

The Vine at Home
Second Sunday of Advent Time – Year C
Sunday 5th December 2021

Call to worship

Advent God, I am waiting for you. Advent God, come, that I may know your presence.
Advent God, I look to your coming, trusting in the power of Immanuel, God with us. Amen.¹

Hymn: 169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuTGA5ke-iY>

Opening Prayers

A prayer of adoration

Praise be to you, O God, source of all justice and fount of all peace.
You summoned the universe from chaos – amidst the confusion of our lives we adore you.
You breathed your Spirit into humanity to give life – with the breath we have we worship you.

In this season of expectation, we rejoice in your harmony, Creator God,
we receive your peace, Jesus Christ, we are filled with your hope, Holy Spirit.

Praise be to you, O God. Amen. *[Pause – hold a moment of stillness]*.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Advent God, we hear your words of hope echoing down the centuries and give you thanks.
From the dawn of time you have poured out your love on humankind,
when we became slaves, you freed us, when we wandered in the wilderness, you found us,
when we rebelled, you wooed us back, when we had forgotten how to live, you came in
Jesus, when we needed courage, you gave us your Holy Spirit.

As I anticipate this season of celebration, as I rejoice again in your coming amongst us,
I am listening for your words of hope echoing down the centuries and give you thanks.
Amen. *[Pause – hold a moment of stillness]*.

A prayer of confession

Gracious God,
You speak words of hope, but so often we despair;
have mercy Lord.
You call us to peace, but so often we live in discord;
have mercy Lord.
You give us a song of joy, but we rehearse a litany of complaint;
have mercy Lord.
You invite us to seek justice, but we fight for our rights;
have mercy Lord. *[Pause – hold a moment of stillness]*.

In this Advent season, I rejoice to hear your voice offering me forgiveness.

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

May your Spirit at work in me like sap rising in a tree, enable me and those I love to bear fruits of repentance and hope. In Jesus's name, Amen.²

You could say the Lord's prayer.

Reading: Luke 3:1-6 – The Proclamation of John the Baptist

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler^[a] of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler^[b] of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler^[c] of Abilene, **2** during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3** He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, **4** as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. **5** Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; **6** and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Reflections on the reading

The wild man becomes the way-maker for Jesus' life and ministry.

The outcast, the eccentric, the bizarre guy with the locust-eating habit finds himself heralded and blessed, as the one making space for the coming of the son of God, the arrival of the Christian religion, and the transformation of human history.

John steps out of the shadows, and acts as the model for us all. No matter how wild, no matter how eccentric, no matter how much we might feel like we don't 'fit in', Jesus is calling us. We have a part to play. *You* have a part to play. Are you ready?

There is a moment in the *Lord of the Rings* films where Frodo – the main character – turns to Gandalf – the figure of wisdom and guidance throughout the story – and says: ‘I wish the ring had never come to me, I wish none of this had ever happened’. Gandalf's wise and empowering response is: ‘so do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.’

It is a seminal moment in the story, and a much used and shared quote, but it also has a lot to say to us today, about vocations and callings and making the most of what we have. Perhaps, as we each reflect on what it is that we are supposed to do with the ‘time that is given to us’, we can learn from John the Baptist.

As you read the story, and reflect on the role John the Baptist plays in the Advent traditions and the Christian narrative, what lessons do you think you are learning?

How can you point people towards Jesus in the way that John does?

² Opening prayers written by Jill Baker

Are there practical things you can do to help 'prepare a way' for Jesus and his ministry in your life, your home, your community, and the whole world this Christmas season and beyond?

Spend some time reflecting on and thinking about these questions. You might like to share them with someone else, or talk about your answers with a friend or someone you trust. They could form the basis of a group discussion.

You could pray this prayer, when you are ready.

Advent God, in the midst of this Advent season, help me to see you.
God of John the Baptist, help me to point the way to you, so that others may see something of your glory, revealed in Jesus, this Christmas season.
In my preparations for and my celebrating of Christmas, help me to remember the miracle of Immanuel, God with us. Amen.³

[Pause – hold a moment of stillness].

Prayers for the world

You may want to find a globe, a map of the world, or pull up a picture of the planet earth on the internet. Hold a moment of quiet, in which you pray for the needs of the world.

The places you are aware of where there is conflict and war.

The communities you are aware of where there is poverty and injustice.

The people you are aware of who are in need of prayer today.

In the stillness, hold their names, faces and situations in your mind.

If you find it helpful, visit a news website or find a copy of the newspaper, and read through it, prayerfully, offering up the people involved in each story to God in prayer. You might like to do this for 5 – 10 minutes a day during this week, helping you to feel connected to our world and to lament with those who grieve, and hope with those who hope.

When you are finished, why not say 'Amen', out loud, as a way of committing the activity to God in prayer.

Blessing

Purify our hearts, O Lord, that I might make space for you to change and transform me.
Open my mind to thoughts of you, that I might be a person of learning and growth.
Engage my spirit, and help me to connect to the hum of the spiritual base-note that is all around us.
In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen.⁴

³ Reflection written by Tim Baker

⁴ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

