

The Vine at Home

1st Sunday in Advent – Year C

Beginning Advent in prayer

Find a candle, and something to light it with.

Before you light the candle, look at the wick, the wax, the lighter or matches you are using. They don't look like much, on their own, do they? Simple, ancient technology that have been used for thousands of years to bring a bit of light to a dark situation.

Yet, they hold potential within them.

Now light the candle. As you do so, you may wish to say out loud: 'I light this candle, as a symbol of your coming Lord Jesus.'

As you watch the flame flicker into life, settle, and begin to burn gently, you might like to give thanks for the things that bring light into your life. If it helps, you could list them out loud – perhaps they are hobbies, favourite places, people, relationships, memories...

Allow yourself to be thankful for a moment, appreciating your blessings, saying 'thank you' to God.

Then, as you watch the flame, think about the heat from that flame – the heat that can be damaging, that can start a fire. In the quiet, you might like to reflect on anything that is damaging in your life at the moment. Do you have habits that are harmful to you or others? Are you carrying guilt around with you, that is weighing you down? Are you taking out your emotions on other people? In the stillness, let go of all that is holding you back.

In the stillness, know that you are loved and accepted, just as you are.

Simply accept that you are accepted.

Thank you Lord Jesus, that you are the light of the world. As we prepare a space for your presence with us this Advent season, as we turn aside from the business of the Christmas-season to look upon you, help us to see your love, your light, at work around us. And help us to be people of the light.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen¹

[You may wish to keep the candle burning throughout the rest of the time it takes you to work through today's Vine at Home].

Hymn / song:

Listen to and watch this song, performed by the National Methodist Choir of Great Britain - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbqyAX5JKCs>

Reading: Luke 21:25-36 - The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁵ "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Exhortation to Watch

³⁴ "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Reflections

'Are you ready yet?' What if you could never be ready? What if you stopped, took a breath, and accepted your own unreadiness. What if, as you took that breath, you just waited...?

Are you ready yet? No, but I am waiting. Here, in Advent, we are waiting. Not readying, but waiting.

We are not waiting for the organised chaos of Christmas lunch, the order of service for the 25th of Dec, the 'plan' for the family parties, the ready-ness of the wrapped gifts and written cards. Or at least, that is only part of what we are waiting for.

What we wait for, which requires no readiness, no organisation... what we wait for is hope.

Advent breathes hope, Advent points beyond the struggles of everyday life to a God who loved people so much that God became people. It points to a God who gets it, who understands us, and still loves us.

Advent tells us that the future is better, brighter, more hopeful. The future is God. Amongst the rushing, the busy, the 'getting ready', Advent whispers "The not yet will be worth it."

[Pause and be still for a moment or two.]

That reading from Luke's gospel is a difficult one, isn't it. Jesus is talking about what is often referred to as 'the end times'. But he is also talking about one of his great themes – how 'the Kingdom of God is near'. Elsewhere, and in other translations, this is written as 'the Kingdom of God is at hand'. This seems to be a key message for Jesus – that somehow, his coming, his presence with us ('God with us, Immanuel'), is a sign and a reminder that heaven is close by, near by, within and all around us. 'At hand'.

That requires us to pay attention. Advent requires us to pay attention. What is already going on in your community, where you think God might be at work?

Where, through whom, and in what way is God's Spirit trying to make Herself known to you today?

Spend some time reflecting on these questions. You might like to watch the candle flame for a while, or to get up and go for a walk, or out into the garden for some fresh air. As you look around you, as you imagine your community, pray this simple prayer:

Show me Lord, what is mine to do. Show me Lord, where you want me to be. Show me Lord, how I can be a part of your Kingdom, here on earth.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Prayers of intercession

To help you pray for the world, you might like to make use of Singing the Faith 168: Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Sing (or listen to) v1.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come, Lord Jesus come.

Come, Lord Jesus come, to this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus. Come to a world which worries, worries about image, about money, about family, about health, a world which worries about the future and has forgotten how to listen for your coming. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Sing (or listen to) v 2.

Lord we need you now. Lord we need you now.

Lord we need you now in this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus. Come to a world which needs you, which needs the hope and justice, the forgiveness and cleansing which you bring. Come to those we know who are in special need today. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Sing (or listen to) v3.

Fill us with your peace; fill us with your peace;
fill us with your peace in this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus. Come to all who long to be filled with peace; those who live with conflict, whether in war zones or in the home. Come to those whose minds give them no peace, who are anxious, frightened and grieving. Come,

Lord Jesus, come.

Sing (or listen to) v 4.

Touch us with your love; touch us with your love;
touch us with your love in this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus. Come to your church throughout the world and touch us with your love, that we may be channels of that love to those who are alone, those who feel unloved, those who are rejected and despised. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Sing (or listen to) v 5.

May we see your light; may we see your light;
May we see your light in this world of ours.

We look for your coming, Lord Jesus. Many live in darkness, the darkness of slavery and oppression, the darkness of pain and despair, the darkness of famine and need.

Shine on with the light that can never be overcome by darkness. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Repeat v 1.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come, Lord Jesus come.
Come, Lord Jesus come, to this world of ours.

Amen.²

Blessing

Go from this place, as a person of Advent,
Go and make space for the God of all grace to be born in your heart,
Go and prepare a room for the God of all justice to come into your neighbourhood.

Love is here.

God is here.

We are ready, we are waiting.

Amen.³

² Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

³ Additional prayers by Tim Baker