

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

**Sunday 3 December 2023
Advent 1**

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. Advent is here! Today, we begin our journey to the stable in Bethlehem. We set off in hope, watching and waiting and working for Christ's kingdom of justice and love as we wait on his return. It is hard to stay 'match ready' 365 days of the year, which is why we have Advent as a season of preparation.

May our Lord's Spirit guide you through each of the coming days. May he deepen your joy and love, faith and hope in the coming days.

Enjoy the peace and promise of Advent!

Every blessing,

Revd Katrina

Vicar

Phone No. 01604 812907

Mobile No. 07710 464675

E-mail: katrinahutchins94@yahoo.co.uk

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As you set out into Advent, may you hear God's voice.

Hark! a herald voice is calling:

'Christ is nigh!' it seems to say;

'Cast away the dreams of darkness,

O ye children of the day!'

Latin 6th century

trans. Edward Caswall (1814-1878)

Prayers and Reflections
for use at home on Advent 1
Keep awake!

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 bowl of water ready for the time of letting go. When you are ready, say this opening prayer.

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,
every one of my worries.
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, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And then, when you are ready, reflect on your life with the second verse from this week's hymn.

Startled at the solemn warning,
let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her sun, all sloth dispelling,
shines upon the morning skies.

Latin 6th century
trans. Edward Caswall (1814-1878)



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

Our second verse invites us to wake up! Spiritually speaking, our Lord is calling us to give our faith life an Advent refresh. With the sameness or the busyness of our daily lives, it is easy for our prayers and praise to go a little stale. Equally, our focus can narrow to where Jesus is today; what he is doing to save those in danger for their lives. Advent invites us to wake up and look to the future and prepare for Christ our King's return. Take a moment to think about how you are feeling as Advent begins. On a scale of one to five, where one is running on empty and five is full to overflowing with joy and praise, how is your prayer life? And, your Bible guided walk with the Lord? What needs refreshing and revitalising? Lift this up to the Lord in prayer. Trust in his generous and self-giving love and compassion. His Spirit will provide what you are seeking.

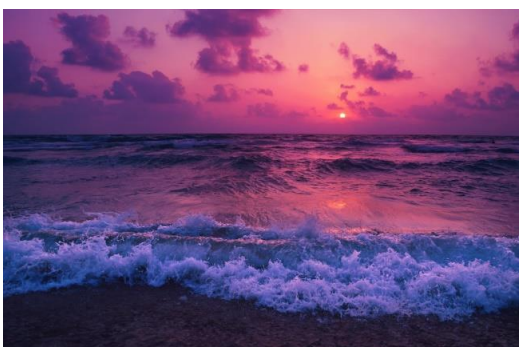
God Waits

God waits silently
in our inner recesses,
the chambers of our soul,
gazing lovingly
on our treasure,
awaiting our response.

Yvonne Morland (2005)

Candles & Conifers by Ruth Burgess

When you are ready, say or sing this third verse of our Advent hymn.



Lo, the Lamb, so long expected,
comes with pardon down from heaven;
let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
one and all to be forgiven.

Latin 6th century

trans. Edward Caswall (1814-1878)

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER

(The Collect)

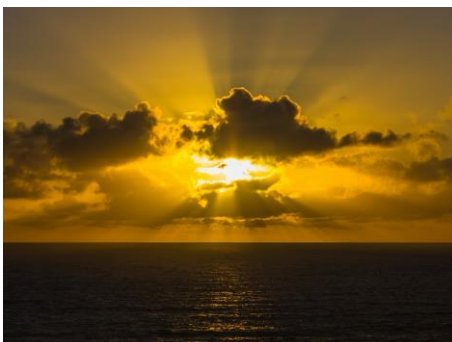
Today, this prayer is being said across our villages and the worldwide Church. Add your voice to the earthly circle of prayer to our Faithful One.

Almighty God,
as your kingdom dawns,
turn us from the darkness of sin
to the light of holiness,
that we may be ready to meet you
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Turning from the world's darkness towards the dawning light of hope is a core Advent image. We will see this in our Gospel reading as Jesus prepares his team for the end times. Waiting for the sunrise can seem endless for those who have had a sleepless night. It can't come too soon. For those who are sleeping soundly, the dawn of a new day can wait. We're too snug in bed... or in our way of life.

Our prayer is an invitation to re-kindle our desire for Christ's return, through prayer and reflection and studying the bible, and to take a fresh look at how we are living by the light of our faith. We need to be ready to greet Christ our King on his return. If he was to come tomorrow, would you or I be ready for this? Advent reminds us to ask this question daily!

Take a moment to think about your life... all that is filled with the holiness of Christ's love and compassion, and his passion for justice and fairness... and, be brave, all that is not quite as it should be... God's Spirit has the power to transform the dark corners of our lives. Open yourself to him.



So when next he comes with glory,
wrapping all the earth in fear,
may he then, as our defender,
on the clouds of heaven appear.

Latin 6th century

trans. Edward Caswall (1814-1878)

LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Keep awake!

Jesus said, 'But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Mark 13:24-end

Keep alert...

Jesus begins his Keep Awake speech by talking about the dramatic events which will happen in his team's lifetime. He is seeing into the near future, and, by quoting words of the prophet Isaiah, speaks of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of its temple, and the political changes this will bring about for Jews and Christians alike. We also get a glimpse of the seismic changes that will flow from the Cross and the empty grave. Jerusalem will no longer be the primary place where God is found; Pentecost will set his Spirit free to roam the earth.

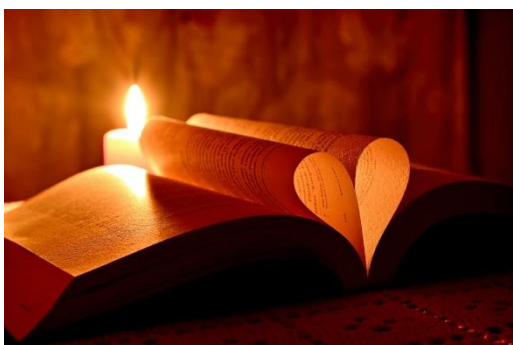
So, yes, these changes did come true in the present generation. But... there is more to come. Jesus will return. He will fulfil Daniel's vision of The Son of Man. It is such a beautiful and hope-filled vision of a world united under Christ our King. Gone will be all of the death, destruction and darkness of the present age. Our world will be as it should be.

As you ponder this, think about how this vision of Christ our King inspires the way that you live and reflect on world events. What is our Lord saying to you as Advent begins? How are you getting ready for this?

I saw one like a human being coming with clouds of heaven.
And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.
To him was given dominion and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

Do stay alert to his voice as you prepare for Christmas. And, as you keep on looking forward to Christ's return.



Honour, glory, virtue, merit,
to the Father and the Son,
with the co-eternal Spirit,
while unending ages run.

*Latin 6th century
trans. Edward Caswall (1814-1878)*

OUR PRAYERS

Feel free to use one or more of these prayers and to add your own.

Lord Jesus, you offer such a beautiful vision of life on your return, and it fills me with such hope. Help me to live each day in the light of this hope as I witness the world's darkness. May your light shine in me.

Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord Jesus, you will return to judge the world's actions; you know where love and compassion is transforming lives, where war and oppression is devastating lives. Shine your light of holiness into the hearts, I pray...

Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord Jesus, Advent is a difficult time for some of my family and friends. Ill-health and the frailties of old age, the loneliness of loss, and fears about the future make it hard for them to have hope. Bless, I pray...

Lord, 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.

O God, you search me and you know me,
all my thoughts and feelings are open to your gaze,
you see the paths I will take before I take them. Guide my daily living.
Bless me and keep my loved ones safe, I pray. **Amen.**