

## 'Pointing to the light'



### Call to worship

In Advent, heaven came to earth. Now let us come and worship the New King in all His majesty.

**Opening hymn: StF182- On Jordan's bank** Watch on YouTube <https://youtu.be/plr21lLgFpg?>

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that  
the Lord is nigh;  
awake and hearken, for he brings glad tidings from  
the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin; make straight  
the way for God within,  
and let us all our hearts prepare for Christ to come  
and enter there.

For you are our salvation, Lord, our refuge, and our  
great reward;

without your grace we waste away like flowers that  
wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out your hand, and bid the  
fallen sinner stand;  
shine forth, and let your light restore earth's own  
true loveliness once more.

To God the Son all glory be whose advent sets his  
people free, whom, with the Father, we adore, and  
Holy Spirit, evermore. John Chandler (1806–1876)

### Advent Liturgy

Our Advent candles flicker, casting shadows spreading light, giving witness in the everyday, telling stories old and new.

Advent God, **shine from us today.**

When we've encountered God, we have a truth to tell. When we have seen God's light, we have a light to share.

Advent God, **shine from us today.**

When our lives seem ordinary and full of faltering steps, God's light still shines and bids us go and tell.

Advent God, **shine from us today.**

We share our very ordinary, our sorrows, joys and faith, and trust that those we share with will glimpse the light of God.

Advent God, **shine from us today.**

Advent God, we may feel we are not worthy to share your extraordinary message. We may feel we'll get it wrong; we don't know all the answers. We may feel we do not have the words; not erudite enough. Shine upon us, light our path that may speak and show and tell what you have done for us. **Amen.**

**Second hymn StF165 Advent candles tell their story vv1-3** (<https://youtu.be/tlC5ybhWcrM>)

Advent candles tell their story as we watch and pray,  
longing for the Day of Glory, 'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.  
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness changed for gladness on that day.

Prophet voices loudly crying, making pathways clear,  
glimpsing glory, self-denying, calling all to hear. Through their message —  
challenged, shaken — hearts awaken: God is near!

John the Baptist, by his preaching and by water poured,  
brought to those who heard his teaching news of hope restored:  
'Keep your vision strong and steady and be ready for the Lord.' (Mark Eary, b.1965)

### **Confession**

O Lord, though You have given us great hope, at times we doubt. We know our faith is weakened by challenging events in our lives. Sadness and despair drown all hope as the tears fall, and we are washed away in the floods and torrents of regret and fear. Forgive us Lord we pray and give us renewed strength for our weakness.

**May we follow the Advent star.**

Forgive us Lord, when we become too immersed in the hurly-burly of Christmas. Forgive us when we get stressed about all the preparations. Forgive us if we become overwhelmed by all we have to do.

**May we follow the Advent star.**

We are truly sorry that at times we lack faith, we lose hope; we do not hold onto Your way.  
We stumble on our journey towards the stable.

**May we follow the Advent star.**

Teach us to be more like the wise men who never doubted the journey they had to make,  
following the star. Teach us to be humble like the shepherds who travelled with the star.

And may the star of Christmas Hope be with us this day and all through Advent. **Amen**

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

O Lord, we thank You for this time of Advent. A time to be still and know that You are God.  
A time to prepare our hearts and minds. We thank You for this previous time of peace and calm to prepare.  
A time to think about what happened all those hundreds of years ago. As the flame of the hope candle flickers we give thanks for all we have. We give thanks for our families and friends and for the time we may be able to spend together during Advent and at Christmas time. **Amen**

**Bible reading: John 1:6-8, 19-28**

### **Reflections – Making way for the light**

The fourth evangelist clarifies the difference between John and Jesus: John is a witness to the light, Jesus is the light; John is the wilderness voice, Jesus is the Word of God.

Henry Spencer Moore was an English artist best known for his semi-abstract monumental bronze sculptures which are located around the world as public works of art. In a lengthy interview a year before he died, the great sculptor Henry Moore reflected on how his early years in a Yorkshire mining village influenced his later work:

One of the first and strongest things I recall were the slag heaps, like pyramids, like mountains, artificial mountains. There were pit heaps all over the great waste, the unburnable rubbish. We played about in them and got very dirty. I remember our street and I can see the sun just managing to penetrate the fog, and the

coal heap at the end.

His father, a miner, was very fond of baked apples for pudding, and little Henry had to go to their dank, dark cellar to fetch them. He was frightened of the dark, so he used to go down the steps sideways, always with one eye on the lighted doorway. Later when he was carving deep into his sculpture he said he always felt he wanted to find a way out, remembering that cellar.

Many of Moore's massive, sculptured forms have holes in them, but for him the holes have their own significance: what appears essential is left out; the light is let in. To many people his sculptures are just puzzling, but to many others they have a massive dignity. In the mining village where he grew up there was always competition between the sun and the fog, between the daylight and the pitch black of the mines, between a small child and the enormous slag heaps. In his work the light always wins, the child comes to shape the slag heaps into human form.

### **The essential place of the light**

Today's Gospel begins with the absence of the light: John the Baptist is a witness to speak for the light, but he is not the light in person. John is the rugged figure whose task is described by the evangelists as laying low mountains and hills, shaping a path through the wasteland. He is God's sculptor, giving shape and form to an indeterminate mass of people, insisting always on the essential place of the light. When he faces critical opposition, he points away from himself to his work in preparing for the one to come.

John keeps declaring, "I am not", in order to point to the one who can say, "I am". The identity of the one coming after John is unknown, but John is clear in his own mind that he is not the light. He must make way for the light, create a space for the light to shine through. And when people see the light, his own task is finished.

John the Baptist's role can be appreciated fully only when the light does come in the person of Jesus. Only then can people realise the true measure of John's worth and the unique place this enigmatic man has in the Christian tradition. It is interesting to recall that John's stature among his own people was so great that many of them came to believe that he was the Messiah. Indeed when Jesus comes to ask his own followers who people think he is, the apostles tell him that some hold him to be John the Baptist come back to life. Even in the early Church, some time after the completion of Jesus' ministry, a sectarian Baptist group still holds on to the belief that John, not Jesus, is the Christ. And that is why the fourth Gospel is so emphatic about John's role: it stresses that John is a *witness* to the light.

### **Making way for the light**

Like John, we are asked to make way for the light. None of us is the light: our role is to let the light through the chunks of solid darkness that litter our human landscape. That appears a mountainous task beside which our own abilities and commitment look so small. Who are we to compete against such large darkness?

Advent calls on us to make what contribution we can. To look first at ourselves and work quietly on the darkness that hides within us – the selfishness, the lack of forgiveness and the lack of love that keep the light of good news from so many people. On the larger social issues – like justice and peace – which require the witness of a caring community and world at large, we are challenged by the Gospel to work harder and *together*.

Like Henry Moore, carving through stone until he comes to the light, we have to keep working our way towards the light that is Christ. Our work may appear fruitless or just odd to those who look at our efforts, but the space we create is significant. Holiness is the constant struggle of letting Christ be the light that shines through everything we do. So let our work puzzle people. Who cares, when the light gets through?

I suggest you look it up if you haven't yet already heard of his works.

## **PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

This third week of advent, as we thank God for calling the Church to prepare a way for his Son, let us pray that God will enable us to witness to the light and preach the Gospel of peace. And for ourselves: that the Lord will awaken our sleeping hearts to watch for his coming, in our families and neighbours, in our foes and in our friends.

We pray to the Lord as **we rejoice in His nearness. Amen.**

### **We continue with our prayers for others....**

We pray for peace. In those parts of the world torn apart by war and injustice, we pray for peace in the hearts of those who have it in their power to bring change and reconciliation. And we pray for justice, that as a baby could become a King, all things are possible through You.

**Eternal God, in Your changing world, hear our prayer.**

We pray for our fragile and beautiful earth, that amidst the consumerism of this time we will grow in love and care for her, and be a people willing to make sacrifices to care for creation.

**Eternal God, in Your changing world, hear our prayer.**

We pray for families, in particular families struggling with rising living costs and the extra pressures that this season brings. We pray too for the elderly and those particularly vulnerable to cold and illness at this time; and we pray that we will form communities which nurture and support the vulnerable.

**Eternal God, in Your changing world, hear our prayer.**

We pray for our church, that we will always rejoice in Your stories, and find new ways of telling them and sharing them with a world so greatly in need of Your message.

**Eternal God, in Your changing world, hear our prayer. Amen**

Creator God, we have heard of faithfulness throughout the ages, and Your desire to enter so personally into the details of our lives. As we leave bring our worship to a close, let us be confident of Your presence with us, and commit to trusting You ever more deeply, today, this Advent and Christmas, over the coming year and always. **Amen**

**Final hymn StF264 – Make Way** Watch on YouTube : <https://youtu.be/aICQ7fb0hEA?>

Make way, make way, for Christ the King in splendour arrives;  
fling wide the gates and welcome him into your lives.

***Make way (Make way), make way (make way),  
for the King of kings (for the King of kings);  
make way (make way), make way (make way),  
and let his Kingdom in.***

He comes the broken hearts to heal, the prisoners to free;

**Blessing** : May God bless you this week, Strength of the Father, integrity of the Son vitality of the Holy Spirit, now and always, **Amen**

the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance, the blind shall see.

And those who mourn with heavy hearts, who weep and sigh,  
with laughter, joy and royal crown he'll beautify.

We call you now to worship him as Lord of all,  
to have no gods before him, their thrones must fall!

*Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)*