

Advent 2016

Words and prayers for the Sundays in Advent. Originally produced by the North Western Baptist Association in 2016.



The Word of the Lord – a word and a prayer for the first Sunday in Advent

As Advent begins, the repercussions of Brexit and the election of an unexpected candidate as US president continue to echo. The message of the moment is that nothing is certain anymore. And for every unexpected outcome there are uncertain consequences.

Yet in this season we are reminded of the enduring promises of God's word; that Christ was born into circumstances no less uncertain, yet as testimony to the enduring reliability of God's promise.

Today we remember words spoken by prophets and preachers, generations before the cry of a new-born king pierced the dark indifference of the night air. Today we light a candle of hope as a testimony to the hope that is always ours.

Candle

We light this candle
Amidst a world of uncertainty
A world of unexpected outcomes
And ways forward that are unclear.

A fragile flame burns
That could be extinguished at any moment
A flickering testimony that there has always been light
Since the day your voice declared that it should be.

So in this world where kingdoms rise and fall
Where rulers posture in their temporary squabbles of state and empire
Where the weakest pay the price for the follies of the powerful
The word of the Lord endures for ever.

Words that promised Messiah's coming
Words fulfilled amidst the chaos of human circumstance
Words of hope, words of life, words of promise
Words that will last for all of eternity.

Second Sunday in Advent – The love of the Lord

As our journey through Advent continues, stories from Syria, Iraq and many less-noticed parts of the world sadden and disturb us. People remain the victims of war, conflict and oppression.

Attitudes of hatred and division give way to acts of violence and persecution, causing many to flee to places of safety, bringing with them stories of indescribable cruelty and abuse.

Yet all too often they are met with attitudes of indifference. Perceived as a threat, their plight fuels demands for more controlled borders to stem their migrant flow.

But those who seek the light of Christ in the midst of this darkness, remember and declare that love will always overcome evil and that when these things are passed, love will remain.

Candle

Another flame defies the darkness
In a world where narratives of division and self-interest still echo;
Though wars rage, innocents mourn and people are displaced
Love's light will never be extinguished.

Love declared by prophets and poets
Became flesh, to place eternity within our grasp
A love from which no earthly circumstance can separate us
A love beyond words, beyond time, beyond measure.

And even though hatred may still linger,
We will not walk in its shadow.
We embrace God's call to love even those who would be our enemy
To declare a neighbour of those that some would call stranger.

For one day the darkness will be finally dispelled
And in its wake, love will forever prevail
And while we wait, our hope is renewed
By love's enduring power and example.

Third Sunday in Advent – The peace of the Lord

On this third Sunday in Advent we are invited to hear that voice from the desert calling us to “prepare the way of the Lord.”

We light what many call the candle of peace, yet do so in a world that is wracked with war and conflict.

Nation sides with nation to build and break strongholds; one rule strives to replace another, each believing it has right on its side, while the wise remind us that eventually arms will need to be set aside and powers must come together at the table of peace-making.

Those who are spared such harmful conflicts, urged by Black Fridays, Cyber Mondays and the latest raft of retail advertisers are encouraged to be ever-restless for more. And in the midst of this clamour, a simple flame invites us to be still and know that God is near.

Candle

Another flame is kindled
Flickering into being like a voice that pierces
The silence of the wilderness
Calming our fears; stilling restless spirits; declaring salvation's dawn.

The road to God's eternity lies straight before us
Drawing our gaze beyond the turmoils and anxieties of the here and now
And though its route may lead through deserts of despair
The peace of God confounds mere earth-bound expectation.

Ours is to know the peace of God's presence
And ours is the call to pursue its cause in the face of hostility
To be those who refuse to repay evil with evil
Whose words and deeds would breed calm and contentment.

Our peace is found not by escaping this world's turmoil,
But knowing God with us in its midst.
By trusting that his purpose will one day be fulfilled
And choosing those pathways that lead to its coming.

Fourth Sunday in Advent – The joy of the Lord

On this fourth Sunday in Advent we are invited to share in the joy of those who recognised and realised the truth of God's coming. They proclaimed their songs of joy amidst and despite the realities that confronted them.

For Mary this required costly and sacrificial acceptance; for Simeon it meant believing in what his earthly eyes would never see; for a group of Shepherds, declaring that salvation had dawned amidst the most chaotic of human circumstances.

Our world presents us with many reasons to despair; we lament the harm and suffering that human beings seem capable of inflicting on one another; we witness abuses of power in every sphere; the resources of Creation are relentlessly exploited, unfairly shared and often denied to those whose need is greatest.

Our joy is not found by turning our backs on such realities and our security does not lie in escaping their consequences. Rather it is to recognise deeper realities that prevail even in the midst of the worst expressions of this world's evil.

Candle

Another flame defies the darkness
Casting its light amidst shadows of despair,
Bearing faithful testimony to a joy that prevails;
Unquenchable, even amongst the gloom and frailty of human circumstance.

We who have glimpsed the light of God's coming;
Are no less called to bear the weight of this world's strife.
Yet ours is a joy that is no mere consequence of earthly circumstance
Dwelling deep within, made complete by knowing Emmanuel, God with us.

And though our treasure may be contained in vessels of clay;
Encased in the fragility of human existence;
Our mortal souls remain locked in hope of eternity.
And we rejoice in the truth that one day this treasure will be revealed.

And so we prepare and wait for God's kingdom coming;
Within us leaps hope, when the signs of its dawning appear
We seek to cast its light in every place of darkness;
Until that day when every eye shall see its glory.

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The Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) is changing its legal status from a charitable unincorporated association to a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO). From 1 January 2020, BUGB will operate as a CIO with registered charity number 1181392.

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