

Hope in Advent

Through Advent to Christmas



Welcome to Advent

You may like to begin by reading the back cover.

The four themes we will be looking at have been prepared by the people listed below:-

Week 1 HOPE IN HOPELESSNESS
 Revd. David Jenkins

Week 2 THE HOPE IN RECONCILIATION
 Revd. Alison Parker

Week 3 THE HOPE OF HOLINESS AND JUSTICE
 Revd. Jenny Dowding

Week 4 HOPE FOR LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION
 Revd. David Shaw

The material for each Sunday is different and includes a candle lighting liturgy. It has been developed by;
 Revd. Dr. Ruth Midcalf and Deacon Maria Howard.

Suggestions for using the material.

If you have the opportunity, you could look at the material early in the day so that you can dwell on it as you go about the day's activities.

At the close of the day you may find it helpful to ask yourself the following two questions and to offer your response to God :-

For what moment today am I most grateful?

For what moment today am I least grateful?

Week 1: Hope in Hopelessness

Sunday

Bible reading: John 1: 1 - 4 (NRSV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Hymn: "Light a candle in a darkened place"
Singing the Faith 174 verses 1 and 2

or "The holly and the ivy are dancing in a ring"
Hymns and Psalms 88 verses 1 and 2

Prayer:

God who is ever watchful, open our eyes and guide our hearts that we might actively and hopefully watch for you. We pray for those who feel that they have no hope this day. Show us how we might reflect your light where you have placed us, Lord of eternal hope.

Amen



Monday

Homeless Hope in Hopelessness

Matthew 2: 13 - 15a ***Now after they (the wise men) had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him". Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod.***

Matthew 8: 20 ***The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.***

John 14: 23 ***Those who love me will keep my word, and my father will love them, and we will come to them, and make our home with them.***

The world is facing its biggest challenge ever in regard to the unprecedented numbers of refugees, fleeing from their homelands because of various causes of conflict, oppression or severe deprivation.

In our Circuit there are people who are homeless.

Lord Jesus, who shared directly in the experience of being without a home and of escaping from danger, bring comfort and strength to all who face great risks and uncertainty in trying to find a place of safety among neighbours who can be trusted.

As other people took responsibility for your life as a child and came forward to offer you a place of refuge as an adult, we offer thanks for all who identify with the needs of people in inadequate housing, who take responsibility to protect the vulnerable, who open up possibilities for those who do not know where to turn next. Grant to all whose influence and intervention can make the difference between life and death for other members of the human family, wisdom, resolve, compassion, patience, imagination and perseverance so that the vast needs they encounter will be met.

We thank you for our own homes, and for all that it means to have a place where we belong.

We thank you for the deep rootedness of relationship with you, that you have taken residence in our lives, that we belong to you, that you are in us and we in you, and for the assurance that nothing can ever separate us from the love that surrounds us. Help us to find meaningful ways of encouraging others to discover their true home in you. Amen

Tuesday

Hungry

Psalm 104: 27 - 28

These all look to you to give them food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

Psalm 146: 7

The Lord gives food to the hungry.

Mark 8: 1

In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way-and some of them have come from a great distance".

Matthew 4: 2

He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

Around the world there are people suffering from severe malnutrition.

In our Circuit there are parents who choose to go without meals so that their children can eat.

Lord Jesus, from your own experience of hunger, and of feeding the hungry, bring relief to those who are starving, strengthen the faint, feed body, mind and spirit of all in distress.

We thank you for all those who, often at great risk to themselves, bring aid and food to others. We thank you for life-giving water and those whose skill makes access to clean, safe water possible.

We pray for those whose decisions in conflict, through trade, or the desire for power, can contemplate letting others go without food and water. We pray for all who work on behalf of others in challenging unbalanced systems, unfair trading and the depth of human callousness.

We are thankful for the food and water that sustains our lives, and for the Bread of Life and the Living Water we encounter in you.

Enable us to feed others with the good things of life-food and truth, understanding and compassion. Amen

Wednesday

Destitute

Hope in Hopelessness

Lamentations 3: 17 - 25

***My soul is bereft of peace;
I have forgotten what happiness is;
so I say, "Gone is my glory,
and all that I had hoped for, from the Lord".
The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion", says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."
The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.***

*Around the world there are people suffering from being
poverty-stricken.
In our Circuit there are people for whom the lack of
money and all the repercussions that brings is a
continual weight around their necks.*

Lord Jesus, born into poverty, thank you for identifying with the deep
needs people face.

