

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

**Sunday 6 December 2020
Advent 2**

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. We have come to the second Sunday of Advent when we think of the Old Testament prophets. Our passage is a beautiful poem of invitation. God is coming! The time of waiting is drawing to a close. 'Come back to me,' God is saying.

It is an invitation to contemplate the first seven days of our Advent journey towards God the Father and his Son, and his arrival at Christmas. What - if anything - has been getting in the way of our daily God & me time? What might we do differently as we travel on? How can God's Spirit help us with this? Less may be more as we edge ever closer to Christmas Eve.

May Advent be a season of fresh revelations of God's loving presence in your life; a season of deepening faith.

God bless,

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An Advent Song of Invitation

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: keep watch take heart!

Prepare the way for the Lord.

Make a straight path for God.

Prepare the way for the Lord.

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God's coming!

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence, and feel his love.

If you are indoors, you may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love, here, in your room. You may also wish to have a cross in your palm, or on the table, and a bowl of water ready for the time of confession.

O God, you search me and you know me.

All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.

You know the journeys that I take
and the places where I rest.

You know all that is on my heart,
and the "to do" lists and worries
that are cluttering my life.

Help me to let go of them,
for a while, as I spend time in your presence. **Amen.**

LETTING GO

If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets, with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, or times when you have failed to notice God's loving presence, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And, when you are ready, reflect on the opening words of our hymn.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!

Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence praise,
in deeper reverence praise.



If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water and make the sign of the cross on your palm.

Feel God's forgiveness. God is inviting you back into his loving presence. You are his beloved child. Rest in his love. May this inspire you to journey attentively day-by-day through Advent-into-Christmas.

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER **(The Collect)**

Across our villages and the worldwide Church, this prayer is being said today. Add your voice to this earthly circle of prayer to our loving Father.

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power
and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered
in running the race that is set before us,
your bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Our prayer for this Second Sunday of Advent reminds us that life is much more like a long distance hike than a quick sprint. We have to build up the stamina and resilience to keep going when life gets tough. We do this by adopting a daily discipline of opening our bible and reflecting on what God's words are saying to us, and by prayerfully engaging with our life. We have to learn to avoid the temptation to take things easy - to coast - through life. To run the Christian race, we need hiking boots rather than running shoes!

How are you finding your daily walk with God? How is he blessing your life? Where do you need his help?



LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

God is coming!

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Isaiah 40:1-11

Setting the scene

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

These uplifting words are so familiar to us from countless Christmas services and Handel's Messiah. Yet - their full force is hidden from us as we sit comfortably in our own homes. For God's message was spoken to a people who had endured fifty long years in exile in Babylon.

If we want to enter into their pain, we should turn to the opening verses of Psalm 137 to sense their devastating loss. Loss of home and temple, loss of God's love and place of presence is giving them a deep longing to go back home to Jerusalem.

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.

As for our lyres, we hung them up
on the willows that grow in that land.

For there are our captors asked for a song

our tormentors called for mirth:

'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'

How shall we sing the Lord's song
in a strange land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem...

You can feel the psalmist pining for Jerusalem. It is impossible for him to sing God's songs for his captors. Joy has left him. I do hope he was one of the ones who lived to hear God's tender and loving words, and burst into songs of overwhelming joy. Alleluia! Praise be! God is coming! At last - we're going to be free! Our past sins are forgiven.

God is inviting us to remember that nothing can separate us from his love, for he will find a way to break through to us. To save us from ourselves, for he is more faithful to us than we are to him.

Pause for a moment. Contemplate whether anything has been getting in the way of you being as open to God as he is to you. Invite him to come and de-clutter your relationship with him. To set you free to spend time with him as he desires.

Making straight

Advent is such an ideal time to take a good look at our pathway to God's presence. What aspects are in need of restoration or urgent repairs?

Isaiah invites us to picture the steep and dusty road up to God's holy city of Jerusalem. Imagine if this was turned into a smooth and easy

highway into God's presence. One that is open to everyone to travel on. It would be like converting a rough mountain pass into the fast flowing M1!

For this is what Jesus came to be. Our super-highway! Here is our God! Come to dwell with us and to die for our sins so that our access to him is always open, well signposted and delay-free.

Pause to contemplate this image. Give thanks to God for sending his Son to make straight and level the way that leads us into God's glorious, loving and almighty presence.

Before moving into your time of prayer, re-read this beautiful passage from Isaiah. Knowing to whom it was first written, and their life-setting, sense how God is speaking to you through its timeless words and images.

A Prayer of Arrival

Lord, you are my hope,
my food,
my trust,
my comfort,
and all my desire. **Amen.**



Dorothea of Montau (1347-94)

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some prayers on this Sunday's theme. Feel free to use one or more of these prayers, and to add your own.

Heavenly Father, as I travel on through Advent to Christmas, make straight my soul's path into your presence, your glorious and loving presence.

Clear away any obstacles or excuses I place between you and me, so that I may arrive ready to be attentive.

Father, hear my prayer.

Father, as I think of your people living in exile,
far from home, feeling forgotten and alone,
my heart aches for those who are held captive in strange lands,
or who have had to flee their homes. Lord, in this time of crisis,
hear their cries for freedom. Set them free. I pray for...

Father, hear my prayer.

Father, in our hearts and homes, we are getting ready to celebrate
your Son's arrival into our lives. For some, in our towns and villages,
this Christmas is going to be a tough time. Ill-health, loneliness,
loss of a loved one, job or financial worries make it difficult to be joyful.
Lord, speak tenderly to those who are struggling at this time,
and grant them peace and hope. I lift up to you...

Father, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

Lord, bless and guide me,
whatever I do, whether at home or outside.
Go before me, watch over me,
and keep me, and my loved ones, safe in your love. **Amen.**