



## ADVENT 4A

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

# Fourth Sunday in Advent - Year A

21st December 2025



## Order of Service

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew Christ would come OR**

**174 STF – Light a candle in a darkened place**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk [Paper hearts required]

**Hymn:**

**180 STF – O come, O come, Immanuel OR**

**628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging**

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 ; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

**Hymn:**

**198 STF – Emmanuel, Emmanuel OR**

**188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**220 STF – When a young unmarried couple OR**

**157 STF – God has spoken – by his prophets**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**173 STF – Into the darkness of the world OR**

**208 STF – Let earth and heaven combine**

Blessing

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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](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## **Call to worship**

Into the darkness of this world,  
Shine your light we pray.

Into the fears and doubts of this community we call home,  
Shine your light we pray.

Into the anxiety, worry and pain that I carry,  
Shine your light we pray,

This Advent and always,

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew Christ would come OR

174 STF – Light a candle in a darkened place

## **Opening Prayers**

The Lord who saves.

Gracious and almighty God,

We are thankful that you are the Lord who hears, sees and saves.

The Shepherd who leads us in this life.

We are thankful that you fulfil your promises.

You do not abandon us in times of trial.

Through your son you delivered the restoration we longed for without knowing we needed it.

We have been broken by sin and lost your light.

Lord, we ask that you lead us out of the darkness and into your salvation.

In the darkness, your light shines through, like a candle lighting the way.

Restore us, Lord, shine your face upon us, that we may be saved.

Let the world see the light of Emmanuel through us.

You sent down to us your son Jesus.

A selfless deed you offered for our sake.

The Lord who saves, who delivers us from sin.

The fulfiller of promises, the one who answers our prayers.

You are always with us.

Let us always know and feel your presence in our lives.

In your holy name we pray.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Alice Arbon-Maher

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

It is just a few days from Christmas and the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Advent has been a long time of waiting and watching for God's son to arrive. Jesus is a gift to us, borne out of God's abundant love and heart to know each and every one of us. God does not remain distant but chooses to come down, be amongst us, sharing a powerful message of how big God's heart is!

*(Hold up a gigantic paper heart for all to see)* God's love for us is even bigger than this heart! Think of the biggest thing you can and God's love is even bigger! How incredible is that!

Later we'll hear words from the book of Isaiah in the Bible, the prophet talked about these events happening hundreds of years before Jesus was actually born, saying "the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Immanuel means 'God with us', so by having that name we were being told that Jesus is God's son and coming to be with us.

Joseph believed this too when an angel visited him to explain why Mary's baby was so special. He understood that he had a part to play in God's amazing plan for Jesus to be born into the world. He loved and cared for Mary and wanted God's love to be made known too.

Each of us are part of this story too. God calls us to make Jesus known and to share his incredible love with others. Everyone has a small paper heart *(distribute these now or before the service begins)* and I wonder how you would like to respond to knowing how enormous and everlasting God's love for you is?

Let's write a short note of thanks (or draw a picture) to God for loving us so much that he sent Jesus into the world. Then we can place all of our hearts into the larger one so we are reminded that Jesus's birth is a mighty act of love and includes all of us.

*(Give time and space for all to participate in this).*

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hymn:**

180 STF – O come, O come, Immanuel OR

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**Readings:** Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

### **Hymn:**

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188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Gail Adcock

## Reflections on the readings

Here we are, the fourth Sunday of Advent. The final candle before Christmas.

The waiting is nearly over, but not quite. There's still one more step, one more story, before we reach the manger.

And today, the story we hear is quiet, uncertain, and very human. It's not about shepherds or angels yet — not about joy bursting across the sky. It's about one man trying to decide what to do when his life falls apart.

Matthew tells it simply:

'Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child.'

We can imagine how that felt for Joseph.

He's an honourable man, trying to do the right thing, and suddenly he's faced with a situation that looks like betrayal. Everything he thought he understood about his future, about love, about trust, it all collapses.

And Joseph doesn't lash out. He doesn't shame Mary. He decides to end things quietly, to protect her from scandal. It's an act of quiet kindness in the midst of heartbreak.

But then, God interrupts his plan.

In a dream, an angel says:

'Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'

Do not be afraid.

It's the same phrase that shows up again and again throughout the Bible, to Mary, to the shepherds, to Zechariah, to the women at the tomb.

It's the phrase that seems to hover over every holy moment when God draws near: 'Do not be afraid.'

Because when God comes close, things rarely stay comfortable.

God's presence unsettles. It shifts what we thought we knew.

And Joseph's story reminds us that faith is not about having all the answers, it's about trusting God enough to move forward, even in confusion.

Long before Joseph, Isaiah spoke to another anxious man, King Ahaz of Judah. The city was under threat, and Ahaz was desperate.

God offers him reassurance:

'Ask for a sign,' says the prophet.