Help those in government, economic planning and financial institutions to
find the will and the way to enable all people in the United Kingdom and
in the whole of your world to live free of anxiety about money.

Help us, in our hopelessness, to discover and rediscover hope in you,
whose mercies are new every morning and whose faithfulness is great.

Amen

Thursday

Unwell

Psalm 22: 14 - 16

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; my hands and feet have shrivelled; I can count all my bones.

Jesus reflected on Psalm 22 as he lay dying on the cross. While around the world there is progress towards the elimination of some diseases, people continue to suffer from viruses, from life-threatening and life-limiting illnesses.

In our Circuit there are people whose lives are deeply affected by their own illness, or that of a loved one.

Lord Jesus, sharing deeply in the challenges faced by human beings, you also brought healing and hope, life and light to vast numbers of people. To those who are ill bring strength and courage, alongside healing and hope.

We pray that they encounter compassionate care, persevering patience and sensitive skill from those who seek to nurse them along the journey to greater health. Amen



Friday

Dying

Hope in Hopelessness

John 19: 30

It is finished

Luke 23: 46

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit

Death comes to us all, and bereavement affects a vast number of us.

While we all seek to comfort those who are dying and distressed, we remember in prayer especially those working in hospices, hospitals and funeral parlours for whom death is a central part of everyday life. We especially remember Rev. Judy Davies, one of our Ministers, who is Chaplain to the Sue Ryder- Duchess of Kent Hospice in Reading, and who has written the prayer below.

A prayer for the dying

Draw near, O God,
to those whose lives are drawing to a close.
In darkness, be their light;
in suffering, be their comfort;
in anxiety, be their peace.
Surround them with your love,
and when the time comes for letting go,
bring them safe to your eternal kingdom,
through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Some helpful quotes-

"You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life. We will do all we can not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live until you die."

Cicely Saunders, founder of the hospice movement, speaking about the purpose of hospice care. (1918-2005)

"From him we come; in him we are enfolded; to him we return".

Julian of Norwich, 14th century

"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever" *Mahatma Gandhi, Indian philosopher (1869-1948)*

Saturday

In War Zones

Joshua 1: 9 ***Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go***

Matthew 6: 10 ***Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven***

While huge numbers of people live in or are fleeing from the world's war zones, some of them come to live in our Circuit, and some members of the armed forces are also related to people in our Circuit too.

God of peace, hope of the hopeless, bless the peacemakers in their efforts to "seek peace and pursue it", be with all who endure the unimaginable horrors of modern warfare, and help us all to bring the healing and sanity of a just and peaceful world into being. Amen

God our creator, forgive us humans;
we do not know what we are doing.
Sometime we can be so presumptuous,
forgetting that we are all on the earth
for so few years before the end.
We beg you God, in the name of Jesus,
to help this world and especially the Middle East.
Put peace into our hearts and heads,
mercy into our daily lives, and love between us.
Make us less selfish, and forgive us. Amen

written by William Matar, Byblos, Lebanon
Reproduced from Methodist Prayer Handbook 2015

Week 2: Hope of Reconciliation

Sunday

Bible reading: John 1: 5 (NRSV)

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Hymn: "Light a candle in a darkened place"
Singing the Faith 174 verses 1 to 3

or "The holly and the ivy are dancing in a ring"
Hymns and Psalms 88 verses 1 to 3

Prayer:

God of relationships, you spared nothing, sending even your only Son that we might be reconciled to you. We pray for our families, our communities, our nation and our world, all known and loved by you. You know our history, our faults and failings, our brokenness and need for healing. Help us to be reconciled to one another and prepared to make the sacrifices needed that we might share words of joy and hope with all. We look to you, Lord of eternal hope.

Amen



Monday

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3: 16 - 17

So much of our world cries out for reconciliation but we need to begin with the great work of God and all he has done for us through Jesus Christ.

Incredible Saviour,

Words fail us when we contemplate what you have done for us. Our thoughts falter when we look to grasp the depth of your love for us.

We are weak, human, and suffering, yet you love us the same. You have put us on Your heart, and spilled Your blood to save us. We, who are finite, flawed, and caught in boundaries, have been saved by You – the infinite, perfect, and boundless.

Let us put You on our hearts and in our minds, that we may suffer with You, rejoice in You, and strive for You.

For God, You love the world.

Amen

Each day this week there will be a verse of this Charles Wesley hymn to sing or pray.

*All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us each to each restored,
together seek his face.*

Tuesday

Hope of Reconciliation

It is all too easy to pray for reconciliation in a detached way but we are reminded that we all share in a ministry of reconciliation.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5: 18 - 19

Loving Lord,

Forgive us. Your desire is always to be working within and through us but we put up barriers and hide from you.

Forgive us. So often we have failed to be people who forgive ourselves and others in an unfettered way.

Forgive us. So often we witness the brokenness and hurt felt by people around us and yet we lack the courage to speak of you and your love.

Break in; we lay our lives open to your redeeming love again.

Make us your ambassadors, your hope bearers, make us salt and light. May your incredible love cascade through us gloriously.

Amen

*He bids us build each other up;
and gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.*

Wednesday

Philemon 1: 1 - 25

This reading is too long to print out but I encourage you to go and find a bible and read it. You can be proud that you have read a whole book of the bible today!
There is much in this letter.

Ask yourself the following questions:
What is Paul asking of Philemon?
What might it cost Paul to bring about this reconciliation?

*Onesimus had been a slave.
Where do we see slavery today?
How do the enslaved and those that imprison them
find a new way forward?*

*Think of families and work situations where power
destroys the peace and harmony that could be
present.*

*Try and be honest about your own complicity in
distorted relationships.*

*Onesimus had done wrong, he needed forgiveness to
move on.*

*Are you holding yourself or anyone else back by
refusing to forgive?*

Dear God,
Restore our relationships so that we can know your peace and
hope. Amen

*The gift which he on one bestows,
we all delight to prove;
the grace through every vessel flows,
in purest streams of love.*

Thursday

Hope of Reconciliation

*E'en now we think and speak the same,
and cordially agree;
concentred all, through Jesu's name,
in perfect harmony.*

Today I have begun with the verse from the hymn because it makes me squirm. We struggle to come close to this in our individual churches and we ignore the scandal of the church that refuses to be one, remaining fractured and distrustful. We do not recognise the holy ground that others walk upon and as a consequence we feed the divisions between people of different faiths.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:1 -6

Lord of Peace,

We so need your help and wisdom here. Help us to be completely humble and gentle with all people. Help us to bear with them in love. We feel that you have called us to one hope, but do not allow our faith to be something that we use to exclude or damage others.

Help us to live out your self-giving love in such a way that you are revealed and do not let us cling protectively to practises or beliefs that you do not own. Amen

Friday

Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

Exodus 22: 21.

God of harmony and delight,

We thank you for the fact that we live alongside people of different races.

We thank you that we live with people of all ages who have their own unique life stories.

We are so sorry for the times we have not listened to those who are hurting and who feel marginalised and victimised in modern Britain.

We pray in sorrow for those that feel excluded from our churches, who anticipate judgement rather than welcome.

Make us people who promote understanding because we are willing to set aside our assumptions and come alongside others in their alienation.

We are ALL made in your image. Help us to see the God light within each other and to hold it out to others despite the vulnerability of doing so.

May your unstoppable grace inspire us always to be hospitable and generous in the way we live.

May this mean that we all experience your unmatched peace.

Amen

*We all partake the joy of one,
the common peace we feel,
a peace to sensual minds unknown
a joy unspeakable.*

Saturday

Hope of Reconciliation

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4: 4 - 7

Earlier this year I had a wonderful experience. I gathered with others to celebrate the faithful witness of the Sisters of Bethany. Their special birthday service was held in Portsmouth Cathedral. There were people present from various Christian Churches and there were people of other faiths. We were a colourful lot. There were about 600 of us. Some were dressed up to mark the solemnity of what we were doing under God. Others had come in from the street because this convent offers hospitality to many who have addictions or who are shunned by others. All ages were there; the service was signed for the deaf; there was special provision for those in wheelchairs. We all had communion, we all drank soup together, and there was bread for all even those who cannot tolerate gluten. When the mother of the convent sang we held our breaths as heaven was glimpsed on earth. These faithful women pray every day for reconciliation. They bring hope to so many, God's hope.

Lord of fellowship and inspiration,
Thank you for the moments when hope is made real in our lives
because you are at the heart of all our relationships. Amen

*And if our fellowship below,
in Jesus be so sweet,
what heights of rapture shall we know
when round his throne we meet!*

Week 3: Hope of Holiness and Justice

Sunday

Bible reading: John 1: 6 - 7 (NRSV)

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

Hymn: "Light a candle in a darkened place"
Singing the Faith 174 verses 1 to 4

or "The holly and the ivy are dancing in a ring"
Hymns and Psalms 88 verses 1 to 4

Prayer:

God of justice, we thank you for the many people over the centuries who have witnessed to your truth and to the constancy of your love in changing and challenging 'desert' situations. As John the Baptist cried out in the wilderness, so we cry out for those desert places in our own lives and in our communities, that we might see your glory revealed, Lord of eternal hope. Amen



Monday

Hope of Holiness and Justice

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8, NRSV)

Holiness and justice are the themes being followed by this year's President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference.

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, believed that people needed to make the journey of faith together, helping each other both to live differently and fight injustice. He said: "'Holy solitaires' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness." He frequently described holiness as 'renewal of the whole image of God'. Wesley did not understand this in a purely individualistic way. His 'horizon of holiness was the whole world, created and recreated'.

In the booklet produced for this year's connexional theme, we read: "An awareness of holiness, of a God who longs for a world where the hungry are fed, the homeless are sheltered, and the lonely are welcomed, can prompt us to reflect the God of justice in our lives. Holiness and justice are intimately related. Responding to love of God in Jesus means seeking to live in a different way – a way that respects and seeks justice for all people."

This week's material for reflection, worship and prayer has been contributed by a number of people within the life of our circuit.

God of holiness and justice

Bible passage: 2 Corinthians 4: 5,6

God has caused his light to shine in our hearts, the light which is the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ

A prayer by Revd. Dr. John Ogden

God of all life, you rule in faithful covenant with your people.

In Jesus Christ your light has shone for all people.

Grant that our lives may be steeped in your holiness, living on earth the life you live in heaven.

In all our dealings with the living world and its people, may your compassion and justice guide our every step.

So may your world be rich

with the blessing of your just and gentle rule.

Amen

Tuesday

The holiness of God in Christ

Bible passage - 1 Peter 1: 13 - 16

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'

A prayer *by Anthonia Allen*

Thank you for the gift of Jesus and the Cross.

Thank you for the outpouring of your Grace,
gift of holiness and hope we have in you.

We praise you for Jesus

our coming King of glory, power and holiness.

We are grateful that you yearn with deep affection of love
to share your holiness with us.

Give us both hope and holiness in this hostile and broken world.

Give us a living hope, a living faith to continue to trust in you.

As you birth living hope and holiness in us,
enable us to be so much filled

as to overflow to the broken world around us,
those who are very near and not so near to us.

Thank you that you always do much more
than we could ever ask or think from you.

In Jesus' Holy name we pray.

Amen

A worship song (*Songs of Fellowship 182*)

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord,
Holy is the Lord God Almighty.
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord,
Holy is the Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come,
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.

Author unknown.

Wednesday

Hope of Holiness and Justice

Hope that we will be caught up in

God's holiness and justice

Bible passage - Luke 1: 46 - 55

Invitation to prayer *by Revd. Angela Webb*

I invite you to read Luke 1:46-56 (*Mary's Song of Praise or the Magnificat*) through slowly two or three times. Notice which word or phrase attracts your attention. Then stay with that word and phrase and let it unfold in your imagination. After a while I invite to you to see how what has unfolded connects with your life today. When you see that connection how do you want to respond. Maybe you will find yourself resting in stillness and discover a sense of the holy.

The Magnificat revisited 2016 *by Revd. Angela Webb*

Here is my song of praise with grateful thanks to Mary, Luke and the Holy Spirit. It is perhaps also an expression of hope that we will be caught up in the holiness and justice of God.

From deep within my being
Praise rises,
As I rejoice in you
My Rescuer and my Friend.
You see my desire
To seek justice,
To love mercy,
To walk humbly with you.
Creator and Sustainer of all,
You have done amazing things
For me,
Beyond and yet
Amongst us
You have blessed me.
Your mercy overflows to those
Who are willing to stand
With hands outstretched
Under the outpouring of your love.
You have watched those
Who go their own way
And seen them frustrated.

You have noticed those
Who think highly of themselves
And left them to their own devices.
You have seen those whose
Desire is to walk with you
And you have worked with them
For good.
You have invited those who
Hunger to a banquet.
You have allowed those who are
Already full up
To choose their own way.
Most wonderful of all,
Unfailing love,
You have blessed human beings
Across the world, across the years
And made them a blessing
To each other
And will continue to bless us
As we seek
To walk and work with you.

Thursday

Hope of justice with love

Bible passage - 1 Kings 3: 9, 16 - 28 The judgement of Solomon

It is love that speaks loudest.

It is love that speaks the truth.

It is love that enables justice.

A prayer by Rev. Lesley Martin

Thank you Lord God that you are concerned for everyone;
the prostitutes, the refugees, the lonely and bereft.

We confess that although we long for justice for ourselves,
we are slow to seek justice for others.

We see justice through eyes that are tainted by ego,
by our own self-centredness.

And we confess that although we pray for peace,
so often we fail, finding it difficult to keep the peace ourselves.

We desire holiness in our lives of following Christ
and yet so often we fail, and we live in a world which fails.

Show us the real meaning of what it means

to love our neighbour as ourselves,

to turn the other cheek.

And when others aim low

let us not despair but let us aim for the highest,
which is God's holiness, truth and wisdom.

Amen

A hymn: The kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed, the sinners find place.

(See the full text of the hymn - Hymns & Psalms 139; Singing the Faith 255)

Friday

Hope of Holiness and Justice
Hope of Justice for the Needy

Bible passage - Isaiah 35: 1 - 10

A prayer *by Colin Ferguson*

Wonderful God, in whose love we find the fullness of life;
in your son Jesus Christ you became like us;
by your Holy Spirit we find you in life today,
sharing our every moment with us,
Spirit of faith, hope, joy, peace, justice and love,
help us to be the channels of your power in the world today.

Wonderful God, we give you thanks for the promise of Jesus
and we praise you that joy fills our lives
and tumbles into the world as people hear the Christmas story.
We give you thanks for those who tell the good news
and share your love with those they meet,
for those who teach us and prepare us for our life pilgrimage;
for those whose joy is never squashed by the misfortunes of life;
for those who have cherished us in our past
and led us to know you as God;
for those whose guidance and faith has inspired and guided us
and prepared our way for us.
Glory be to God.

Yet with all our praise and thankfulness, Lord
we still get things wrong and do what you would not want us to do,
and we fail to do the work that you would like us to do.
Forgive us when our faith wobbles and our hope is short sighted.
Help us to be your hope to the people we know,
walking in the expectation of your kingdom coming.
Forgive us when we limit our love and withhold our joy,
when we reject the stranger,
and walk on the other side of the road to avoid the cry of the needy.
Forgive us when we do not forgive.
Love us when we do not love as you would like us to.
Forgive us and prepare us to be the people you would like us to be.
Help us to be alive with hope, love and justice so that your kingdom may
be known in this place and at this Christmas.

Amen

Saturday

The Advent Hope

Bible passage - Jeremiah 22: 3 - 5

Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor those who have been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow.

Invitation to pray by Stephen Appiah

The divine priority set out by our Lord Jesus included

"the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me ... to bring freedom to the oppressed and the prisoner".

This is still work in progress as millions still suffer injustice in our world. A common cause of injustice is human selfishness. Where can people who are subjected to injustice find hope? - unless those who understand the divine purpose for justice and freedom, seek to pray and act against all forms of injustices wherever they occur.

The Word became flesh and suffered pain and injustice.

The Advent candle is a sure sign of hope to our world. This year, let us light the Advent candle to send a message of hope and raise awareness to justice for all.

A prayer (*Light a candle and pray*):

Grant us, Lord,

a vision of your world as your love would have it:

a world where the weak are protected,

and no one goes hungry or poor;

a world where the riches of creation are shared,

and everyone can enjoy them;

a world where different races and cultures

live in harmony and mutual respect;

a world where peace is built with justice,

and justice is protected by love.

Give us the inspiration and courage

to create a better world,

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



(Prayer adapted from invitationtoprayer.org)

Week 4: Hope for Leadership and Direction

Sunday

Bible reading: John 1: 8 (NRSV)

He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

Hymn: "Light a candle in a darkened place"
Singing the Faith 174 verses 1 to 5

or "The holly and the ivy are dancing in a ring"
Hymns and Psalms 88 verses 1 to 4

Prayer:

God of all the world, we pray for your world, its nations and leaders and your body of Christ, the Church, at work within it. May we follow your lead with the obedience of Mary, crown you as Lord of our lives and point to you in all our words and actions, that others may come to know you for themselves, Lord of eternal hope. Amen



Monday

Each day this week I want to take characters from the Christmas story and reflect on an area of leadership that they might represent. Then to consider leadership in that context and suggest points for prayer.

Prophets Matthew 1: 18 - 24

Matthew more than Luke sees the coming Jesus in the light of the prophets. In chapter 1 v 23 he quotes Isaiah 7 verse 14. In chapter 2 v 6ff he quotes Micah 5 verse 2. Further in the same chapter he uses Hosea and then Jeremiah. Although the prophets weren't there at the time of the birth of Jesus they are prominent characters in the story.

Prophetic leaders, people who lead by their prophecy, are critical to our lives; critical, in both senses – essential and discerning. My reading of the prophets is that they were often uncomfortable people to be with because they said things people didn't want to hear or even think about. They were assessors of the world around them in the light of God's standards and purposes.

Ironically though these people were and are seen as doom-sayers by those who didn't like what was/is being said, they were/are ultimately brings of hope. They are speakers of God's purposes, which are life enriching and life giving.

Who would you describe as a modern day prophet?
Greenpeace? Critics of capitalism? Pacifists?

Please pray for those who bring hope by presenting God's truth.

Tuesday

Hope for Leadership and Direction

Shepherds Luke 2: 8 - 9, 15 - 20

There are no obvious leaders among these workers. I want to use them (!) to reflect on those who lead in the workplace. This is such an important role for those who work with and under a workplace leader. It can make all the difference between joy and misery.

I know of friends and family who have worked in dreadful situations, but because the leader understood and supported her team it was a good place to be. These difficult places were/are given hope by good quality workplace leadership.

Pause for a moment and think about your work context. You may be a leader. You may 'under' a leader. You may be both. What strengths do you bring to that role? What do you admire in those who exercise leadership over you or with you? Give thanks to God for those qualities you identify.

It maybe the shepherds didn't have a leader, but exercised a more flattened (a term which describes situations with no hierarchy) form of leadership. After all we read; *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.'*

Collectively they discerned the direction and the decision and found hope.

Where do you work in a flattened leadership model? At church?

You are invited to pray for those who this day will have a miserable time at work because of poor leadership.

Wednesday

Angels Luke 2: 9 - 14

In and among the angels in Luke's account we can see a model of spiritual leadership. In his wonderful and challenging book 'The Contemplative Pastor' Eugene H. Peterson (clergyman and author of 'The Message') reminds himself and his readers that his responsibility as a clergyman is not running a church, but to share in spiritual leadership.

So how are the angels offering a model of spiritual leadership? The angels as they appear before the shepherds are firstly offering worship to God and secondly pointing others towards Jesus who is the Saviour. The angels praise God and give glory to God which is the heart of worship. They then declare to the shepherds the reality of the birth of Jesus and enlighten them as to what this means for them.

This may not be all that needs saying about spiritual leadership, but it encapsulate a good deal of it – offering worship to God and pointing others to their Saviour Jesus.

In your prayers today you are invited to reflect on spiritual leadership in your situation.

Who are your spiritual leaders?

How do they spend their time? Are they spending time like the angels or in running the church? This is always a balance.

Reflect on how a rebalancing might bring more hope to your situation

Pray for your spiritual leaders, that they may be able to exercise their calling.

Thursday

Hope for Leadership and Direction

Magi Matthew 2: 1 - 2, 9 - 12

Traditionally these people were 'wise' and 'men'. Wikipedia describes them as 'a group of distinguished foreigners'.

There is a picture painted by Xu San Chun, a Chinese artist, which depicts the 'distinguished foreigners' as a Buddhist monk, a Confucian scholar and Lao Zi the founder of Taoism. This picture interprets the Magi in a particular context. It plays with the idea of who these visitors to the Christ child might be. They are foreign leaders.

Who might 'our' distinguished foreign visitors be?

Russian President Vladimir Putin,
Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria,
Donald Trump/Hilary Clinton (at the time of writing the result of US Presidential election is not known)?

What gifts of hope would be offered, by the people you have named above, to the Christ child and to the world?

Today we are dependent on foreign leaders. We may not vote for them but our lives are impacted by them and their leadership. It matters not just to Americans who is in the White House. It matters how the Chinese leadership respond to Climate Justice and the need to reduce Fossil Fuel emissions. The behaviour and decisions of some countries' leaders result in mass migration, which affects us.

Today you are invited to pray for leaders around the world - those who you instinctively like and those you don't.

Friday

Herod Matthew 2: 3 - 8, 16 - 18

Let's be clear Herod is not a good model of any form of leadership. He is a bad model!! His actions are self-focused, manipulative, violent and would in any age constitute 'crimes against humanity'. I hope, though, we can see when a national leader embodies the opposite characteristics they might be described as a good model.

Herod is concerned by the threat this new born child potentially brings to his rule/authority and power. Holding on to power and maintaining his grip was Herod's aim.

Many politicians today are criticised for wanting these things. Jeremy Corbyn was accused after the recent leadership election of seeking to strengthen his grip on the Labour party by changes he wants to make. Boris Johnson was described as supporting Brexit only to further his own career.

There is undoubtedly a popular notion that leaders in Parliament and Local Government are in it for themselves. I don't believe that to be the case for the vast majority of Public Servants in this country. The tragic murder of the MP, Jo Cox, enabled the other side of the story to be told – tireless devotion to her constituents, a commitment to tackling injustice wherever she found it.

Before God name your local MP and, if you can, your local Councilors (you may need to do some research!).

Give thanks for them.

Pray that they may be faithful in their service.

Pray that through their work hope might be fleshed out in real situations.

Saturday

The Christ Child Luke 2: 1 - 7

Divine leadership is not modeled; it is demonstrated in the birth of Jesus.

St Paul in quoting the wonderful early Christian hymn in chapter 2 of the letter to the Philippians declares:

(Christ Jesus) ***who being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human form.***

Or in Charles Wesley's hymn ***Let earth & heaven combine
Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.***

It is true that both the reading and the hymn go on to say more about Jesus - what he does, who he is and what he has won for us, nonetheless we can only marvel and wonder at this demonstration of vulnerability.

We have all sorts of theological words –'incarnation' (becoming human) and 'kenosis' (self-emptying) which seek to understand the extraordinary birth of God Almighty as a baby in Bethlehem.

However, I invite you to pause for a moment 'in wonder, love and praise' at this incredible truth.

In your imagination kneel before the baby, remembering these tiny hands 'flung stars into space'.

***Remember and give thanks – all this for you.
Such is Divine Leadership.***

Christmas Day

Bible reading: John 1: 9 (NRSV)

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Hymn: "Light a candle in a darkened place"

Singing the Faith 174 all verses

or "The holly and the ivy are dancing in a ring"

Hymns and Psalms 88 all verses

Prayer:

Lord of eternal hope, we sing out your praises for your true light has indeed been birthed into our world through the precious gift of your son, Jesus Christ, this day. May our lives shine brightly as we are illumined by your great love, reflecting light and bringing new life into our churches, our communities and our world. Amen



This booklet has been prepared by people from the Basingstoke and Reading Methodist Circuit. There is a page for each day in Advent right up to and including Christmas Day.

It is offered as a gift in the hope that people from our circuit and beyond may draw closer to God and to each other as they explore the material and enjoy the Advent season.

The material offered differs from one week to another and in some weeks day by day as different compilers have been inspired to tackle the themes in different ways. It may be that some styles will appeal to you more than others, so if one day is less helpful just reflect on the bible verses for the day and be aware other entries may suit you better.

We decided to look at hope in four different ways, one for each week in Advent:

Hope in hopelessness

The Hope in reconciliation

The Hope in holiness and justice

The Hope for leadership and direction

Since this year Advent has the maximum number of days we have not dated the pages so it could be used in any year by using just some of the entries for week 4. If this bothers you, write the dates for this year in pencil on the pages before you start.

If you are curious about the authors and compilers of the material they are listed inside the front cover. Individual entries are credited to their authors. To those who have proof-read, prepared for printing, printed, assembled and distributed it a big "Thank you".

May all who use this resource be abundantly blessed at this time and may God use them to bless others too.