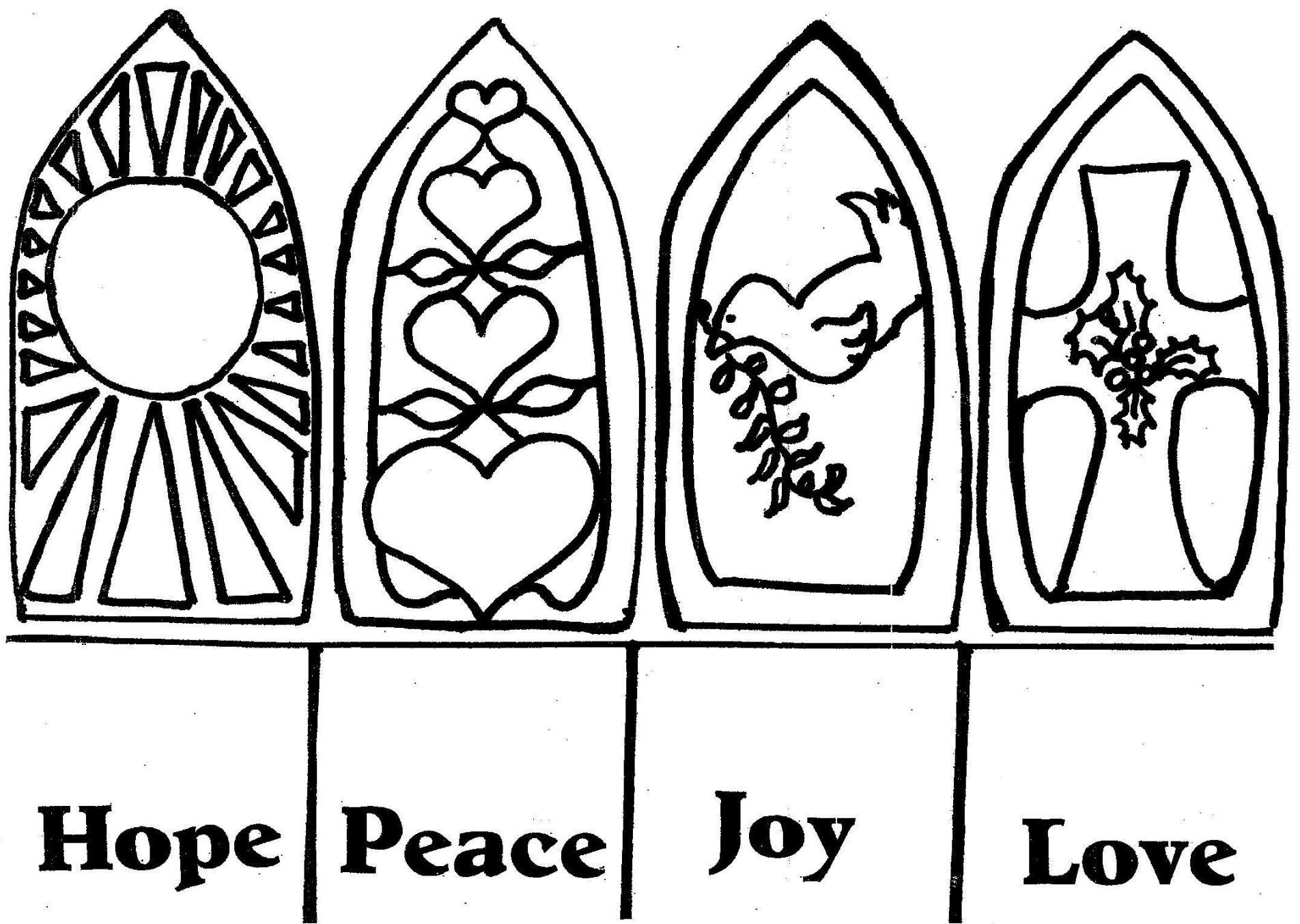


# Reflections For Advent



Chester le Street & East Durham  
Methodist Circuits



# Advent 2025

Welcome to our booklet of daily reflections and devotions for Advent.

Advent is a time of preparation, a time for us to prepare for Christ's arrival. My prayer is that this booklet will help us in our preparations, encouraging us to spend time each day with God.

