

## Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December 2023 (Advent 4)

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You may like to use this reflective time around midnight to watch for Christmas day (start about 11.50pm) or at any time on Christmas Eve as a still point in your day.

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.

### Advent 4

Advent is a time of preparing for a new baby, a time to create space for reflection and wonder.

As Advent reaches its fulfilment, we listen to the frenzied activity that is all around us, we listen to the travail and the trauma, we listen to joys and celebration. We listen in the midst of noise and silence. We listen in loneliness and togetherness. We listen to the everyday, the ordinary, and there within it all, we listen to the voice of God.

Advent God, **may we listen and hear your voice.**

May we be aware of your voice in the greetings from friends old and new, near and far and in the familiar words of stories and carols.

Advent God, **may we listen and hear your voice.**

On this Christmas Eve, let us open ourselves afresh to listen again to the familiar and allow ourselves to hear new messages in old words.

Advent God, **may we listen and hear your voice.**

As we light this 4<sup>th</sup> candle, preparing to celebrate Christmas, that most extraordinary of stories filled with love, let us open our ears to listen, our eyes to see, our hearts to love and our very beings to be enfolded in your Spirit. Let us listen and be open to our inner selves, to the world around us, to the sights, the sounds, the senses and the needs that surround us. Let us listen to your still small voice and be open to your indwelling Spirit. Let us be messengers of the good news that we have heard and let us be open, too, to listen to your good news that others share with us. **Amen.**

Reading Micah 5:2-4 (The Message)

But you, Bethlehem, David's country,  
the runt of the litter—

From you will come the leader  
who will shepherd-rule Israel.

He'll be no upstart, no pretender.

His family tree is ancient and distinguished.

Meanwhile, Israel will be in foster homes  
until the birth pangs are over and the child is born,

And the scattered brothers come back  
home to the family of Israel.

He will stand tall in his shepherd-rule by GOD's strength,  
centred in the majesty of GOD-Revealed.

And the people will have a good and safe home,  
for the whole world will hold him in respect—

Peacemaker of the world!

Tonight we wait,  
held in a moment beyond time and space,  
a moment of wonder  
as worlds collide and all creation holds its breath

in the timing that is God.

As we wait we reflect on a story of life and love,  
accidents and circumstances,  
of journey and encounter in strange places.  
Tonight we hold Bethlehem in our hearts,  
a place of no significance given the utmost significance  
in a story beyond the bounds of time and space.

Bethlehem then and now,  
an ordinary place with ordinary people and ordinary struggles  
incarnated in the holy.  
God of all time and space we wait in you,  
daring to hope that from this moment in this time  
peace will come to the world  
and once again Bethlehem will shine  
beneath a star signalling your presence in everything  
and glowing with love.

In oneness with Christians around the world we share together the words that Jesus taught  
the disciples, **Our Father...**

**Reading** Luke 2:1-20

[Listen](#) to When a child is born

If using as a watchnight at midnight light a candle

Poem

A mother rocks the baby she has nurtured  
through nine months of anticipation,  
a mixture of joy and worry.  
She looks into his eyes and sees all of creation in the depths of love.

A father stands and watches,  
unsure of his place in this new experience  
and yet aware of a longing,  
his heart already intertwined with this small and wonderful life.  
His hand rests on her shoulder  
and she looks into his eyes and sees all creation in the depth of love.

We watch, outsiders and yet participators  
for we are held in the depths of creation  
and there is love in our eyes for this child and all children,  
for this couple and all couples,  
for all who nurture love into the world.

Immanuel, God is with us.

Prayer

Loving God, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, a boy born in humble surroundings who grew  
in the oneness that is the knowledge of you to become a light to all who met him. This child  
knew a different way of being, a way of love and he shared all he knew with those around  
him, calling them to a different way of being. We hear the call echoing down through  
centuries of faith, and we celebrate our own birth into this new way of living.

We pray for all children who are born tonight whether in hospitals, homes or the street, may  
they know love in their lives and be nurtured to reach the full potential of their humanity.

We pray for those who are homeless, living on the streets, and dependant on others for clean clothes and food. May they sense your presence with them through the kindness of strangers.

We pray for refugees fleeing injustice and war, walking long miles and risking danger to reach a new safety. May they sense your presence with them through the generosity of the stranger and the welcome of a new land.

We pray for people who are lonely and isolated, people missing the presence of loved ones this Christmas, and people who are trapped in the terrors of their own minds. May they be helped to know they are not alone.

We pray for those who are working tonight and tomorrow to provide care and support for those in need. May they be appreciated and know love through the kind words of those they serve.

We pray for ourselves. May this Christmas be a time of joy and hope in the midst of fear and chaos, and may we find new and creative ways of sharing the faith we hold within our hearts with others, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amen.