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CHRISTMAS EVE B

24th December 2023

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Call to worship

(You may wish to light a candle and watch the flame flicker for a few minutes before beginning these devotions. Focus yourself on God amongst the noise and busyness of this Christmas Eve.

Can you sense anticipation in the air?)

God is right here, present, with, incarnate, and ever so real.

As you celebrate the meaning of Christmas, and tell the story in readings, carols and reflections, I listen for your Spirit speaking to me today, Lord God.

Help me to see something of your coming here, by your Spirit, Christmas God.

Advent God, as I wait, with baited breath, for your coming,

I travel to the manger-side in my mind and imagination,

Bringing myself, our world, my hopes and our fears.

Come into this space, by your Spirit, Christmas God.

Amen.

Hymn:

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness - [YouTube](#)

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

Reading: Luke 1:46b-55 – [Click for reading](#)

Hymn:

Love Shone Down - [YouTube](#)

Responding to the reading

How are you when it comes to waiting?

Do you like today, or just want it to be over?

Can you sense the anticipation in the air? See it in the eyes of the children, feel it in the hurried last-minute preparations, hear it in the whispered conversations about stockings and mince pies and who is coming over when?

Christmas Eve is a precious time, a time of waiting and preparing, a time of readying and hoping, a time for family and candles and stories and possibility... All of which can be helpful to us in our Christian discipleship.

Can you make a conscious effort today to prepare some room in your heart for Christ, as well as in your home for guests or in your car boot for presents? If you are cooking, can you use the time to think about the ingredients you need in your life to make your home and your life a better, safer, fairer place? If you are wrapping or packing presents, can you pray for the people you are giving them to – that they might know something of the presence of God as well this Christmas?

Christmas is a season of contrasts. Most of us will know a mixture of joy and sorrow over the coming days, of laughter and lament, of blessing and of heartbreak. For whilst we know there are very good reasons to rejoice at God's Incarnation amongst us, we may also be struggling with pain or depression, grief or isolation, economic challenge or debt.

As we hear the word's of Mary's song of praise as her world is turned upside down on the first Christmas, perhaps you notice the wonder in Mary's voice. Let's read between the lines a bit too:

- Mary is astounded that God has chosen her – a lowly servant, not, she might be thinking, a royal princess.
- She can't get over what this powerful and holy God has done for her – an ordinary young woman.
- She rejoices that those who are proud are being scattered – perhaps she has in mind the religious leaders, or the self-righteous individuals who may have shunned her for her pregnancy.
- She somehow understands that this child to whom she will give birth will turn the world upside down, bringing down the powerful and lifting up the lowly
- Humble as she is, and hungry for more of God, she is the one who has been filled with goodness – whilst those already full of their own wealth or self-importance can receive nothing more.

Mary's song of praise is both beautiful and subversive. It is a mandate for revolution, for building a kingdom of justice, peace and dignity for all – especially those who have been over-looked. It couldn't be a better prescription for what Christmas can be.

Can your Christmas be as equally transformative this year?

Responding in prayer

Let us pray,

God of Justice, forgive me when my Christmases become more about what I can get than what I can give.

Forgive me when my personal Christmas stories eclipse the Christ child from the centre.

Forgive me when I indulge my Christmas lunch with little thought for those who are going hungry.

Forgive me when my Christmas tree is dressed more extravagantly than my poor neighbours.

[Pause]

Come, God of justice, to who all who need you to visit them this year.

Come, that a world of poverty, pain and brokenness might catch a glimpse of the Christ-light at the manger-side.

Come, that I may see what is mine to do, Lord God, Immanuel,
Amen.

Hymn:

191 STF – Away in a manger - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

Go in peace, and discover the Prince of Peace at work in the world.
Go with grace, and learn something from the Wonderful Counselor.
Go in love, and meet with the Creator God, made known in a baby, lying in manger.
Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week Ahead

Monday 25th December

- Wake up, wake up! It's Christmas morning, Christ's eternal day is dawning!
- Play this song and give thanks for Christ, born in our hearts again this special, precious morning: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hey6l95DAdM>

Tuesday 26th December

- On this second day of Christmas, 'Boxing Day', many countries have traditions of giving gifts to those in need – it may be that the name of the day comes from the 'alms box' that would stand in churches for gifts to the poor. And there are people living in poverty in our world, and it is likely there will be some in your local community or at least the nearest town. What support networks are in place for them, and are there things you could do to help?
- As you pray into issues around poverty and injustice, you might like to look up the work of local charities responding to issues around debt, homelessness, poverty and other issues you are aware of in your local area. Pray for them too, and the work they are doing to respond.

Wednesday 27th December

- On this third day of the Christmas season let us give thanks for the riches we have received. Take a moment, simply to be grateful. You could write a gratefulness journal today, simply listing all the things you are thankful for, and praying thanks to God for them.

Thursday 28th December

- Living God, on the fourth day of Christmas,
I pray for all who feel isolated in the communities and towns around me.
I pray for those in my own family or networks who may be feeling the effects of loneliness during this winter season.
God of love, show me how to be an answer to my own prayer – how to pick up the phone, or make a visit,
In Jesus, name,
Amen.

Friday 29th December

- Take a moment to look at your hands. Reflect on the things you have used them for already this week: to do housework, to write emails, to make phone calls, perhaps some digging in the garden or some manual labour tasks.
- Thank you God, for these hands. Help me to use them as your hands in the world – to use my body, my mind, my whole life, for the building of your Kingdom here on earth. Amen.

Saturday 30th December

- You might like to use this prayer as a blessing or grace before one of your meals today.
- Gracious God, thank you for the many ways you have blessed me, and for the nutrition in the meals I am eating this day. Thank you for the strength that comes from my food to keep me going. Thank you for the tastes I can enjoy and the refreshment I can feel.
- Gracious God, today, as I eat, I remember that all I have is gift – and I look out on the world around me, knowing that many people are not as blessed as I am, and many will go hungry today.
- God, help me to seek justice in your world. Amen.