These daily reflections begin on Advent Sunday, 30 November, and continue right up until Christmas Day.

These reflections have been written by a variety of people from across our Circuits. The basic model is that each reflection contains a Bible verse or verses, a short reflection and a prayer. Sometimes the Bible verse is included in the reflection, sometimes you will need a Bible to hand to look the reading up. Sometimes there isn't a specific verse, but a theme.

Thank you to each person who has contributed to this booklet and thus enabled it to happen.

On the four Sundays of Advent you are invited to share in the Advent Liturgy, part of the Advent and Christmas resources produced by the Methodist Church this year, on the theme of 'Gifted'. You might like to light your own advent candles as you use these prayers. Each Saturday you are invited to read and reflect on a reading from the lectionary for the following Sunday.

There is a link to the electronic version on the Circuit webpages: [www.clsmethodist.org.uk](http://www.clsmethodist.org.uk) & [www.eastdurhammethodists.co.uk](http://www.eastdurhammethodists.co.uk)

I hope that you find this booklet to be a blessing in this season of Advent.

Anne Kilvington

# 30 November 2025

## Advent Sunday

### ADVENT CANDLE LITURGY

#### You are a Gift

Gift-giving God,

**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Lord God of this Advent season, of every season, every day, minute and second, give us, we pray, the gift of peace in this season of Advent.

Bring peace to the world, but also bring peace within each of us.

Gift-giving God,

**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Lord God, we give ourselves afresh to you as we step into Advent.

Let us iron the crumples and the creases from our lives  
so that we may be the best gift that we can be.

Gift-giving God,

**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

May we start today and not wait to become, and to be, the  
person/people you want us to be,  
so that we can give the best that we can of you and ourselves to  
those around us.

Gift-giving God,

**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

# 1 December 2025

John 1: 1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Christmas is coming!

I can still remember the thrill of excitement I felt as a child, when, as Christmas approached, I would listen to my Mum's tape of Christmas songs and hear Bing Crosby sing the line 'Soon it will be Christmas Day'.

However, I'm maybe jumping ahead a bit, because we are just at the start of Advent, with a few weeks to go yet.

Advent is a time of waiting. It is a time of preparation for Christmas and the mystery of the Incarnation – Jesus sharing our human life and living among us. Traditionally it is a time for prayer, fasting, and reflecting on our relationship with God, with the aim of leading us 'into a deeper and more grounded sense of joy and mystery' (Janet Morley).

How might we best spend this waiting time, this preparation time? How do we best prepare ourselves, to celebrate Jesus' coming into the world?

The focus of our waiting and our preparations is of course Jesus, and the mind-blowing fact that our God came to us, as a vulnerable, tiny baby, born in a stable.

Jesus came to 'tell the good news to the poor ... to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, and to say, 'This is the year the Lord has chosen.' (Luke 4: 18 – 19).

Loving God, this Advent, how might we join in with you? Amen

Anne Kilvington, Circuit Minister

## 2 December 2025

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

After a period of prolonged rain we headed off on a family camping holiday. On arriving at the campsite and finding tents filling almost every inch of the field, we headed down a track ending up in a second field with a few tents pitched around the periphery. As we drove onto this grass the car began to sink and came to a halt, wheels spinning in mud. Thankfully, other campers came to our rescue and pushed us back on to the track so we headed back to the first field and pitched our tent.

A literal translation of John 1:14 is "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." A tabernacle was a temporary dwelling made of cloth and supported by wooden poles, essentially a tent. A tabernacle was carried by the Israelites across the wilderness to their promised land, a temple where God dwelt with the Israelites on their journey.

John is speaking of the event we refer to as the incarnation, God becoming human as Jesus. God could have chosen to remain distant and remote from humanity but he chose to pitch his tent among us. God loves us so much that he became one of us and lived among us, experiencing life as we experience it, from birth through to death.

At the end of our holiday we packed up our tent and headed home. God's dwelling with us as Jesus was temporary, and Jesus told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them. This earthly place is temporary and one day we too will pack up our tent and return home to the place Jesus has prepared for us, a return home made possible through his death and resurrection.

