

twelvebaskets



ADVENT SUNDAY B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Advent Sunday - Year B
29th November 2026



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness OR

89 STF – Strength will rise as wait upon the Lord

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

625 STF – Deep in the darkness a starlight is gleaming OR

173 STF – Into the darkness of this world

Readings: Isaiah 64:1–9; Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19; 1 Corinthians 1:3–9; Mark 13:24–37

Hymn:

177 STF – Lo, he comes with clouds descending OR

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

494 STF – Come thou fount of every blessing OR

639 STF – Through the love of God our Saviour

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

317 STF – At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on www.theworshipcloud.com.

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Call to worship

(You may wish to use your own liturgy for lighting Advent candles at this point in the worship).

So we light the match,
Spark the flame,
Begin the Advent journey of preparation and waiting,
Of anticipation and surprise,
Of encounter and transformation.

Come amongst us, Immanuel God,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness OR

89 STF – Strength will rise as wait upon the Lord

Opening Prayers

God of the heavens and the earth,

We come to worship this morning with anticipation; with souls waiting in the darkness that comes before the dawn.

We hold our breaths, knowing that your light is coming and that there is so much wonder in this waiting stillness.

We unclench our fists, letting the tightness of their grip melt away into the promise of tomorrow.

We hold out our hands out to the skies, eagerly watching for glimpses of the stars.

In our worship this morning, help us to listen with pensive ears and find you in those precious moments between the inhale and the exhale.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Throughout November, the All Age talks for The Vine have been prepared by our friends at All We Can, the Methodist Church's international development agency. Each week, we are highlighting one of All We Can's 'Extraordinary Gifts', which are a great way to do your Christmas shopping! Why not buy a gift that transforms life for someone in one of the

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

countries where All We Can's partners are working this Christmas – find out more and order a catalogue for your church online at allwecan.org.uk/extraordinary-gifts

Today, we are focusing on Wonder Women (*you might like to display a picture of this gift from the All We Can website, or invite people to turn to the relevant page in the gifts catalogue*).

In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes: 'Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.' We are entering into that waiting time, today...waiting for Christmas, which connects us to our eternal waiting for the Christ to make himself known to us, each day, and ultimately at the end of time. As we wait, this verse reminds us, God is good to us, and the gifts of the divine are available to us, even during this waiting time.

What gifts do you have? What skills, strengths, abilities? You might like to turn to someone sitting next to them and ask them 'what are you good at?'

[Give people time to do that, and you might like to invite people to feedback what their neighbour has shared].

How do these gifts help us in the 'here and not yet' time? Are they helping us to do small acts of love, kindness and peace, as we wait for Jesus' coming, as we wait for Christmas?

All We Can's Extraordinary Gift called 'Wonder Women' is about supporting women like Lisa in Liberia, to learn new skills and start their own enterprises to support themselves, and their families.

As Lisa says, 'I feel proud because I'm the only woman (on the electrical training programme)'.

As you use one of your skills this week, perhaps you can think of Lisa, and give thanks for the work of All We Can and their partners in equipping people to fulfil their potential.

Amen.³

Hymn:

625 STF – Deep in the darkness a starlight is gleaming OR

173 STF – Into the darkness of this world

Readings: Isaiah 64:1–9; Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19; 1 Corinthians 1:3–9; Mark 13:24–37

Hymn:

177 STF – Lo, he comes with clouds descending OR

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness

³ All Age Talk written by All We Can

Reflections on the readings

One of the readings set for Advent Sunday this year is Isaiah 64:1 to 9. It opens with about as bold a prayer as scripture ever offers: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence" (Isaiah 64:1 to 2). To understand why anyone would pray that way, it helps to know a little about the moment behind it.

This part of Isaiah comes from after the exile in Babylon had officially ended. The people had been allowed home. On paper, the story was one of restoration: God had brought them back, just as the prophets had promised. In practice, home was still a wreck. The city lay in rubble, the temple barely rebuilt, the surrounding nations hostile, the economy struggling. The grand future the earlier prophets had spoken of was nowhere to be seen. The people were technically free and still living like a defeated nation, overshadowed by empires far bigger than themselves. This prayer comes out of the gap between what had been promised and what had actually arrived, from people who have not given up on God. They still expect God to act, which is exactly why they are so angry, confused, and hurt that nothing has happened yet. There is a strange kind of faith hidden inside that frustration. Nobody bothers demanding anything from a God they have stopped believing in.

