witness Joseph's lament over Mary's news. How we respond is part of our faith and relies upon that strength and courage we find when we live within God.

Mary demonstrated strength and courage and despite the almost inevitable disgrace of finding herself pregnant before marriage the story reveals a turning of disgrace into grace reminding us of the power of love and the challenge of God's love, accepting us as we are and encouraging us to see ourselves not as fallen but as works in progress.

In our passage from James we are reminded of the Advent theme of patience. The Kingdom is only partly here and whilst we might be tempted to lament, James urges his listeners and us to be careful in how they respond. Do not take out your frustrations with the way things are, and your impatience for a better way by complaining about others. Judging others or ourselves is to lose ourselves along the way. Joseph could have said to Mary why can't you be like other girls – but he didn't.

There is a lot of unrest in the country at the moment and we are all aware of the challenges around the crisis in the cost of living but complaining will not solve it and strikes will only make it harder for everyone. We need patience but more importantly we need love born of strength and courage. Covid reminded us that we are all together in times of challenge, all vulnerable and we also need to be together in this current crisis which is leaving people just as vulnerable. So instead of lamenting we should draw on the inner strength that comes from God and be beacons of hope and love through our actions of care and support. We can make a difference when we work together, we can bring that place of sanctuary and love closer with every choice we make to share and open our hearts to possibilities. Strength and courage will lift our hearts and our song will be as magnificent as Mary's in a totally different way.