Father we thank you that you came among us, died and rose for us, and have gone to prepare a place. Help me to be aware of your presence in my life and to look forward with hope to the place you have prepared for me.

Alan Irvin, Renew Church

## 3 December 2025

Luke 22: 24 – 27

Advent – a time of preparation, preparation for the time when Jesus will come again. But, if we're not careful, it can just become a time of hustle and bustle. A time where people are rushing around spending, spending, spending on things they can't afford, on things that friends and relatives neither want nor need, to celebrate a festival where Jesus may not even be acknowledged.

So, as friends of Jesus, let's slow down and think, if we can, of the time when Jesus will come again. When he was on earth, he told people – particularly his special friends - over and over, what sort of a kingdom was his. His is a kingdom of love. As we're told here in Luke 22: 27, it's a kingdom where others are placed before self; where the least will be first. It's a kingdom where OTHERS are helped, cared for and loved before ME!

In Matthew 23:23 Jesus rebuked the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, reminding them of the powerful words of Micah 6:8 'To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

This is the sort of kingdom Jesus wants to find when he returns; a kingdom where justice, help, compassion, kindness, courtesy, respect and consideration for others are the order of the day – a kingdom of love for others and for God.

Making time to discover just what Jesus wants and expects of us, will surely help us to prepare ourselves, our hearts and minds, to celebrate the time when he came down to earth the first time. It will surely help us to be ready when he comes again.

Let's pray: 'O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for thee.' Amen.

Judy Tasker, Houghton-le-Spring Methodist Church

## 4 December 2025

Galatians 4: 4 - 5 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Aelfric of Eynsham was born in 955. He was a Benedictine monk, a teacher at heart, whose pastoral writings give us a glimpse into the Anglo-Saxon world.

Advent falls in the season of winter, a season of cold and shortened daylight hours. Not too much of a problem in our world of artificial light, central heating and full larders. But to people in the early decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Advent season must have felt hostile and threatening. It was a season when time stood still, a season of waiting while nature slept. A season to be endured.

Aelfric writes to his congregation, "This season until Midwinter (Christmas) is called *Adventus Domini*, that is, 'the coming of the Lord' when we ... confess our redemption through (Christ's) first coming, and we remind ourselves that we should be ready for his second coming."

During Advent, Aelfric and his contemporaries were counting down to the winter solstice. As the days grew shorter and the nights colder, the end of the world must have seemed imminently plausible, so a twin focus in Advent worship on the moment when the Eternal Son entered time at the incarnation and on the moment when he will return in glory on the last day would have been of great hope in this season of cold and darkness.

It can be so for us too.

Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness, open my eyes, help me see. Amen

Richard Bainbridge, Supernumerary Minister

## 5 December 2025

Luke 1 26-31, 38 Mary was greatly troubled at his words.

Earlier each year, as shops begin displaying Christmas stock, I am filled with dread and greatly troubled, as I'm sure many of you are, at the thought of shopping, writing cards and the never ending preparations for one day in the year - everything has to be perfect and it rarely is!

But the feeling of dread cannot compare to how Mary must have felt, a simple young girl with her whole life planned, soon to be married, is told that she is pregnant, yet still a virgin, how confusing, what a disgrace, how will she explain to her family, to Joseph and to his family, what will people think of her?

But when the angel Gabriel assured her that she was highly favoured and that the Lord was with her, she simply accepted his words and fulfilled her role as the mother of our Lord Jesus.

Maybe we all need to listen to God more and accept his role for us. None of us will ever be blessed in the way that Mary was, but we can all play our part in God's plan, if only we can answer, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be as you have said."

Prayer: We pray for those who dread Christmas, many in our world who are separated from their families, refugees and those living in poverty.

Come Lord Jesus come, Lord we need you now, in this world of ours. Fill us with your peace, touch us with your love, may we see your light, in this world of ours.

Pam Murphy, Consett Methodist Church, North West Durham Circuit

# Saturday 6 December 2025

Isaiah 11: 1 – 10

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord – and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting-place will be glorious.

# 7 December 2025

## Second Sunday in Advent

### ADVENT CANDLE LITURGY

#### The Orange in the Stocking

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Holy God, the greatest giver of all times,  
you are not the 'stocking filler' or little extra,  
you are the greatest and best gift that can be given.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**  
Holy God, you call us to be the gift of God to neighbours and  
strangers.

You call us to be life giving to all those we encounter.  
You call us to be a blessing to the Church and the world.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**  
May we sort the wheat from the chaff in our lives.  
May we not be just little stocking filler extras but full to overflowing  
with your love.

May we truly seek to be the holy gift you call us to be.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

## 8 December 2025

Isaiah 40: 31 Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength.

The term 'advent' means arrival or coming. Each week of Advent corresponds to the particular theme of hope, peace, joy and love.

The significance of Advent lies in its invitation. In the midst of preparing for Christmas and, sometimes, the chaos of the holidays, it is good to pause and reflect to prepare for the arrival of Jesus. This helps us to reflect on the significance of Christ's birth, his ministry and his promise to return.

It is never easy to wait, especially when the things we are waiting for really matter. As children, we eagerly await Christmas Day, when we might receive the gift we are waiting for.

Advent is a time when, strangely, we put ourselves in a state of expectancy on purpose. We know that there are some things wrong in the world – wars, pandemics, accidents out of our control, and we know the world is not as it should be. On the other hand, we see goodness where love wins through – acts of kindness, helping others without expecting anything in return, taking responsibility for our mistakes.

So let us deliberately lean into the hope of all that Christmas means, with faith in the coming of the one who is the perfect example to us all. The time for Advent is a time for hope.

Lord Jesus, master of both light and darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. Amen

Tom Baker, West Pelton Methodist Church

## 9 December 2025

### The Hope That Holds Us

Advent is one of those quiet but powerful seasons that sneaks up on us in the middle of our chaos. It's the time we're invited to pause and remember what hope really looks like — not the shallow kind that wishes things were different, but the deep, soul-level hope that anchors us even when life feels uncertain.

Hope is at the heart of Advent. It's what keeps us looking toward the light when the nights feel long. The people of Israel waited for centuries for the Messiah, holding on to promises they couldn't yet see. And then, in the most unexpected way, Hope showed up — not in a palace, but in a manger. That's the kind of God we have. One who steps right into our mess, not waiting for us to get it together first.

In our world today, it's easy to lose sight of that hope. News headlines, personal struggles, endless to-do lists—they all crowd out the quiet voice that whispers, *"I am with you"*. But Advent calls us back to that truth. It reminds us that hope isn't about ignoring what's hard, it's about believing that God is still working through it.

So this season, let's hold onto that hope. Let's make space for it. Light a candle, take a breath, whisper a prayer. The same God who came near in Bethlehem is still coming near to you now. And that's the kind of hope that doesn't disappoint.

God of Hope, in the quiet of Advent, help us pause and remember your presence. Anchor our hearts with the deep hope that sustains us, even in uncertainty. May we trust that you are with us, working through every struggle. Amen.

Linda Watkin, Circuit Minister

**10 December 2025**

Problem to Power

Christ comes  
as image of the truly loving God;  
as joyful hope of the oppressed;  
as problem to power.

Christ comes  
and Herod's iron rod is threatened;  
paranoia piqued by rumours of the Child;  
his madness unconstrained.

Christ comes  
and Pharisees will watch such strange Love,  
unhindered and free of narrow control.  
Dumbstruck, they'll conspire.

Christ comes  
and priests and pious leaders will shudder  
as convenient compromises could crumble  
if this Rabbi has his way.

Christ comes  
and the might of Empire will have no answer to this King:  
Hands will be washed in abdication,  
with crucifixion, just in case.

Christ comes  
and even Joseph chooses first the way of pride:  
a problem to be quietly dismissed;  
a love too easily set aside.

Christ comes.  
But Mary sees, as one powerless herself,  
that here is Love for all, to be embraced,  
pondered, nurtured, and  
magnificently rejoiced.

Andrew T Murphy © 2024, Minister, East Mercia Circuit

## 11 December 2025

Isaiah 9: 2, 6 & 7 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light, On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father Prince of Peace.

### The Clear White Light

Last year my wife and I went to see the group Lindisfarne who we saw in the 1970s/80s and the audience were mostly of a certain age, but the concert did not disappoint.

One of their most famous songs which they always sing to end their concerts is called 'Clear white light' and everyone was on their feet singing at the top of their voices. 'Do you believe the clear white light is going to guide us on our way?' and then the last verse '**Yes** I believe the clear white light is going to guide us on our way.'

In that moment I thought I wonder how many people were having the same thoughts as me. 'What a perfect Advent theme.'

Jesus the light of the world, the light that no darkness can ever overcome. So my moment became a prayer for all those people present to recognize that one true light Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Surely this is what we all desire for Advent because it is the truth the Church proclaims during this season as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus the one true light for the world.

It is our Advent hope not only for our Churches but for the world we live in to keep our light shining into the future. Jesus will always have the final victory. He is the only light we should follow. So let us keep that light shining in our own lives and the life of our Churches.

Lord God may your light shine in the darkest places of our world. Help us to keep the light of faith burning brightly within us so that we in turn bring light and hope to others and bring glory to your name. Amen

Bill Indian, Chester le Street Methodist Church

## 12 December 2025

Mark 1: 1 – 3 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

Advent is often described as a period of preparing, and indeed there always seems to be a lot to do at this time of year. The bigger part of our preparedness has nothing to do with our list of tasks, or how much we plan and arrange, it's about how we are in our hearts and minds. It can be hard to move from 'doing mode' into simply being and resting in the presence of the creating Spirit of God and I wonder, what would Christmas be like if we stripped away all the to-do lists and simply waited on the coming of the Prince of Peace? How might we regain some of that simplicity in midst of all that accompanies a 21st century Christmas?

At that first Christmas there was no pressure for the perfect day. Jesus was born in circumstances that surely wouldn't have been part of any birth plan, yet amidst the busyness of a city crammed full with visitors, and in the space where animals fed, the perfection of God found human form and lived among us.

As we prepare to hear the good news of Jesus' birth once again, let's open our hearts and minds to new possibility; let's prepare ourselves to be vulnerable in admitting our need of Jesus and let's wait, ready to receive from Christ in the familiarity yet also the uncertainty of the Christmas story, knowing that God can and will work through all of our experiences whether planned or not.

Loving God, help us to prepare our hearts and minds ahead of any of the practicalities of our celebrations. May we revel in simplicity and find hope in the unexpected, knowing that you meet us in it all. Amen

Kathy Bevan, Great Lumley Methodist Church

# Saturday 13 December 2025

Isaiah 35: 1 – 10

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.'

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

# **14 December 2025**

## **Third Sunday in Advent**

### **ADVENT CANDLE LITURGY**

#### **Give Hope**

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Heavenly God, you speak to us through messengers, words  
and deeds,  
the rhythm, the beat of your gift never ceases, never stops or falters  
or fails.

Your gift is for life, not limited by time or space.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Heavenly God, you challenge us to be the heartbeat of love to our  
community.

You challenge and call us to be a constant power for good.

You inspire us to be the bringers of good news.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Heavenly God, may we be up to the challenges you set before us.

May we give you time in our busy days, in our list making and our  
shopping, so that we are buzzing with your Spirit as your gift to all  
we meet.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

## 15 December 2025

Romans 15: 13 May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I came across an 'Advent Ribbon Reflection' by Chloe Axford recently that really spoke to me.

It helped me to reflect on what Advent means to me, something that I've never had time to do before.

She outlined what the word Advent means.

Advent from the Latin *adventus* meaning 'arrival' or 'coming', is a chance for us to slow down and take time to prepare for Jesus' birth at Christmas.

She talked about using purple ribbon to reflect on Advent because it symbolises penitence and preparation.

This year I have had a lot of challenges health wise. I know that God has been with me through it all. My coping mechanism is to focus on the present moment and not to think too far ahead because I haven't known what lay ahead. The phrases 'a chance to slow down' and 'taking time' really spoke to me.

By doing these things it has been an opportunity for me to reflect on what Jesus coming into the world really means for me in contrast with the headlong rush towards Christmas Day, parties, presents, and turkey we experience in the world outside the church.

I hope that these words bring hope, joy, and peace to you this Advent and help you to prepare for his coming.

Lord, during Advent, help us to slow down to your rhythm, to prepare for your coming quietly and expectantly. Amen

Claire Mordue, Chester le Street Methodist Church

## 16 December 2025

### Legend of the Poinsettia

There is an old Mexican legend about how Poinsettias and Christmas come together. It goes like this:

There was once a poor Mexican girl called Pepita who had no present to give the baby Jesus at the Christmas Eve Services. As Pepita walked to the chapel, sadly, her cousin Pedro tried to cheer her up.

'Pepita,' he said 'I'm sure that even the smallest gift, given by someone who loves him will make Jesus happy.'

Pepita didn't know what she could give, so she picked a small handful of weeds from the roadside and made them into a small bouquet. She felt embarrassed because she could only give this small present to Jesus. As she walked through the chapel to the altar, she remembered what Pedro had said. She began to feel better, knelt down and put the bouquet at the bottom of the nativity scene. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into bright red flowers, and everyone who saw them were sure they had seen a miracle. From that day on, the bright red flowers were known as the 'Flores de Noche Buena', or 'Flowers of the Holy Night'.

The shape of the poinsettia flower and leaves are sometimes thought of as a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem which led the wise men to Jesus. The red coloured leaves symbolize the blood of Christ. The white leaves represent his purity.

Submitted by Jean Shotton, Houghton-le-Spring Methodist Church

## **17 December 2025**

Mark 6: 35-37 Jesus' disciples came to him and said, "Send the people away so that they can go ... and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

Many of us will recognise these words as the precursor to Jesus feeding 5,000 people. In November, we used this miracle at our Jigsaw Church for families to help us explore being generous, offering hospitality and being open to others. Christmas is a time when hospitality is big on the agenda. What we're cooking, how we cook it and making sure it's all ready at the same time dominates many thoughts. Some of us will gather in large groups, some in small groups and some will spend much time alone. I doubt any of us will be catering for 5,000 though!

Eating together can be a real opportunity to connect with others. I wonder how our meals, our hosting and our generosity can lead to deeper knowledge and care for our guests? What does asking questions, listening well and sharing our experiences show about our love for others and our love of God? When might we find opportunities in the busy-ness to share genuine connection with those we know and love most, those we know well yet see rarely and those we see regularly but often connect with less deeply. Prior to serving lunch for 5,000, Jesus was seeking to connect and rest with twelve of his closest friends. He interrupted this aim to teach, heal and cater for a large audience. However, afterwards Jesus was able to find some time alone to pray. I wonder how we look after ourselves and spend time with God in this season?

A final thought. It was a young boy who provided the five loaves and two fish which Jesus transformed into sustenance for so many. What are our expectations of children and young people at Christmas? How do we support them to serve others? How can we be open to knowing them?

Dear Lord, Thank you for the generous and sacrificial love you show through Jesus. Help us to find Godly ways to serve others this Christmas. Help us to be open to deeper connection with you and those we spend time with. Amen

Neil Garlick, Great Lumley Methodist Church

**18 December 2025**

The angel came to Mary  
She had a job to do  
To bring to life a baby  
hope for me and you

Long ago the prophets knew  
That this story would come true

John the baptist in the river  
Gave the people the best news ever  
The Son of God will become a man  
Peace on Earth to be His plan

Now the batten of news is ours  
Of joy hope love  
And peaceful powers

So amongst the glitter and frenzy and mirth  
Let's share hope joy love  
And peace on Earth

\* \* \* \* \*

The manger is empty  
The stable is bare  
We need to see it  
Let us prepare  
A candle of faith placed in a ring  
With ivy green new life to bring  
Amongst the cruel holly thorns  
Blood red berries here are borne  
With hope in a world of blood and strife  
Of the gift of eternal life  
The fruits and ribbons bring gifts of joy  
To man woman girl and boy  
For in the manger a baby's place  
Comes the gift of love to the human race

Maureen Simpson, St Paul's Methodist Church

## 19 December 2025

Luke 1: 28-30 The angel went to her and said "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her "Do not be afraid Mary; you have found favour with God."

Do not be afraid. That's easy for the angel to say! Having an angel turn up in your kitchen is not an every day occurrence! I can imagine Mary swirling around and dropping the bowl she was holding with a clatter. Having an angel tell you there is a baby on the way, in rather peculiar circumstances, is not the usual way of finding out you are pregnant.

Mary's head must have been so full of questions. How was she going to tell Joseph? Thankfully God already had that one sorted. But how was she going to tell her mum? The bible doesn't tell us much about Mary's family, apart from her cousin Elizabeth, but I expect there were other female family members around. Mary was possibly more afraid of those women than she was of the angel!

Mary would have been well aware she had brought shame on the family. But, she had God and Joseph to support her. The women may well have thought Mary was lying or going mad when she told them of the angel's visit, but when Joseph told them of his visit and maybe even reminded them of what the scriptures said, hopefully they became excited at the prospect of this new baby.

Prayer: When difficult circumstances surround us, help us to know that you are the same God that supported Mary, who supports us now. Amen.

Kath Jones, Circuit Children, Youth and Families Worker, North West Durham Circuit

# Saturday 20 December 2025

Matthew 1: 18 – 25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us').

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

# 21 December 2025

## Fourth Sunday in Advent

### ADVENT CANDLE LITURGY

#### With Love from God

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Holy God, as Advent draws to a close, your gospel shines all the more brightly with messages of hope and promise, of love and care, of gifts already given and gifts for the present and for the future.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Holy God, remind us afresh of the angel's appearances, of the sparkle and shine that their words and their messages add to our everyday lives.

May we be able to offer their messages and gifts with love, compassion and care.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Holy God, sharing your love is work that is often hard.  
But when we sit back and look at what a difference we've made we rejoice that we are made with love and live to love in your name.

Gift-giving God,  
**may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

**22 December 2025**

Luke 2: 19 Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

I wrote this a few years ago as I was thinking, and wondering, how Mary felt as she cradled her new born Child, and wondered how she would use the gifts that were brought and laid as gifts for the Christ Child.

'Jesus - the name you were given before even I knew you.

I look at you now in your perfection.

Those shining, almost all knowing eyes.

The softness of your skin, your features, not yet defined but full of promise.

Why me? Why was I so honoured in bearing you?

I am not rich or powerful and yet the Lord has singled me out.

I gaze at you in wonder.

I can't stop looking at you, loving you.

Who are these people who come to gaze in awe?

Simple Shepherds, grand opulent Kings.

Bringing gifts to lay at your feet.

What shall we do with them?

These singular gifts.

Although overwhelmed by generosity, I baulk at their significance.

What will you become - my beautiful holy child?

Will the lamb mean sacrifice or just a generous gift from humble folk?

Does gold reflect your majesty or will it be just a means to survive in the hardships to come?

And frankincense; will it find many worshipping at your feet as these strangers do now?

Finally myrrh. Sweet perfume.  
But what suffering does it herald.

All these offerings given in love  
To you my wonderful, wonderful boy"

In this advent season, may you all share in the blessings brought by  
the Christ Child who grew into our precious Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who suffered and died that we might live.

Audrey Soulsby, West Pelton Methodist Church

## 23 December 2025

Luke 2: 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

As I re-visit the events of the 'First Christmas' each Advent, I always find myself humbled by the Shepherds story. Baby Jesus, the long-awaited for Messiah, has now been safely delivered in Bethlehem, just as the angels had foretold. And you might have expected then, that when the Messiah was finally born after hundreds of years of prophecy, that this would be big news. That it would be the King in power at the time, or the High Priest or the Pharisees that would be the first to be told, so that a public proclamation could be made to the wider population. We know that's not what happened after Jesus' birth. The first people that God chose to hear the message that a Saviour had been born were some humble shepherds, out on hillside, looking after their flocks.

Shepherds had a tough life in those times. They had to be constantly with their sheep, keeping watch and guard over them. And because they were often away for long periods of time, they weren't able to worship frequently at the synagogue and they were generally considered to be pretty close to the bottom of the Jewish social hierarchy. But this is exactly the point that we need to realise.

Jesus the Messiah was born on earth **for all humankind** – not just for the highly religious people, the rich and wealthy or the people who had power and authority at that time. And by sending an angel, and then a heavenly host of angels, to appear to the shepherds, God was making it very clear that Jesus' arrival was just as significant and relevant to them as it was to the High Priest in the Temple in Jerusalem. There was no social hierarchy, no them and us, everyone was equally precious and valued.

Father God, We thank you that Jesus' birth here on earth was a gift for everyone, regardless of our background or status. Amen.

Karen Heptinstall, Chester le Street Methodist Church

## 24 December 2025

Colossians 1:26 This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it is out in the open ... Christ is in you, so therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory.

Advent is a time of looking forward, a time for waiting for the best gift anyone could wish for - a child - to be loved, cared for, and cherished. A child who would be the most important gift ever.

The theme for this Advent is 'Gifted'. A gift made in love, the best gift of all.

I almost share Christ's birthday. Mine is Christmas Eve and Mum often told us how she put herself in Mary's place that day, imagining how she felt being rejected in so many places as she waited for something special to happen.

Gifts come in all shapes and sizes. There are good and bad gifts, but we are the privileged ones, as we have an open invitation to speak the good news to all. Telling them that they are beloved, created with infinite care by our Lord, who has given a gift to the world that keeps on giving, day after day, year after year.

Jane L Frayer wrote in 'The Hidden Gift of Christmas': 'Gifts wrapped for the season and decked out with care remind us that we are all a gift made special by His love.'

He also gifted us his most precious Son to save us from sin. Without Christmas there would be no Easter and without Easter no Christmas. Think about it.

My challenge is for us all to look at our Christmas trees and see if we can work out what the hidden gift is. If you can't work it out:

*A hidden gift at Christmas concealed within the tree*

*The cross of Christ where God's great love poured out for you and me.*

Heavenly Father thank you for giving us all the precious gift of being part of your family. Amen

Ann Riding, Hetton-le-Hole Methodist Church

# **25 December 2025**

## **Christmas Day**

Philippians 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Merry Christmas! After all the rush, all the planning, all the activity, Christmas is here and God's great gift is with us.

Years ago, my Mum and I were chatting about family Christmasses past and what we remembered. I described a particular Christmas when I was about 8 years old. My granddad (a joiner) had made furniture for my dolls, and my parents put an apple and orange in my stocking which they had never done before. (I loved fruit as a child). I told Mum it was my favourite Christmas of them all and she laughed and said 'That was our hardest Christmas, your Dad and I had no money after moving house and the fruit was to fill some space in your stocking!

I have often thought of that conversation and that reminder that the most valued gifts are often not the ones we would expect.

As we read from Luke's gospel this morning we see the Christ Child, the greatest gift the world will ever know, arriving almost unnoticed, received and treasured by just a handful of folk.

This Christmas, whatever else we give and receive, I hope we will remember the gift of God's love, the gift of knowing we are held and watched over by him. I hope we will remember in the midst of our parcels, that the greatest treasure of all is a deepening relationship with our creator, redeemer and friend. Lastly, if this is a testing Christmas, a worrying, lonely or challenging Christmas, remember you have God who loves and forgives you, Christ who lived among us and feels our struggles, and the Spirit of God within us with the power to calm all our struggles.

Merry Christmas, enjoy your gifts.

Jenny Porterpryde, Superintendent Minister

# **25 December 2025**

## **Christmas Day**

### **ADVENT CANDLE LITURGY**

#### **The Best Gift**

#### **The Lord is King! Let earth rejoice!**

A babe was born in Bethlehem, homeless, stateless,  
laid in a manger surrounded by love unconditional.

Jesus the Christ Child born for each one of us.

Emmanuel, God is with us!

#### **The Lord is King! Let earth rejoice!**

A babe, a gift, the best, treasured, adored, worshipped;  
with Mary let us ponder the greatness of the gift,  
treasuring it beyond measure in the depths of our being.

Emmanuel, God is with us!

#### **The Lord is King! Let earth rejoice!**

A God-given babe whose very being changed the world order  
changes us, transforms us, empowers and enlivens us.

Let us now and for always treasure the gift in our hearts.

Emmanuel, God is with us!

#### **The Lord is King! Let earth rejoice!**

