

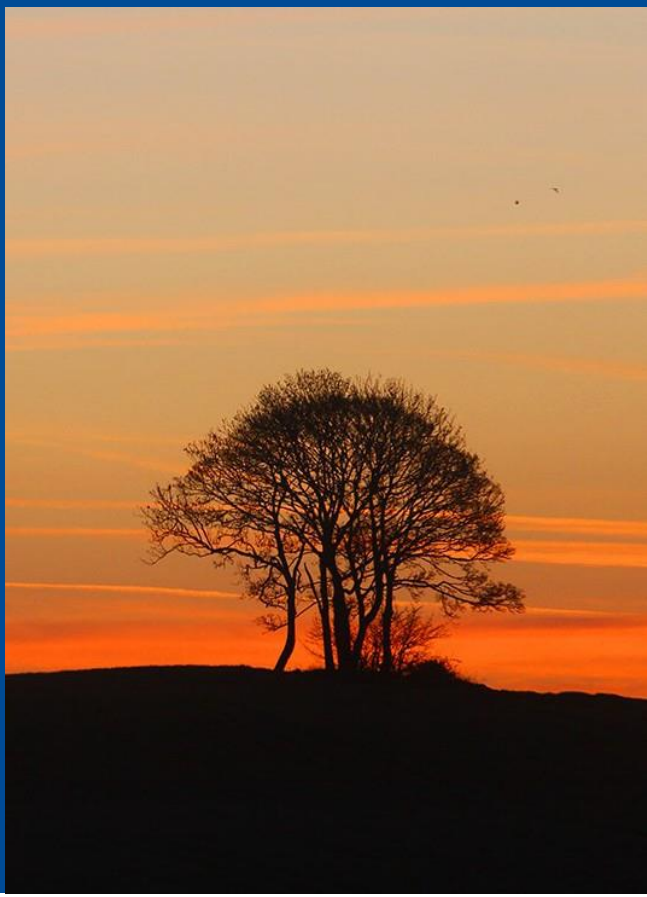
Advent Contemplative Space



St James's
PICCADILLY

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

Monday, Wednesday, Friday
4th - 22nd December 2023 at 6pm



Advent Contemplative Space

A space for prayer, readings, and silence, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 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 from 6pm - 7pm
Zoom link [here](#)

Monday 4th December

Mark 13.33-37

The day and hour unknown. Teaching a stone to talk (excerpt)
- Annie Dillard

Wednesday 6th December

Psalm 139.11-18

Keeping Quiet - Pablo Neruda

Friday 8th December

John 1.1-15

You, Darkness - Rainer Maria Rilke

Monday 11th December

Luke 1.26-38

Two pursuits - Christina Georgina Rossetti

Wednesday 13th December

Book of Wisdom: Sirach

Mary, ground of all being - Hildegard of Bingen

Friday 15th December

Psalm 96

The earth is my sister - Susan Griffin

Monday 18th December

John 1.14-18

When the words stop - Hafiz

Wednesday 20th December

1 John 4.7-10

This is the discovery - Howard Thurman

Friday 22nd December

Micah 5.2

The Rapture of Sadness Past (excerpt) - Michael Leunig

Waiting, Listening, and Paying Attention

Monday 4th December at 6pm

Mark 13.33-37

Jesus said "Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the door keeper to be on the watch.

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—

lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

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

Dear God,

In this season of Advent let us pray that we come to recognise with Thomas Berry that 'If the outer world is diminished in its grandeur, then the emotional, imaginative, intellectual, and spiritual life of the human is diminished and extinguished ...

Our task at this critical moment is to awaken the energies needed to create the New World and to evoke a universal community of all parts of life.'

Wednesday 6th December at 6pm

Psalm 139.11-18

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

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

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

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

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.

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

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

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 ...

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

O holy One, give us the discernment and courage to know
what actions we must take to move towards a universe where
all is considered sacred and an integral part of your divine gift
to us.

Friday 8th December at 6pm

John 1.1-15

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God;
all things were made through him, and without him was not
anything made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not
over-come 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.

Mary Mother of God. The Divine Feminine

Monday 11th December at 6pm

Luke 1.26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

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. 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. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Two pursuits *Christina Georgina Rossetti*

A voice said "Follow, follow" and I rose
and followed far into the dreamy night,
Turning my back against the present light.
It led me where the bluest water flows,
And would not let me drink: where the corn grows
I dared not pause, but went uncheered by sight
Or touch; until at length in evil plight
It left me, wearied out with many woes.
Some time I sat as one bereft of sense:
But soon another voice from very far
Called, "Follow, follow and I rose again.
Now on my night has dawned a blessed star:
Kind steady hands my sinking steps sustain,
And will not leave me till I shall go hence.

Prayer

Laudato Si, mi Signore (*Praise to you my Lord*)

Pope Francis

In the words of this beautiful canticle, Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

Praise to you my lord, through our Sister Mother earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs"

The sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of goods with which God has endowed her.

We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.

The violence present in our heart, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and all forms of life.

This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor. She "groans in travail"

We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth, our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters"

Wednesday 13th December at 6pm

Book of Wisdom: Sirach

Sophia (the Spirit of Wisdom) I loved;
I sought her out in my youth, I fell in love with her beauty,
and I longed to make her my bride ...
Once you have grasped her, never let her go.
In the end she will transform herself into pure joy.

Mary, ground of all being *Hildegard of Bingen*

Mary, ground of all being, Greetings!
Mary, the heavens gift the grass with moist dew.
The entire earth rejoices.
From your womb the seed sprouted forth.

The birds of the air nest in this tree.
Blessed is the fruit of your womb!
Your womb's fruitfulness is food for humankind.
Great is the joy at this delicious banquet!
In you, mild virgin, is the fullness of all joy.

Prayer *Alain de Lille* (12th century theologian)

O Child of God and Mother of things
Bond of the world, its firm tied knot,
Jewel set among things of earth
and mirror to all that passes away
Morning star of our spheres;
Peace, love, power, regimen and strength,
Order, law end, pathway, captain and sources
Life, light, glory, beauty and shape
O rule of our world!

Embrace the Beauty, the Joy, and the Terror

Friday 15th December at 6pm

Psalm 96

Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.

Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous deeds among all peoples.

For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.

Splendour and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come into his courts.

Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.

Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

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 earth is my sister *Susan Griffin*

This earth is my sister, I love her daily grace,
her silent daring, how loved I am,
how we admire this strength in each other,
All that we have lost, all that we know,
we are stunned by this beauty
I do not forget what she is to me and what I am to her.

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.

Monday 18th December at 6pm

John 1.14-18

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.
(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.'") Out of his fullness
we have all received grace in place of grace already given.
For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came
through Jesus Christ. 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.

When the words stop *Hafiz*

When the words stop
And you can endure the silence
That reveals your hearts pain of emptiness
Or that great wrenching sweet longing,
That is the time to try and listen
To what the Beloved's eyes most want to say.

Prayer

The Bhagavad Gita

When you offer with love a leaf, a flower, or water to me
I accept that offer of love from the giver who gives of herself.
Whatever you do, or eat, or offer,
Whatever you do, do as an offering to me.

Wednesday 20th December at 6 pm

1 John 4.7-10

Dear friends let us love one another because love comes from God.

Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

And God showed his love for us by sending his only son into the world, so that we might have love through him.

This is what love is; it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

This is the discovery *Howard Thurman*

This is the discovery made by the slave that finds his expression in the song – a complete and final refusal to be stopped. The spirit broods over all the recalcitrant and stubborn aspects of experience until they begin slowly but inevitably to take the shape of one's deep desiring.

There is a bottomless resourcefulness in man that ultimately enables him to transform 'the spear of frustration into a shaft of light.' Under such a circumstance even one's deepest distress becomes so sanctified that a vast illumination points the way to the land one seeks. This is God in man; because of it man stands in immediate candidacy for the power to absorb all the pain of life without destroying his joy.

Prayer

from **Psalms 96**

Let the sea thunder and all that it holds,
and the world with all who live in it:

let all the rivers clap their hands and the mountains
shout for joy, at the presence of Yaweh.

Friday 22nd December at 6pm

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.

A prayer for our earth

from a prayer at the end of encyclical **Laudato si'** (*Praise be to you*), written by Pope Francis and quoted in the '**Sleepers Wake' Advent Book**

All powerful God, You are present in in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures;
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned
and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty,
not pollution and destruction.
Amen.

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