

Christmas Services 2019 at St James's Church

Sunday 15th December at 6.00pm

Festival of Lessons and Carols

Scripture and poetry with music from St James's Lay Singers and Ukulele Orchestra.

Preacher: The Revd Hugh Valentine

Tuesday 17th December at 5.30pm

Carols for Shoppers

Take a break from your last-minute Christmas shopping and add your voice to the **Vigala Singers** and musicians from the **Royal College of Music Junior Department** in this service of popular Christmas carols and readings.

Preacher: The Revd Lucy Winkett

The church will be closed from 2.00pm-4.30pm as we prepare for the service. Doors will open at 4.30pm. This very popular service is likely to be oversubscribed. It will be relayed on speakers in the courtyard. Free entry and all are welcome.

Tuesday 24th December at 4.00pm

Carols for Christmas Eve

Children and families especially welcome to the Christmas Eve Christingle service.

Tuesday 24th December at 11.30pm

Midnight Mass

Preacher: The Revd Hugh Valentine

Wednesday 25th December at 11.00am

Christmas Day Eucharist

Preacher: The Revd Dr Ivan Khovacs

Followed by Christmas lunch - all welcome.

See our website www.sjp.org.uk for full details of all Christmas services and concerts. Follow us on Twitter: [@StJPicadilly](https://twitter.com/StJPicadilly)



Advent Contemplative Space

A space for prayer, readings and silence
daily throughout Advent

Monday - Saturday • 2nd - 23rd December 2019
St James's Church, Piccadilly

Advent Contemplative Space

What? Each session will be facilitated by a member of the St James's Church community and will include a welcome, guided silence with opportunities to write or draw, a Bible reading, another reading (usually a poem), time to share reflections, and a closing prayer.

Where? In the Side Chapel (Jermyn Street side of the church)

Who? Everyone is welcome to attend for all or part of the time each day.

Schedule

Monday 2nd December	10.00am - 11.00am
Tuesday 3rd December	10.00am - 11.00am
Wednesday 4th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Thursday 5th Dec ember	1.00pm - 2.00pm
Friday 6th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Saturday 7th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Monday 9th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Tuesday 10th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Wednesday 11th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Thursday 12th December	1.00pm - 2.00pm
Friday 13th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Saturday 14th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Monday 16th December	10.30am - 11.00am
Tuesday 17th December	09.00am - 10.00am
Wednesday 18th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Thursday 19th December	1.00pm - 2.00pm
Friday 20th December	10.00am - 11.00am
Saturday 21st December	10.00am - 11.00am
Monday 23rd December	10.00am - 11.00am

O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel,
who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush
and gave him the law on Sinai:
Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples;
before you kings will shut their mouths,
to you the nations will make their prayer:
Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.

O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel;
you open and no one can shut;
you shut and no one can open:
Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house,
those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

O Morning Star, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness:
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.

O King of the nations, and their desire,
the cornerstone making both one:
Come and save the human race,
which you fashioned from clay.

O Emmanuel, our King and our lawgiver,
the hope of the nations and their Saviour:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.

all the deepest, dearest needs that were denied to us and others or never met or never known, 'Beautiful but nevermore' is the sense of it.

Yet in no way is it depressing, this elusive melancholy, particularly when held and savoured - for then it is recognised as the healing miracle of acceptance. Fortunate indeed are those who ever find even the briefest glimpses into this rare and gentle epiphany, and if I could wish all the world something for Christmas, I would certainly wish it some amalgamated sadness rapture - otherwise known as peace.

The Christmas story is a poem about the nature of human divinity, conveying how the mysterious something which is divine and redeeming in humans is a quality born in humility, and often in a vulnerable or rejected state. Its birth may be welcomed by the wise and lowly but not by the powerful (Herod), who feel instinctively threatened and commit wide-spread crimes in futile attempts to eliminate the challenge of this innocent, natural divinity. The general archetypal truth of this poetic metaphor is borne out in human behaviour, in history as well as in personal and cultural life, and in matters large and small. It's all about improbability and the fact that truth, vitality and redemption arise from unlikely ground - the unattractive area that claims the least attention or consideration.

...And seeing as it's Christmas with all the truthfulness of the silly season, and seeing as there's unforeseen sadness in the air and a star in the sky, we may surely feel entitled or even inspired to see things very differently and find some forlorn, absurd, sparkling thought of our own - or an outcast possibility or person, perhaps, who has somehow sung to our poor semi-conscious soul - and pay some long overdue homage.

