

Winchester, Eastleigh, and Romsey Circuit
Worship at home sheet 24th December 2023
Advent 4
Prepared by Revd Ruth Fry

Opening liturgy

We listen as Advent reaches its fulfilment, we listen to the frenzied activity that is all around us, we listen to the travail and the trauma, we listen to joys and celebration.

God of all **listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.**

We listen in the midst of noise and silence.
We listen in aloneness and togetherness.
We listen to the everyday, the ordinary, and there within it all, we listen to the voice of God.
God of all **listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.**

We listen to messages new and old, from friends far and near.
We listen to familiar words, hymns and songs, Bible stories telling all.
God of all **listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.**

On this Christmas Eve, let us open our selves afresh to listen ever more to the messages of God that lighten our paths, confirm our faith, embrace our being, and call us to be messengers ourselves.
God of all **listen to my cries and let me hear your voice.**

Advent God, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, that most extraordinary of gifts, let us open our ears to listen, our eyes to see, our hearts to love and our very beings to be enfolded in your Spirit. Let us listen and be open to our inner selves, to the world around us, to the sights, the sounds, the senses, and the needs that surround us.
Let us listen to your still small voice and be open to your indwelling Spirit.
Let us be messengers of your good news that we have heard and let us be open, too, to listen to your good news that others share with us. Amen.

Listen, read, pray, or sing along
https://youtu.be/cZGVQKjn_V8?si=0ohLcacfQwW_W099x

Like a candle flame,
flickering small in our darkness.
Uncreated light
shines through infant eyes.

God is with us, alleluia.
God is with us, alleluia.
Come to save us, alleluia.
Come to save us.
Alleluia !

Stars and angels sing,
yet the earth sleeps in shadows ;
can this tiny spark
set a world on fire ?

Yet his light shall shine
from our lives, Spirit blazing,
as we touch the flame
of his holy fire.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)
Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 176
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Prayer

God of all glory,
You brought the universe into existence,
And raised up witnesses to your greatness and love.
We praise and adore you.
Grant that by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit
We may worship and serve you,
And praise your holy name;
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Read 2 Samuel 7 v1-11, v16

Read Luke 1 v26-38

Reflection

Christians will face many distractions this final week of Advent. The images of war in Gaza are unwatchable. Retailers bombard us with the lie that we can spend our way to happiness. Family gatherings and travel may well end up all being rather stressful.

How do we find an authentic Christmas faith?
How can we even begin to comprehend the sheer magnitude of the incarnation?

In her book *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Annie Dillard lamented how casually we often confess our faith: *"Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets! Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews! For the sleeping God may awake someday and take offense, or the waking God may draw us to where we can never return."*

John Betjeman in his poem "[Christmas](#)" sums it up for me.

And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me?

And is it true? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissued fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells

Can with this single Truth compare —
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

Luke tells us of an Angel visiting an ordinary young Jewish girl named Mary to bring her a message from God. Mary cannot understand how the angel's message could possibly be true. The angel goes on to tell Mary that her elderly relative Elizabeth has conceived a son and says, *'For nothing is impossible with God'*.

Several verses later when Luke tells us of Mary's visit to Elizabeth Mary speaks the powerful words of what are known today as the Magnificat. The Magnificat is the great New Testament song of liberation – personal and social, moral, and economic – a revolutionary document of intense conflict and victory. It praises God's liberating actions on behalf of Mary which provide the pattern and model of all God's actions on behalf of marginal and exploited people. Mary's song is precious to women and other oppressed people for its vision of their concrete freedom from systemic injustice – from oppression by political rulers on their 'thrones' and by the arrogant and rich.

An authentic Christmas faith must surely therefore include prayer and action in partnership with God, the baby born as one of us to bring salvation to the whole created order.

Listen, read, pray, or sing along

<https://youtu.be/pliqObTHxUQ?si=Qc5RNnKj7BWsbiJ5>

The Angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame ;
'All hail,' said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favoured lady.'

Gloria !

'For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
all generations laud and honour thee,

thy son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold ;
most highly favoured lady.'

Gloria !

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
'To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said,
'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name : '
most highly favoured lady.

Gloria !

Of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever
say,

'Most highly favoured lady.'

Gloria !

Sabine Baring-Gould (1834–1924)
Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 187 .

Intercessions

Let us pray.

In joyful expectation of his coming to reign we pray
to our Lord, saying,

Come, Lord Jesus

Come Lord Jesus

Come to your world as King of the nations
We pray especially for Israel and Palestine,
for a just and peaceful solution to the ongoing
conflict.

Before you rulers will stand in silence.

Come, Lord Jesus,

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to your Church as lord and Judge,
We pray for churches everywhere living out the
Gospel
and seeking to follow you.

Help us to live in the light of your coming

And give us a longing to do your will.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to your people as Saviour and bearer of pain.
We pray for all who are ill, for those who mourn
and for

Those who face financial struggles.
Enfold us all in your love and mercy,
Wipe away the tears of failure, fear, and distress,
And set us free to serve you forever.

Come Lord Jesus

Come Lord Jesus.

Come to us from heaven

With power and great glory,

And lift us up to meet you,

Where with all your saints and angels,

We will live with you forever,

Come, Lord Jesus

Come, lord Jesus.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

*If you give your weekly offering through an
envelope scheme or in cash, please set it aside, and
pray with those who give using Standing orders.*

Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them
our lives, to be used in mission and service through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Read and pray

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
give the Lord his rightful place !
Garlands, gleam with his charisma,
tinsel, glisten with his grace !
Jesus is the heart of Christmas
welcome him with love and praise !

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
light your candles from his flame !
Hang your holly in his honour,
trim each fir tree in his name !
Jesus is the heart of Christmas
celebrate the day he came !

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
share him in each card you send.
Give each gift in love and friendship,
share his gifts which have no end.

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
Lord and Saviour, Guide and Friend.

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
find his peace on busy days.
May the messages of Advent
guide us through the Christmas maze.
Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
sing each carol in his praise !

Marguerite Kendrick (b. 1927)

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Closing prayer

May our lives and our prayers
Be like lights shining in dark places.
And may the blessing of God-
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-
Fill our hearts and homes
With light this Christmas
And in the new year to come.

Amen.

Resources taken from: The Methodist Worship Book 1999 TMCP,
<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays>, the women's bible
commentary 2014 SPCK

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