

PRAYERS AND LITURGIES FOR ADVENT, CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR

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Ann Siddall

Call to worship at the beginning of Advent (1)

(This call to worship requires the communion table to be empty as worship begins. During the prayer, purple material, a Bible, a candle, and a wrapped gift are laid on the table. And during the worship that follows a few moments of quiet space are left after the Bible reading, after the prayers of intercession, and before the Benediction and people are invited to stay in the silence with the words “And now in a few moments of quietness, let us watch and wait to honour the Christ who comes.”)

In the midst of frenzied shopping and end-of-year weariness,
we spread out a purple cloth, (a purple cloth is spread over the communion table)
read again the ancient stories, (a Bible is placed on the table)
and light a candle in the darkness, (a candle or an Advent wreath is placed and lit)
to celebrate a visitation.

Gathered here we declare our intention to live
as if the greatest gift in the world
were about to be placed into our hands (a wrapped parcel is laid on the table),
and as if the Giver has understood
our deepest needs, our most heartfelt prayers.

Like Mary, may we be surprised by our calling;
like Simeon and Anna, may the years increase our faith;
like sleepy shift workers on a hillside, may our eyes be opened;
like Joseph may we listen to our dreams;
for this season requires our creative imagination.

There is a Presence in our world that asks to be seen,
who will stay awake?
There is a coming to our world that seeks a welcome,
who will offer hospitality?
Even now Jesus Christ is moving towards us.

Our worship this morning will include some quiet spaces,
space after the Scripture is read,
space during the offering of our prayers,
and space before the Benediction.
In the spaces you are invited to watch and wait, look and listen. Christ comes.

Advent call to worship (2)

What will set us journeying in search of the Christ this Advent?
How far are we prepared to go out of our way
to look for the signs of His coming,
and to prepare a path?

How will we travel through this season,
will we be burdened by responsibilities and tasks,
loaded with others' expectations, overwhelmed by their needs?
Will we be full of joy or weary of grief?

What will guide our steps in these weeks?
Will we follow a thread of longing,
the hint of an alternative pathway,
the words and music of the gathered community?

Sisters and brothers in Christ, Advent awaits us.
Let us place our feet on the road and begin the journey.
May we find in familiar words, rituals and customs
the birth of the new thing that awaits us. AMEN

A prayer for courage

Holy One, You call us to live in this world
as courageous bearers of hope,
standing in the face of all that seems
to contradict your Gospel and demean life.
Let us be courageous.

As the advertisements turn Christmas into a product,
and elevate prosperity and material possessions,
help us to show that the greatest gift of all
is Your presence at the centre of our lives.
Let us be thankful.

As families gather and tensions run high,
save us from false expectations and exclusivity;
from holding onto old hurts and resentments,
and from seeking love instead of giving love.

Let us be loving.

Let our celebration of Christmas be characterised
by our willingness to risk doing it differently,
and our witnessing to a deeper source of hope
than that which can be wrapped in bright paper.

Let us celebrate!

A prayer of longing and waiting

Holy One, we have waited
through many a long night,
for your coming:
like those of old our eyes
have been red from weeping,
our minds numb from anxiety,
and our hands held out in longing.

And this Advent season
sees us waiting again,
alongside our own struggles,
and alongside a world
torn apart by greed and need,
poverty and affluence,
hunger and obesity.

When will You come to us?
When will we see a star we can trust?
When will wise ones rise up in our midst?
When will humble workers see angels?
How long, O God, must we wait
for the promises to be fulfilled?
How long will You keep us waiting?

So as once more we play the waiting game,
unable to bring about the changes we seek,
unable to put an end to society's pain,
unable to appease all the hunger,
help us to be tenacious,
unyielding in our expectation
that Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

AMEN

We wait for you

Jesus our Christ,
as the hot sun releases the perfume of the gum trees,
as country people wait for rain to soften the hard earth,
as the city streets begin to radiate heat,
we wait for You.

Long-awaited One,
as we pull the Christmas music out of the cupboard,
dust off the Advent wreath,
and begin to search for new prayers for Christmas,
help us not to be so over-prepared that we forget to wait for You.

Gift of love,
as we queue at the checkout with arms loaded,
and buy the ingredients for the Christmas pudding,
and try to find last year's greeting card list,
save us from filling the quiet spaces of waiting for You.

You, who came into a troubled world,
are paused once more at our threshold,
hearing the cries of Your people,
and searching for a way to come
to those who wait for You.

Let us be among the crowds
who stand with eyes turned towards a far horizon,
and ears tuned to hear the softest footstep.
Let us be attuned to Your comings,
blessed are those who wait for You.

AMEN.

Let the celebrations begin

Like eager children waiting for dawn,
tearing at the wrapping to get to the gift,
waking sleeping parents with shouts of joy,
let our celebrations begin!

May this Christmas morning
find us able to say "Alleluia"
even in the midst of pain and anxiety,
because You are our hope.

Jesus Christ, come to us,
fill our hearts with joy in knowing
this deeper truth that life contains,
that because You come, all will be well.

Let us witness not to successful lives,
not to perfect health, faultless families,
highly achieving work, or new possessions,
but to the quiet inner knowing of You.

And as we gather this joyful morning,
let our Alleluias rise from willing lips,
from lives opened to Your gift,
and from hearts filled with Your love.

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
and Amen!**