Prayer

We say together the antiphons for the seven days preceding Christmas Eve:

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,
reaching from one end to the other mightily,
and sweetly ordering all things:
Come and teach us the way of prudence.

Week one: Slowing, Stopping, Waiting

Monday 2nd December

Mark 13.33-37

- 33 Jesus said "Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come.
34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the door keeper to be on the watch.
35 Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning—
36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.
37 And what I say to you I say to all: Watch."

Teaching a stone to talk (excerpt) *Annie Dillard*

At a certain point, you say to the woods, to the sea, to the mountains, the world, Now I am ready. Now I will stop and be wholly attentive. You empty yourself and wait, listening. After a time you hear it: there is nothing there. There is nothing but those things only, those created objects, discrete, growing or holding, or swaying, being rained on or raining, held, flooding or ebbing, standing, or spread. You feel the world's word as a tension, a hum, a single chorused note everywhere the same. This is it: this hum is the silence.

The silence is all there is. It is the alpha and the omega, it is God's brooding over the face of the waters; it is the blinded note of the ten thousand things, the whine of wings. You take a step in the right direction to pray to this silence, and even to address the prayer to "World." Distinctions blur. Quit your tents. Pray without ceasing.

Prayer *Michaela Youngson*

A Prayer of approach, longing and confession for the Advent season.

God, with us, as we enter this season of longing and waiting, bear with us a little longer;

R: be patient with our impatience.

You have journeyed alongside us from the beginning of time,

R: yet still we miss the signs of your presence.

When we are blinded by the brashness of this season:

R: Open our eyes to the glimpses of your glory.

When we want simple answers:

R: Open our minds to the hints of incarnation.

When we are deafened by our own shouting:

R: Open our ears to the whispers of your grace.

May we share with you in longing for restoration and renewal, and may we be watchful for the light that breaks through the darkness of our world.

R: In Christ's name. Amen.

God says 'Be patient, watch and wait, for the time is close at hand.'
Know that you are loved, forgiven and healed.

R: Amen. Thanks be to God.

Tuesday 3rd December

Psalm 139.11-18

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"

12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand - when I awake, I am still with you.

Prayer John Birch

Advent God,
we journey with you,
to Bethlehem's stable and a new-born King,
ears attuned to the song of angels,
eyes alert for Bethlehem's star.
Forgive us if on our journey
we are distracted by the tempting offers
of this world.
Keep our hearts aflame
with the hope of Christmas,
and the promise of a Saviour. **Amen.**

Monday 23rd December

Micah 5:2

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.

The Rapture of Sadness Past (excerpt) Michael Leunig

Christmas approaches and an unforeseen sadness quite suddenly appears. How beautiful and astonishing it is. There you are, standing alone in the kitchen, paused between one ordinary thing and the next, when all at once this strange feeling enters the body like wine, gently flooding your veins with a mysterious sweet mixture of grief and yearning. And there, intoxicated for a moment, we are able to stand clear of the world and stare like children into the life that was ours, the life that has slipped away so sadly and joyfully, beyond memory and into the blackness of space, without us having understood very much of it at all.

I hereby name this sweet, pre-Christmas melancholy 'amalgamated sadness rapture', suspecting it is distilled from the dim memory of all life's losses and

with all that distorts your truth,
and make our hearts attentive
to your liberating voice,
in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Saturday 21st December

Luke 2.8-14

- 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.
- 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.
- 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.
- 11 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.
- 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
- 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
- 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

Meditations with Julian of Norwich (excerpt)

God wants to be thought of
as our Lover.
I must see myself so bound in love
as if everything that has been done
has been done for me.
That is to say,
the Love of God makes such a unity
in us
that when we see this unity
no-one is able to separate oneself
from another.

Keeping Quiet *Pablo Neruda*

"Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still.

For once on the face of the earth
let's not speak in any language,
let's stop for one second,
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment
without rush, without engines,
we would all be together
in a sudden strangeness.

Fishermen in the cold sea
would not harm whales
and the man gathering salt
would look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victory with no survivors,
would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brothers
in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused
with total inactivity.
Life is what it is about;
I want no truck with death.

If we were not so single-minded
about keeping our lives moving,
and for once could do nothing,
perhaps a huge silence
might interrupt this sadness

of never understanding ourselves
and of threatening ourselves with death.
Perhaps the earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead
and later proves to be alive.

Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go."

Prayer *Jan Sutch Pickard*

May we be out of our depth – as the deeps of the night sky contain but cannot explain God's mystery. May we lose count – as an infinity of stars is dazed and amazed by God's presence. May we be in the dark – as the moon is eclipsed, but held safe, with all that is, in the palm of God's hand. May we be lost for words – as the Word is spoken, in the silence of the night, in the beauty of God's creation. **Amen.**

Wednesday 4th December

John 1.1-5

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 He was in the beginning with God;
- 3 all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.
- 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
- 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

You, Darkness *Rainer Maria Rilke*

You darkness from which I come,
I love you more than all the fires
that fence out the world,
for the fire makes a circle
for everyone
so that no one sees you anymore.
But darkness holds it all:

Friday 20th December

Psalm 24

- 1 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
- 2 for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.
- 3 Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?
- 4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.
- 5 They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Saviour.
- 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.
- 7 Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
- 8 Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.
- 9 Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
- 10 Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty— he is the King of glory.

(The Creator) desires ... (fragment) *Jan van Ruysbroek*

(The Creator) desires that we might see
And that is why s/he is ever uttering to our inmost being
One deep unfathomable word and nothing else.
There is one word, and it is all that is
There are millions of words and they all utter the one word
We are all utterances of the Divine.

Prayer *Janet Morley*

O God our disturber,
whose speech is pregnant with power
and whose word will be fulfilled:
may we know ourselves unsatisfied

pulling at me - a thread
or net of threads
finer than cobweb and as
elastic. I haven't tried
the strength of it. No barbed hook
pierced and tore me. Was it
not long ago this thread
began to draw me? Or
way back? Was I
born with its knot about my
neck, a bridle? Not fear
but a stirring
of wonder makes me
catch my breath when I feel
the tug of it when I thought
it had loosened itself and gone.

Prayer *John Birch*

Forgive us, Lord.
We are a wandering people
who kneel before you now,
a people who bring prayers
and requests to your feet
when we have need of you
and nowhere else to turn,
then go our own way
when times are good
and life is easy.
Forgive us and draw us close.
Teach us your way
that we might follow.
Help us to walk in your company
and know your presence
from the moment we awake
until we lay our heads to rest. **Amen.**

the shape and the flame,
the animal and myself,
how it holds them,
all powers, all sight —
and it is possible: its great strength
is breaking into my body.
I have faith in the night.

Prayer *Anon*

God of shadows and echoes, darkness and light, help us to be still in our dark moments, our waiting times, our uncertainties. And when morning comes, show us how to greet the dawn without trying to make sense of the amazing light. **Amen.**

Thursday 5th December

Ecclesiastes 3.1-8

- 1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:
- 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
- 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
- 6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- 7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

I go among trees *Wendell Berry*

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes
and lives a while in my sight.
What it fears in me leaves me,
and the fear of me leaves it.
It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it,
and the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labour,
mute in my consternations,
I hear my song at last,
and I sing it. As we sing,
the day turns, the trees move.

Prayer *Christian Aid*

God of the waiting,
give us courage to wait with those in the most broken places of the world,
and with all those who struggle to be bearers of hope there.
We pray with those who wait for wars to stop, for violence to cease.

God of the waiting, turn conflict into peace.
We pray for those who have given up on the coming of hope because they
feel they wait in vain at checkpoints, at borders, for jobs, for food, and for
all those whose lives are crushed under the structures and systems of
injustice.

God of the waiting, wait with your world.
Turn anger into reconciliation, and our lack of hope into courage,
so that our waiting may be over and all the things of darkness shall be no
more.

Prayer *Donald Hilton*

Lord Jesus,
We pray that you
will break into our lives,
even though there is a part of us
that fears your coming:
that fears that you will
turn our living
inside out
and upside down.

Teach us the true measure of our need
that we may pray
and look
for that coming
with wholehearted
and joyful anticipation,
eager hope,
and a readiness to be changed. **Amen.**

Thursday 19th December

John 3.16-19

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone
who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.
¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who
believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are
condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the
only Son of God.¹⁹ And this is the judgement, that the light has come into
the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds
were evil.