The first thing this passage gives us is permission to be honest with God rather than polite. "Tear open the heavens" is a demand, not a request for comfort. Behind it sits the Hebrew word *qara*, meaning to rip, or split by force. This is people remembering Sinai, when the mountains genuinely shook at God's approach, and fire kindled brushwood at his coming (Isaiah 64:1 to 2), and wondering aloud why nothing like that seems to be happening for them now. It would have been easier and safer to keep quiet, to assume God's silence had a good reason and wait patiently without making a fuss. This prayer refuses that. Gustavo Gutiérrez, writing from among the poor of Latin America centuries later, argued that God is known first through this kind of cry, not through calm theology composed at a safe distance from suffering. This passage was making the same case long before he put it into words. Demanding is not the opposite of trusting. Sometimes it is the clearest evidence of it.

From there, the prayer moves into something harder: honesty about failure that does not tip over into despair. "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth" (Isaiah 64:6) is an uncomfortable verse. It reaches for the language of ritual impurity to describe collective sin, which says something about who was holding the pen and whose experience became a shorthand for shame, and that is worth naming plainly rather than passing over. Underneath the discomfort of the image, though, there is real honesty at work: a people refusing to pretend everything is fine, naming their own part in the wreckage alongside the empire's part, without letting either one cancel out the other. That kind of honesty is actually good news, even though it does not sound like it at first. A community only confesses this openly when it still believes something can be done about it. This is not the language of people who think they are beyond help. It is the language of people who still expect to be forgiven, still expect the relationship to hold, and are simply refusing to dress up the truth before bringing it to God.

And then, almost without warning, the prayer turns fully toward hope. "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8) is the hinge on which the whole passage swings, and it is where this text becomes an Advent text rather than simply a lament. This is not resignation, as though the people had stopped struggling and settled for their fate. It is a claim, stated plainly in the middle of the ruins, that the relationship with God has not broken, whatever the wreckage around them might suggest. A potter does not throw away a pot that has cracked in the

shaping. There is an old Japanese practice, kintsugi, of mending broken pottery with lacquer dusted in gold, so the fracture becomes the most visible part of the piece rather than a flaw to hide. Isaiah's prayer is reaching for something close to that. The people are not asking God to pretend the break never happened. Verse 9 asks for exactly that kind of future: "Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever." That is not a request to erase the record. It is a request to keep shaping a life that carries the fracture without being defined only by it. Even a community that cannot see God's face can still say it is worked by God's hand, still being made into something, still held by someone who has not walked away from the project. It is not blind optimism that pretends the ruins are not there. It is a settled conviction that ruin does not get the final word, because the hands doing the shaping belong to someone who has never yet abandoned the clay.

Mark's gospel, our other reading today, arrives at a similar place by a different road. "Keep awake" (Mark 13:37) is Jesus telling his followers, living under Roman occupation, that the fig tree already putting out leaves is a sign things will not stay as they are. Isaiah's returned exiles and Mark's small, watched community are doing the same thing in different centuries: refusing to let the powers around them have the last say on what the future holds, watching instead for the first small signs that something new is already on its way.

That space between promise and arrival is not hard to find beyond ancient Judah. Christians in Gaza and the West Bank will light Advent candles this year under occupation and devastation. Christians in parts of Iran gather in secret, risking arrest simply to worship. These are not stories of a different kind of faith, only a harder one: people who keep lighting candles anyway, who have not let their circumstances talk them out of hope.

Closer to home, parish churches across the UK will light the first candle of the wreath as daylight fails earlier each afternoon, lit by congregations carrying their own version of that gap: an NHS waiting list stretching past a year, an energy bill nobody can quite afford, a food bank queue nobody expected to join. The promise of a decent life has been made in one form or another, and for many it has simply not arrived yet. That is exactly the situation this prayer was written for, where hope, rather than cheerfulness, is what is needed.

What this text offers, then, is not a tidy answer to that gap, but permission to pray honestly inside it, and a reason to keep hoping while we do. It gives us leave to demand rather than merely endure, to name failure without pretending, and still to trust that the hand shaping us has not let go. That permission matters, because so much of what passes for faith at this time of year is really just cheerfulness, a determination to feel festive whatever is actually going on underneath. Isaiah offers something sturdier than cheerfulness. He offers hope that has already looked straight at the ruins and decided to keep praying anyway, and a promise that whatever gets broken along the way will be mended, not disguised.

So let this Sunday's advent candle be more than a symbol. Let it be a decision: to pray as honestly as Isaiah did, to keep watching for God's coming in the middle of the ordinary and the unfinished, and to become, in some small way, the answer to somebody else's cry within our own reach. That might mean a phone call to someone who is lonely this winter, a gift left at the food bank, or simply a prayer held for people under a different sky in Bethlehem, Gaza, or Iran, who are lighting the same candle in far harder circumstances and still finding reason to hope. The heavens tore open once, quietly, in a manger nobody had thought to watch. They will tear open again. Until they do, we are the clay still being shaped, the break still being mended in gold, and our hands are among the ones God intends to use.

Amen.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Jasmine Devadason

Hymn:

494 STF – Come thou fount of every blessing OR

639 STF – Through the love of God our Saviour

Prayers of intercession

Isaiah taught his people to pray without pretending, to bring the whole of their need before God and trust the potter not to drop the clay. Let us pray in that same spirit, honestly, for the Church, the world, our own communities, and all who wait for God to come.

The response to “Tear open the heavens” is “and come down among us.”

Let us pray.

Come among your Church, Lord, still watching in the dark.

Give us the courage to pray as Isaiah prayed, honestly and without polish, and the patience to keep watching for the first signs that you are already at work. We remember Christians who worship this Advent at real cost: those who gather in secret in Iran, those who meet under occupation in Bethlehem and across the West Bank, and all whose faith is tested by fear rather than comfort. Keep them faithful, and keep us from ever taking for granted the freedom to pray aloud.

Tear open the heavens, **and come down among us.**

Come among the nations, Lord, so many of them still living in the gap between promise and reality.

We pray for peace in Gaza and across the Middle Eastern countries, for an end to bombardment and blockade, and for the safety of civilians, aid workers, and all who long simply to go home. We pray for communities still waiting on liberation long promised and long deferred. Give wisdom and honesty to leaders and negotiators, and give courage to those who keep insisting, against the evidence, that a better peace is possible.

Tear open the heavens, **and come down among us.**

Come among our own communities, Lord, and the everyday ruins many are carrying this winter.

We pray for those on NHS waiting lists stretching past a year, for households choosing between heating and eating, for anyone facing redundancy or already out of work, and for all who rely on food banks to get through the week. We pray for those who make decisions on their behalf in government and local councils, that policy would be shaped by compassion as much as by cost. Shape us, your Church, into people who notice need close at hand and do something about it.

Tear open the heavens, **and come down among us.**

Come among all who suffer, Lord, wherever the wound is found.

We pray for the sick and those awaiting diagnosis or treatment, for people living with disability who face barriers others never notice, for those wrestling with addiction, and for exhausted carers holding families together with little support of their own. We hold before you the anxious and the depressed, and the lonely who will spend long, quiet hours alone this Advent with no one to check on them. Be gentle with those who have run out of strength to hope, and let this church remain a place where struggle can be spoken aloud rather than a place people feel they must hide it.

Tear open the heavens, **and come down among us.**

Come among those who grieve, Lord, and among the dying.
We remember before you those who have died recently, and those whose absence is still keenly felt as this season returns without them. We think of hospice staff and palliative carers who sit with the dying day after day, and of children learning to live with loss far too young. Comfort all who mourn, give thanks for lives that shaped and blessed us, and hold every one of them, as you hold us, unfinished but never discarded, still the work of your hand.

Tear open the heavens, ***and come down among us.***

Merciful God, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Take these prayers, spoken and unspoken, and shape them, and us, into signs of the hope we long for. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, and until you come, make us ready to watch, to wait, and to work for the world you promise.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of every season,
God of this exact moment,
God who is Immanuel,
Come amongst us, by your grace,
And use our gifts for the building of a grace-filled world
In which justice and peace reign over all.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

317 STF – At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

May we go out from this place to disrupt all that is wrong, unjust and hateful in this world.

May we nurture and plant seeds of love.

May we celebrate your coming amongst us, Immanuel. Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Jasmine Devadason

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker