

A gathering prayer

Lord, as we gather here today,
we continue to watch for you.
Be in our watching and our waiting,
our speaking and our listening,
our coming in and our going out.

**Lord, as we gather here today,
we continue to watch for you. Amen**

Advent Hymn: Sing or Read

- 1 Light a candle in a darkened place,
in its flame see hope on every face,
Christ our Saviour will be born,
heralding a brand new dawn,
so let it burn.
- 2 In the darkness, see the coming light,
Word of God speaks through the darkest night,
keep a watch, the time is near,
time for hope and not for fear,
so let it burn.
- 3 Stepping through each page of history,
prophets contemplate this mystery,
celebrate the coming King,
words of joy and hope they bring,
so let it burn.

Clare Stainsby (b.1959)

The verses may be sung progressively through Advent until verse 6 on Christmas Day. Verses 1 & 2 should be used on the First Sunday of Advent.

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ADVENT 2

Our lists are long, even in this strange mess where we live these days. And we want to do it right, we want to be safe, but we want to be able to enjoy the season. We've got work to do to put right what has gone wrong, to heal what is broken, to mend the relationships, and to prepare for the company that will come.

The prophet Isaiah reminded us that there is work to be done. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." When God comes in, then healing is to be found, but we need to make the way; we need to open the door into our lives. (Isaiah 40:1-11)

So, we light these (2) candles as a sign of our faith that the God we worship is not far from us, and that we can clear the way for God to come and dwell with us. We light these candles in faith that company is coming.

Prayer of confession

God of Advent,
we confess that we have been
reluctant to speak out your message of hope,
and to live out your promise of salvation.

Give us the generosity of heart
and the wisdom of spirit
to be your messengers in your world today,
that others may know that you love them
and call them closer to you.
We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

God of all ages and all travellers,
we praise and adore your faithfulness.
Despite our half-heartedness,
you give your whole self to us.
To challenge our complacency,
you give us the urgent message of John the Baptist.
To prepare us for Christmas,
you bless us with the season of Advent.
To show your love for us, you call us home.
We praise and adore you.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

Sing or Read:

- 1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh ;
awake and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings !
- 2 Then cleansed be every life from sin ;
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.
- 3 For you are our salvation, Lord,
our refuge, and our great reward ;
without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.
- 4 To heal the sick stretch out your hand,
and bid the fallen sinner stand ;
shine forth, and let your light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.
- 5 To God the Son all glory be
whose advent sets his people free,
whom, with the Father, we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

John Chandler (1806–1876)

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John 1:1-34

Reflection on the reading

John the Baptist had known Jesus for a long time - since before birth. As they grew up, they probably met regularly and got to know one another. In today's reading, they are now both grown men and

John's ministry of repentance is in full swing. John has caused enough commotion in Jerusalem to attract the attention of the religious folks who ask him about the Messiah.

John is clear from the outset about his own identity. He is not the light; he gives testimony to the light. He is not the Messiah, but he is preparing the way for the Messiah. They should watch and wait. While the visitors from Jerusalem are still hanging around, John looks up and sees his cousin. 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (v29). John makes it clear to his followers that he believes Jesus to be the Son of God.

The revelation that his own cousin, a local Galilean, is the 'Lamb of God' is probably a surprise for John too. He points to Jesus' baptism as the point when he knew Jesus was more than a relative or friend. That was when he saw the Spirit descend like a dove, and he knew that it would be Jesus who would baptise with the Holy Spirit.

Later, however, John has some doubts. Just as Jesus' ministry is drawing crowds, John sends some of his followers to ask an unexpected question: 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?' (Luke 7:19). John - who had first recognised the Messiah in His mother's womb, who had baptised Jesus and saw the Spirit rest on Him like a dove, who had declared, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world' (v29) - is still not sure that Jesus is what he expected a messiah to be. Maybe He isn't all that I thought. Maybe He is just my cousin. Maybe I got it wrong.

Jesus sends an encouraging message back to His cousin: 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk... the dead are raised and the good news is proclaimed to the poor' (Luke 7:22). The fulfilment of the prophetic expectation is met in Jesus' ministry, which John will understand.

Jesus doesn't always do what we expect Him to. We can be prone to questions or even doubt. We can oscillate between passionate conviction and wavering scepticism. At times like this it's important to consider the evidence and remember how Jesus is a clear fulfilment of prophetic expectation in Scripture. However, if John the Baptist had wobbly moments, we might expect to have them too sometimes. Thankfully, Jesus speaks kindly. He points to the evidence beyond expectation. He reveals that in the kingdom of God, the unbelieving religious leaders are out, and the weak, the lame and the poor are in. Even John didn't expect that.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

Sing or read:

- 1 Hills of the north, rejoice,
river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice ;
valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love,
he brings salvation from above.
- 2 Isles of the southern seas,
sing to the listening earth ;
carry on every breeze
hope of a world's new birth :
in Christ shall all be made anew ;
his word is sure, his promise true.
- 3 Lands of the east, arise !
He is your brightest morn ;
greet him with joyous eyes,
let praise his path adorn :
your seers have longed to know their Lord ;
to you he comes, the final Word.
- 4 Shores of the utmost west,
lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest
in whom the dawn has come :
he brings a never-ending light,
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.
- 5 Shout, as you journey on ;
songs be in every mouth !
Lo, from the north they come,
from east and west and south :
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.

Charles Ernest Oakley (1832–1865) and Editors of *English Praise*, 1975

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A sending out prayer

**Advent God,
we are your messengers:
sent – like John – to prepare the way for your coming.
As we go about, may we herald in words and actions
your healing and forgiveness. Amen.**

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen

