

**Mears Ashby and Hardwick
and Sywell with Overstone**



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

Sunday 5 December 2021

Advent 2

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. We have come to the second Sunday of Advent. Having last week undertaken an 'Advent Clean' of our inner life, we are now ready to listen more actively and attentively to God's words for us. God is already more ready to listen to our prayers than we are to hear his wise and loving thoughts for us. Enjoy reflecting on the theme of 'Ever listening!'.

May God continue to bless and guide you on your pilgrimage through Advent and on into Christmas.

Every blessing,

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An Advent Hymn of Invitation

As you sing or read the third verse of O come, O come, Emmanuel, think about how you are feeling at this time. Where is the light of love, joy and happiness shining bright? Give thanks to God. Where do you feel a sense of darkness? Offer this to God in prayer. He is listening.

O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice, rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee,

O Israel.

from the Great O Antiphons (12th - 13th century)
trans. John Mason Neale (1818-1866)

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Ever listening!

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 pay attention to God's 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 that God has been listening as you opened your heart to him. Always, he listens with love and understanding, and with a deep desire to forgive you your sins. May he set you free to live with hope in your heart as Advent continues.

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 the second Sunday of Advent offers us the image of life being a race that we run to the best of our abilities. Sometimes, we face hurdles that we need to overcome. Will we leap over them and run on? Or, trip and stumble, and need God's help to get up and race on towards life's earthly finishing line? Picture the hurdles that you have faced or, perhaps, are facing at this time. All sorts of challenges can cause us to fall short of God's two key commands, to love him with every fibre of our being and to love others as we love ourselves, or cause us to doubt that God is with us.



Advent is a time for remembering that God always listens to us and Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. He never leaves us to face life's challenges (hurdles) on our own. Pause to contemplate God's presence in your life's storms and sadness. Lift your heart to him.



Be still, my soul: the Lord is at your side;
bear patiently the cross of grief and pain;
leave to your God to order and provide;
in every change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: your best, your heavenly friend,
through thorny ways, leads to a joyful end.

*Katherina von Schlegel (b. 1697)
trans. Jane L. Borthwick*

LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Listen! God is coming

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

Luke 3:1-6

Waiting for the Lord

If you pick up your bible and turn to the last book of the Old Testament, you'll find that it is by the prophet Malachi. His book is set in the time of God's people's return from exile. Coming home to Jerusalem, they have rebuilt the city's walls and homes and temple but they are not yet free. They are still under the control of the Persians and all is not well with life in Judah. God needs to call his people back to him. Malachi warns them to expect God's messenger. It is a prophecy that came true both during their lifetime and, again, with the birth of John the Baptist.

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

Malachi 3:1-4

God has been watching his people and listening to their prayers. It is time for his messenger to come. God plays a long game. He can see far into his people's future and counts back thirty years. Choosing wisely, he picks an elderly devout couple to be the parents of his messenger - John, who will prepare the way for God's Son. It is a sign to us that, when we raise our pleas and petitions to God's attentive ears, we can trust in his loving yet timely response. Waiting is an essential part of praying.



Contemplate this idea of waiting on God's response with the help of this psalm verse.

Wait for the Lord;
be strong and he shall comfort your heart;
wait patiently for the Lord. *Psalm 27:14*

Listening to God

Waiting is an essential part of listening. What else do we need to do? Look out for signs that God is springing into action or speaking to us. Over the past week, we have been journeying with Zechariah's song of salvation. I wonder who, on hearing him say or sing:

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of all their sins.

Benedictus

saw the connection with the words of Malachi and thought, 'This is it! God's messenger is here! Let's wait for his message.' It would have taken a deep faith to wait for him to grow up. And, I wonder, who missed God's cue? And when John left home to go out into the wilderness, 30 years on, who saw God's sign and followed him, and who stayed firmly at home?



Advent is an invitation to you to look back at your life and notice where God has spoken into your life or come to your rescue. When did you spot his cues? And, where did you fail to see his Spirit or his helper at work? Learning from this, seek God's help to be 'ever listening' out for him and to him.

My heart tells me of your word, 'Seek my face.'

Your face, Lord, will I seek. *Psalm 27:8*

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some prayers for Advent 2. Feel free to add your own.

Heavenly Father, you are so very attentive to me,
you hear every one of my prayers, both spoken and unspoken,
and you always know just how I am feeling. I praise you for your love.
Forgive me for the times when I have failed to listen out for your voice
or missed your words to me. Speak, Lord, for I am listening.

Father, hear my prayer.

Father, as I think of John calling your people to come into the wilderness and seek your forgiveness, my heart's desire is for all peoples, everywhere, to experience your love and hear you calling their name. We are all your beloved children. Help me to remember this when I see your forgotten and hurting ones. I pray for...

Father, hear my prayer.

Father, when I feel unwell or lost or alone, it is so comforting to sense your love and care for me. You are always with me, even when life feels full of darkness. You are my light and my salvation. May my family and friends who are sick or struggling feel your love, your precious love for them. 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.

O God, you search me and you know me,
all my thoughts and my feelings are open to your gaze,
you see the paths I will take before I take them.
You are my light in the darkness and my delight in life's joys.
You are always at my side. Bless my loved ones too, I pray. **Amen.**