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ADVENT SUNDAY B

29th November 2026

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening prayers

Holy God, of this and every season
Today I light the match (you may wish to light an actual candle at this point).
Today I spark the flame,
Today I begin the Advent journey of preparation and waiting,
Of anticipation and surprise,
Of encounter and transformation.

Come and make yourself known in the everyday extraordinariness of this day,
Immanuel God,

Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar

Reading: Mark 13:24–37 – Click for reading

Responding to the reading

It is perhaps a little surprising that we begin Advent with these words from Mark's Gospel. We might expect something a little more festive, instead, we get darkness.
The sun going dark, the moon refusing to shine, stars falling from the sky, the heavens being shaken, and Jesus telling his disciples to keep awake. It's not exactly the traditional Christmas card image!

But perhaps there is something important about beginning Advent this way, because Advent is not simply a season of preparing for Christmas. It is a season of looking at the world honestly, recognising that things are not as they should be, and daring to hope that they might yet be different. And that is exactly the world Jesus is speaking into.

The passage comes towards the end of Jesus' ministry, at a time of considerable uncertainty and anxiety. His disciples are trying to understand what is coming. The world they know feels fragile. The structures they have relied upon are not as permanent as they imagined. And Jesus uses dramatic, unsettling imagery to describe a world being shaken.

Perhaps you recognise something of that feeling today?

We live in a world where so much seems uncertain: conflict and war, political instability, climate anxiety, uncertainty about the role of AI, poverty and inequality, communities divided, people struggling to find security, belonging and hope. Sometimes it can feel as though the foundations are shifting beneath our feet, and perhaps our instinct is to look away, to retreat into the familiar, to distract ourselves.
But Jesus says: "Keep awake."

Not because we should live in fear, or should spend our lives anxiously trying to predict the future. And certainly not because we should become obsessed with working out when the end of the world might come. In fact, Jesus is quite clear that nobody knows the day or the hour. Instead, perhaps this is an invitation to live with our eyes open, to remain attentive, to notice what is happening around us, to refuse to become so comfortable with the world as it is that we stop imagining how it could be.

There is something particularly interesting about the little illustration Jesus gives: he points to a fig tree. When its branches become tender and its leaves begin to appear, you know that summer is near. You don't need somebody to explain it, you simply need to pay attention. The signs of change are there, if you are willing to notice them.

Can you do the same this advent? Can you recognise the signs of hope?

Hope is not always dramatic, it doesn't always arrive with angels singing or the heavens opening, sometimes it looks like a community coming together to support somebody who is struggling, or people choosing reconciliation rather than resentment.

There is another challenge in Jesus' words. He doesn't simply tell his disciples to stay awake and watch, he tells them a story about a man who leaves his house, puts his servants in charge and expects them to get on with their work until he returns.

In other words, waiting is not an excuse for doing nothing. The servants are not asked to sit around staring at the horizon. They are given something to do. And perhaps that is the difference between passive waiting and Christian hope.

Passive waiting says: ‘Things are terrible, but perhaps somebody will come along and sort them out.’

Christian hope says: ‘Things are not as they should be, but we believe they can change — and we have a part to play.’

We are not simply waiting for God to make the world better, we are invited to participate in the work of making God's love visible in it.

Perhaps this is why Advent begins in the dark, because the Christmas story itself is not a story about God arriving in a world that has everything sorted out. Jesus is born into a world of occupation, inequality, fear and uncertainty. He arrives not in a palace, but in an ordinary family. Not among the powerful, but among the vulnerable. Not as a display of earthly strength, but as a tiny, dependent child.

The light of the world comes into the darkness, and the darkness does not have the final word. That is the hope at the heart of Advent: not that everything will suddenly become easy, but that God has not abandoned the world.

Love is still at work and new beginnings remain possible. Even when the world feels shaken, there are still signs of life, still reasons to hope, still opportunities to make a difference.

So perhaps the invitation this Advent is to stay awake: stay awake to suffering, rather than becoming indifferent, stay awake to injustice, rather than accepting it as inevitable, stay awake to the people around us, rather than becoming absorbed in our own concerns…but also to stay awake to hope.

Because Advent is a season of waiting, yes, but it is also a season of preparation. We are preparing to welcome Christ. And perhaps the best way to do that is to live as though the things Jesus came to bring — love, justice, mercy, peace and hope — really matter.

- Where have I become so accustomed to the darkness that I have stopped looking for the light?
- What small signs of hope or new beginnings can I see around me?
- Where might I need to wake up to suffering or injustice that I have been overlooking?
- What could I do this Advent to help make God's love more visible in the world?

May we have the courage to look honestly at the world, without being overwhelmed by its darkness. May we have the wisdom to recognise the small signs of hope. May we refuse to become indifferent to suffering, or complacent in the face of injustice. And may we remain awake to the possibility that God is doing something new, often in places and through people we least expect.

As we begin this Advent journey, may we wait with hope, live with purpose and keep our eyes open. The light is coming. The world is waiting. And there is work for us to do.
Amen.

Hymn / Song
176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness – YouTube

Blessing

May you rise from this moment, certain that the Christ is coming.
May you see the Spirit of God at work in the world, everywhere, and may you join in,
Today, this week, and always.
Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers For This Week

Monday 30th November

- Never-changing, always patient God,
  Help me to display patience this day:
  to wait prayerfully,
  to pause meaningfully,
  and to keep my faith in the advent of your coming,
  Immanuel, God with us. Amen

Tuesday 1st December

- At the start of the month, how can you use this December to encounter God more closely?
- If it helps, you might like to meditate on this quote from author JRR Tolkien:
  'Here comes Christmas, that astonishing thing that no commercialism can defile…
  unless we let it.'

Wednesday 2nd December

- Today, you might like to use the moments when you are doing housework or completing a menial task to pray. Is there something connected to the task that helps you focus on God, or notice the presence of the divine in your life?
- For example, weeding might help you think about habits you would like to be rid of; showering might help you think about where you can wash yourself in God's love; tidying up might help you give thanks for the things you have received as a blessing from God.

Thursday 3rd December

- In the name of the Christ who comes,
  Help me to practice presence this day.
- Help me to notice your love, all around, and to be open to receiving from you, by your incarnate presence, O Lord. Amen

Friday 4th December

- On this day in 2005, tens of thousands of people in Hong Kong joined in a protest for democracy. Today, as many people around the world continue to campaign for a fairer politics, where everyone can have a say, you might like to pray for all those working for justice, peace and equality, and for all who enter the political sphere – that they may know your wisdom and grace.

Saturday 5th December

- At some point today, you might like to be still, to sit in the stillness of this season and simply try to quiet your mind. Do not try to achieve anything, or solve anything, simply be still, and know that God is God.