



# Advent Contemplative Space

A space for prayer, readings and silence  
daily throughout Advent on Zoom

Monday - Friday

30th November - 23rd December 2020

St James's Church, Piccadilly

# Advent Contemplative Space

## A space for prayer, readings and silence, weekdays throughout Advent

Please join us for this series of Advent reflections. Each session will be facilitated by a member of St James's community and will include a welcome, reading from Scripture, a second reading (usually a poem), guided silence with opportunities to reflect in whatever way is meaningful for you, time to share reflections, and a closing prayer.

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

## All sessions will take place on Zoom [here](#).

### Schedule

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Mon 30th Nov  | 1.00pm - 2.00pm<br>Mark 13.33-37 The day and hour unknown<br>Annie Dillard - Teaching a stone to talk (excerpt)           |
| Tues 1st Dec  | 1.00pm - 2.00pm<br>139.11-18 Darkness and Creation<br>Pablo Neruda - Keeping Quiet  |
| Weds 2nd Dec  | 1.00pm - 2.00pm<br>John 1.1-15 In the Beginning<br>Rainer maria Rilke - You, Darkness                                     |
| Thurs 3rd Dec | 1.00pm - 2.00pm<br>Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 A time for everything<br>Wendell Berry - I go among tress                           |
| Fri 4th Dec   | 1.00pm - 2.00pm<br>Luke 1.26-38 Birth of Jesus foretold<br>Wendy M. Wright - Wreathed in Flesh (excerpt)                  |
| Mon 7th Dec   | 10.45am - 11.30am<br>Isaiah 40.1-5 Comfort for God's people<br>Gerard Manley Hopkins - God's Grandeur                     |
| Tues 8th Dec  | 1.00pm - 2.00pm<br>Psalm 146.5-10 Blessed are those whose hope is in God<br>Yehuda Amichai - The Place where we are right |

- Weds 9th Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
Isaiah 35.1-10 Joy of the redeemed  
Jane Kenyon - Briefly it enters and briefly speaks
- Thurs 10th Dec 1.00pm - 2.00pm  
Isaiah 7.10-14 A sign in the House of David  
Adrienne Rich - Transcendental Etude
- Fri 11th Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
Psalm 96 Sing to the Lord a new song  
Jane Kenyon - The Bat
- Mon 14th Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
Isaiah 52.7-9 How beautiful are the mountains  
Meister Eckhart - on eternal birth (excerpt)
- Tues 15th Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
Isaiah 11.1-9 The branch from Jesse  
St John of the Cross - Sabbath poem
- Weds 16th Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
John 1.14-18 The Word became flesh  
Denise Levertov - Mass for the Day of St Didymus
- Thurs 17th Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
John 3.16-19 For God so loved the world  
Denise Levertov - The Thread
- Fri 18th Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
Psalm 24 The earth is the Lord's and everything in it  
Jan van Ruysbroek - (The Creator) desires (fragment)
- Mon 21st Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
Micah 5.2 From out of Bethlehem  
Michael Leunig - The rapture of sadness past (excerpt)
- Tues 22nd Dec 1.00pm - 2.00pm  
Isaiah 9.2-7 The people who walked in darkness  
Anne Sexton - Not so. Not so.
- Weds 23rd Dec 10.45am - 11.30am  
Luke 2.8-14 Sign to the shepherds  
Meditations with Julian of Norwich (excerpt)

# Week one: Slowing, Stopping, Waiting

Monday 30th November

## 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** from *Bread of Tomorrow: Prayers for the Church Year*,  
*Janet Morley, ed.*

For the darkness of waiting  
of not knowing what is to come

of staying ready and quiet and attentive,  
we praise you, O God:

**For the darkness and the light  
are both alike to you.**

For the darkness of staying silent  
for the terror of having nothing to say  
and for the greater terror  
of needing to say nothing,  
we praise you, O God:

**For the darkness and the light  
are both alike to you.**

For the darkness of loving  
in which it is safe to surrender  
to let go of our self-protection  
and to stop holding back our desire,  
we praise you, O God:

**For the darkness and the light  
are both alike to you.**

For the darkness of choosing  
when you give us the moment  
to speak, and act, and change,  
and we cannot know what we have set in motion,  
but we still have to take the risk,  
we praise you, O God:

**For the darkness and the light  
are both alike to you.**

For the darkness of hoping  
in a world which longs for you,  
for the wrestling and labouring of all creation  
for wholeness and justice and freedom,  
we praise you, O God.

**For the darkness and the light  
are both alike to you.**

**Tuesday 1st 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.

**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 2nd 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:  
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 3rd 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.

### **Friday 4th 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** - *Iona Community in Scotland*

You keep us waiting.  
You, the God of all time,  
Want us to wait for the right time in which to discover  
Who we are, where we must go,  
Who will be with us, and what we must do.

**So, thank you ... for the waiting time.**

You keep us looking.  
You, the God of all space,  
Want us to look in the right and wrong places for signs of hope,  
For people who are hopeless,  
For visions of a better world

that will appear among the disappointments of the world we know.  
**So, thank you ... for the looking time.**

You keep us loving.  
You, the God whose name is love,  
Want us to be like you –  
To love the loveless and the unlovely and the unlovable;  
To love without jealousy or design or threat,  
And most difficult of all, to love ourselves.  
**So, thank you ... for the loving time.**

And in all this you keep us,  
Through hard questions with no easy answers;  
Through failing where we hoped to succeed and making an impact when we  
felt useless;  
Through the patience and the dreams and the love of others;  
And through Jesus Christ and his Spirit, you keep us.

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

**Monday 7th 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

### **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 8th 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.

### **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** *by Roy Henderson*

You are God, deepest desire,  
of a world that longs to rejoice,

yearns to be set free,  
and desires to dance and sing for joy ...

Like the bulb that breaks into blossom  
buried the long, slow winter,  
Like a prisoner who breaks into song  
released after long nights imprisoned,  
Like an exile who breaks into a run,  
returned after the long march for home ...

Now, in this time together  
let your life blossom within us,  
a freedom song break from our lips,  
and grant us the release we crave ...

If there is a corner of our life  
that has fallen dead, lifeless ... revive us.  
If there are powers that imprison, trap, shut us in, ...  
open wide the doors for us, to life.  
If we feel a distance between us and you,  
where truly we belong ...  
call our name, and welcome us home.

Because this is Advent,  
the longing time, the waiting time, the hoping time.

The time when we stand with creation itself, on tip toe,  
and sing out our longing for a world  
made new and fresh and free and alive ...  
where we find you, coming to find us,  
making your home among us,  
with Jesus ...  
who is called 'God with us'.

Through whom and by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
you enable us to pray as one

**Amen.**

## Wednesday 9th 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 ...

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 10th 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 11th 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.

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.**

## Week three: O Come, Emmanuel

Monday 14th 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.

### **On eternal birth (excerpt)** *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,  
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;

4 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.

**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** – *adapted from ‘Advent in the new universe story 2020’*

Dear God,

We see with wonder that since the very beginning the mystery of Christ is at  
work in the world as a whole.

We know we share the air we breathe with all creation on Earth.

We celebrate with humility and awe this mystery of divine self-bestowal.

We are changed from the inside out through renewal of our understanding  
of both the human Jesus and the eternal Christ.

**Amen.**

Wednesday 16th December

**John 1.14-18**

<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> (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.'") <sup>16</sup> Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> 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?

**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.**

**Thursday 17th December**

**John 3.16-19**

<sup>16</sup> '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.

<sup>17</sup> '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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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,  
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** *Roy Henderson*

Put simply, God, We want to live.  
To *live* – not exist. Live.  
We want to live.  
That is what we are waiting for. Life.

With all of creation we long to live  
To know the freedom that comes from saying  
Yes – yes God let it be so.

To live as Mary lived,  
vulnerable, yet unshakably strong.  
Subject of gossip and speculation,  
yet bearer of your living Word.  
Yes – yes God let it be so.

So we pray for the people:  
Who go hungry today  
– may they eat their fill.  
Who are heartbroken today  
– may they sing for joy.  
Who are not free today  
– may the dance and jig.  
Yes – God let it be so.

We thank you,  
For the lives of all the people who have loved us,  
Inspired us, challenged us, comforted us...  
Who have brought your good news to us...  
All who rest in your love and our love,  
may we be worthy of all they have given us  
to hand on..  
Yes – yes God let it be so.

Now, quietly, in this moment ...  
we bring our own concerns,  
in the language of our hearts ...

*(silence)*

Put simply, God.  
We want to live,  
like Jesus.  
Alive for others. Alive in you.  
We desire all things to be filled with your glory.

Yes – yes God let it be so.  
**Amen.**

### **Friday 18th 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

with all that distorts your truth,

and make our hearts attentive

to your liberating voice,

in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

**Monday 21st 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 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.

**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.

## Tuesday 22nd December

### Isaiah 9.2-7

2 The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
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,  
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 Counselor, 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.  
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** *adapted from 'Advent in the new universe story 2020'*

Dear God,  
we pray alongside everyone who has ever lived through the drama of  
Advent and Christmas,  
each of us unique dimensions of the universe,  
each of us bringing to birth God's spirit in our time and place in the cosmic  
story,  
revealing God's presence and love, bringing Christ to our time.  
With the psalmist we call on you: 'Breathe life into our lungs so we can  
shout your name!'  
**Amen.**

**Wednesday 23rd 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 Savior 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 favor 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.

### **Prayer - adapted from ‘Advent in the new universe story 2020’**

Dear God,

As we wait expectantly for the revelation of the Christ,

Open us to repentance and rethinking of the nature of divine presence in  
our lives.

Help us to hear your insistent call to incarnation.

May we, with Mary, respond with assent, radical amazement and awe to  
the realisation that our expanding cosmos is infused and alive with divinity.

Help us to incarnate the mystery of Christ in our time, our lives.

**Amen.**