The Thread *Denise Levertov*

Something is very gently,
invisibly, silently,

Wednesday 18th December

John 1.14-18

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Mass for the Day of St Thomas Didymus (excerpt) *Denise Levertov*

God then,
encompassing all things, is
defenceless? Omnipotence
has been tossed away, reduced
to a wisp of damp wool?

and we,
frightened, bored, wanting
only to sleep till catastrophe
has raged, clashed, seethed and gone by without us,
wanting then
to awaken in quietude without remembrance of agony,
we who in shamefaced private hope
had looked to be plucked from fire and given
a bliss we deserved for having imagined it,

is it implied that we
must protect this perversely weak
animal, whose muzzle's nudgings
suppose there is milk to be found in us?
Must hold to our icy hearts
A shivering God?

Friday 6th December

Luke 1.26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,
²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.
²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."
²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.
³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God.
³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.
³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,
³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."
³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"
³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.
³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.
³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."
³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Wreathed in Flesh *Wendy M. Wright*

A novice master once responded when asked about a life lived in Christian authenticity, that to be a Christian was not to know the answers but to begin to live in the part of the self where the question is born . . .
He was speaking of an attitude of listening, of awareness of presence, of an openness to mystery.

Prayer *Ray Simpson*

Calm us to wait for the gift of Christ.
Cleanse us to wait for the way of Christ.
Teach us to contemplate the wonder of Christ.
Anoint us to bear the life of Christ. **Amen.**

Saturday 7th December

Romans 13.11-14

11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Four Quartets, East Coker (excerpt) *T.S. Eliot*

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

Prayer *Ray Simpson*

God be with us on our journey towards Christmas. Help us to go deeper into what is real until we are brought to the wonder of your incarnation. **Amen.**

Sabbath poem *St John of the Cross*

If
you want,
the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the holy,
and say,

“I need shelter for the night, please take me inside your heart,
my time is so close.” Then, under the roof of your soul, you will witness the
sublime intimacy, the divine, the Christ
taking birth
forever,

as she grasps your hand for help, for each of us
is the midwife of God, each of us.
Yet there, under the dome of your being does creation
come into existence eternally, through your womb, dear pilgrim—
the sacred womb in your soul,

as God grasps our arms for help; for each of us is
His beloved servant
never far.

If you want, the Virgin will come walking
down the street pregnant
with Light and sing ...

Prayer *Donald Hilton*

Come to us, Lord Jesus Christ,
come as we search the Scriptures and see God’s hidden purpose,
come as we walk the lonely road, needing a companion,
come when life mystifies and perplexes us,
come into our disappointments and unease,
come at table where we share our food and hopes,
and, coming, open our eyes to recognise you. **Amen.**

so may we open ourselves also
to contain your life within us,
through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Tuesday 17th December

Isaiah 11.1-9

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
5 Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
6 The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
7 The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
8 The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
9 They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

Week two: Apocalypse Now. Change is afoot, newness stirs, the unexpected is revealed

Monday 9th December

Isaiah 40.1-5

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.
3 A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.
4 Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

God's Grandeur *Gerard Manley Hopkins*

(with a few gender-inclusive tweaks)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do *(we)* then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears *(our)* smudge and shares *(our)* smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs--
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Prayer *Angela Ashwin*

From rushing round to stillness,
O God, we come.
From being pulled in all directions
to the simplicity of this moment,
O God, we come.
Help us to realign
our will with your will
and our spirits with your Spirit
as we reach out to you
in the silence. **Amen.**

Tuesday 10th December

Psalm 146.5-10

5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.
6 He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever.
7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free,
8 the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous.
9 The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
10 The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord.

Week three: O Come, Emmanuel

Monday 16th December

Isaiah 52.7-9

7 How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”
8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;
together they shout for joy.
When the Lord returns to Zion,
they will see it with their own eyes.
9 Burst into songs of joy together,
you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

Excerpt on eternal birth *Meister Eckhart*

We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I also do not give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time. When the Son of God is begotten in us.

Prayer *Janet Morley*

O God,
you fulfil our desire
beyond what we can bear:
as Mary gave her appalled assent
to your intimate promise,

He is in the bird, that shameless flyer.
He is in the potter who makes clay into a kiss.

Heaven replies:
Not so! Not so!

I say thus and thus
and heaven smashes my words.

Is not God in the hiss of the river?

Not so! Not so!

Is not God in the ant heap,
stepping, clutching, dying, being born?

Not so! Not so!

Where then?
I cannot move an inch.

Look to your heart
that flutters in and out like a moth.
God is not indifferent to your need.
You have a thousand prayers
but God has one.

Prayer *Kate McIlhagga*

Christ our Advent hope,
bare brown trees,
etched dark across a winter sky,
leaves fallen, rustling,
ground hard and cold,
remind us to prepare for your coming;
remind us to prepare for the time
when the soles of your feet will touch the ground,
when you will become one of us
to be one with us. **Amen.**

The Place Where We Are Right *Yehuda Amichai*

From the place where we are right
flowers will never grow
in the spring.

The place where we are right
is hard and trampled
like a yard.

But doubts and loves
dig up the world
like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
where the ruined
house once stood.

Prayer *Ray Simpson*

The earth is becoming a wasteland:
Breath of the Most High, come and renew it.
Humanity is becoming a battleground:
Child of Peace, come and unite it.
Society is becoming a playground:
Key of Destiny, open doors to our true path.
The world is becoming a no-man's land:
God-with-us, come and make your home here. **Amen.**

Wednesday 11th December

Isaiah 35.1-10

- 1 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus,
- 2 it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God.
- 3 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;
- 4 say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will

come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”

5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

7 The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it.

9 No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there,

10 and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks *Jane Kenyon*

I am the blossom pressed in a book,
found again after two hundred years . . .
I am the maker, the lover, and the keeper . . .

When the young girl who starves
sits down to a table
she will sit beside me . . .

I am food on the prisoner's plate . . .
I am water rushing to the wellhead,
filling the pitcher until it spills . . .

I am the patient gardener
of the dry and weedy garden . . .

I am the stone step,
the latch, and the working hinge . . .

you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.

5 Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.

6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

Not so. Not so. *Anne Sexton*

I cannot walk an inch
without trying to walk to God.
I cannot move a finger
without trying to touch God.

Perhaps it is this way:
He is in the graves of the horses.
He is in the swarm, the frenzy of the bees,
He is in the tailor mending my pantsuit.
He is in Boston, raised up by the skyscrapers.

The cats and I chased the bat
in circles—living room, kitchen,
pantry, kitchen, living room ...
At every turn it evaded us

like the identity of the third person
in the Trinity: the one
who spoke through the prophets,
the one who astounded Mary
by suddenly coming near.

Prayer Janet Morley

O unknown God,
whose presence is announced
not among the impressive
but in obscurity;
come, overshadow us now,
and speak to our hidden places;
that, entering your darkness with joy,
we may choose to co-operate with you,
through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Saturday 14th December

Isaiah 9.1-7

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
2 on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.
3 You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.
4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat,

I am the heart contracted by joy . . .
the longest hair, white
before the rest . . .

I am there in the basket of fruit
presented to the widow. . . .

I am the musk rose opening
unattended, the fern on the boggy summit . . .

I am the one whose love
overcomes you, already with you
when you think to call my name. . . .

Prayer Janet Morley

God of the poor,
we long to meet you
yet almost miss you;
we strive to help you
yet only discover our need.
Interrupt our comfort
with your nakedness,
touch our possessiveness
with your poverty,
and surprise our guilt
with the grace of your welcome
in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Thursday 12th December

Isaiah 7.10-14

10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz,
11 "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the
highest heights."
12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."
13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try
the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?"

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Transcendental Etude *Adrienne Rich*

No one ever told us we had to study our lives,
make of our lives a study, as if learning natural history
or music, that we should begin
with the simple exercises first
and slowly go on trying
the hard ones, practising till strength
and accuracy became one with the daring
to leap into transcendence, take the chance
of breaking down the wild arpeggio
or faulting the full sentence of the fugue.
—And in fact we can't live like that: we take on
everything at once before we've even begun
to read or mark time, we're forced to begin
in the midst of the hard movement,
the one already sounding as we are born.

Prayer *Janet Morley*

God our deliverer,
whose approaching birth
still shakes the foundations of our world:
May we so wait for your coming
with eagerness and hope
that we embrace without terror
the labour pangs of the new age,
through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Friday 13th December

Psalm 96

- 1 Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

- 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
- 4 For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
- 6 Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.
- 7 Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- 8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.
- 9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.
- 10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
- 12 Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
- 13 Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.

The Bat *Jane Kenyon*

I was reading about rationalism,
the kind of thing we do up north
in early winter, where the sun
leaves work for the day at 4:15

Maybe the world is intelligible
to the rational mind;
and maybe we light the lamps at dusk
for nothing ...

Then I heard the wings overhead.