But Ahaz refuses. Maybe out of false humility, or maybe out of fear.'

So Isaiah says:

'The Lord himself will give you a sign.

Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son,  
and shall name him Immanuel — God with us.'

It's not a grand military victory or a political solution. It's a baby.

God's sign of hope comes in vulnerability, in something small, tender, ordinary. That's what Joseph learns too: that God's redemption is not a thunderclap, but a heartbeat. God's answer to fear is 'presence.'

By the time Paul writes to the Romans, that child has grown, lived, died, and risen. Paul describes Jesus as the fulfilment of the promise, the one who shows what divine love looks like in human form.

And Paul's greeting to the Roman church begins with grace:

'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.'

Grace and peace. That's the tone of Advent's ending — not triumph, but tenderness. Not power, but presence. Not certainty, but trust.

The name given to the child in both Isaiah and Matthew is Immanuel: 'God with us.'

Not 'God above us.' Not 'God against us.' Not 'God far away until we get our act together.' But 'God with us.' With us, in confusion, like Joseph.

With us: in fear, like Ahaz.

With us: in fragile hope, like Mary.

With us: in all the ordinary places we least expect holiness to show up.

Sometimes we think of 'God with us' as a Christmas-only idea, like it ends once the tinsel comes down. But Matthew's Gospel actually begins and ends with that same promise. At the very last verse, Jesus says to his friends:

'Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

From birth to resurrection, it's the same story: God with us. Always. Still.

Maybe that's the word we need this Advent. Because our world feels anxious again: uncertain, divided, weary. In the UK right now, we see communities stretched by cost-of-living pressures, public services under strain, wars casting long shadows, and many wondering what kind of future we're preparing for our children.

So as we light the final candle of Advent, we might whisper Joseph's prayer: not one of certainty, but of courage: God, help me to listen. Help me to trust your presence when I don't understand it. Help me to believe that love is being born here.

Because Immanuel means that we never wait alone.

God is with us: in the waiting, in the wondering, and in every quiet act of love that prepares the way.

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

220 STF – When a young unmarried couple OR

157 STF – God has spoken – by his prophets

### **Prayers of intercession**

As we draw near to Christmas,  
let us bring our prayers before the God who is with us, in hope, in fear, and in every ordinary moment of our lives.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Tim Baker

God of all nations and peoples,  
you are with us even in the world's uncertainty.

We pray for peace where there is war, for Israel and Palestine, for Ukraine, and for all places  
where violence overshadows hope.

Bless those who work for peace — diplomats, aid workers, journalists, and ordinary people who  
choose compassion in the face of hate.

In a world threatened by climate change and division, renew our courage to protect the earth,  
and to live as people who believe your creation still matters.

God with us, hear our prayer.

God of this land,  
we pray for our nation and our communities.

For all who struggle with the cost of living,  
for families worried about heating and food,  
for those working long hours for too little reward.

We pray for the NHS, for teachers, for social workers,  
and for all who serve others with dedication and care.

May those in power lead with wisdom and compassion,  
seeking the good of all, not the few.

We give thanks for our local community, for neighbours who look out for one another, for  
volunteers who bring light in dark seasons, for every small sign that love is still alive among us.

God with us, hear our prayer.

God of promise, we pray for your Church throughout the world, that we may be bearers of good  
news, not fear.

Where the Church has been silent in the face of injustice, wake us up. Where we've been harsh  
or exclusive, soften our hearts.

Bless our own church family here, our ministers, musicians, and volunteers, and all who help  
prepare the way for your coming.

May we, like Joseph, listen for your voice and act with courage and kindness.

God with us, hear our prayer.

God of compassion, we pray for those who carry heavy burdens.

For the sick and the grieving, for the anxious and the weary, for refugees, prisoners, and all who  
feel forgotten.

May they know the comfort of your presence, and may we, your people, be signs of your love in  
action.

God with us, hear our prayer.

God of quiet miracles, as Christmas draws near, help us to make space for your presence in our  
hearts.

When we are uncertain, give us trust. When we are afraid, give us courage. When we are busy  
or distracted, draw us back to what matters most: your love, born among us, still at work in the  
world.

God with us, hear our prayer.

Loving God,  
we bring all these prayers — spoken and silent — to you, through the one who is truly  
Immanuel, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

### **We will now take up the offering.**

God of all grace,  
Today we bring our gifts to you today,  
Come into our midst, we pray,  
And, by your Spirit, bring us together,  
With each other and with the community, to transform society  
In Jesus' name

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

173 STF – Into the darkness of the world OR

208 STF – Let earth and heaven combine

### **Blessing**

May the God who came as a child  
enter our waiting and our wondering.

May the God who spoke to Joseph in the night  
speak peace to our fears and courage to our hearts.

May the God who is forever Immanuel — God with us  
walk beside us in love,  
and bless us and all whom we love,  
this day and forevermore. Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker