Introductory Notes

As we stages of re-opening society in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, looking ahead as far as December may still seem like uncertain terrain. The resource offered here for Advent 2021 has been developed in a ‘pandemic conscious’ manner: conscious that there may still be a mixture of in-person and online worship taking place, conscious that services may be taking place at different times and in smaller groups, and conscious that all-age or family services may be taking place at a different time or in a different format than the principal Sunday service.

To that end, the four Service of the Word patterns offered here are shaped largely around the Second Service lectionary readings, in some cases shortened, and re-ordered to allow for a chronological reading though portions of St Luke. For each service, a theme has been identified based on the readings:

* Advent 1: ‘Wonder’,
* Advent 2: ‘Let Go’,
* Advent 3: ‘Take Heart’,
* Advent 4: ‘Hope’

Supplementary material for a scriptural reflection leading into experiential prayer based on these themes has been prepared by the Children’s Ministry Network and is available on their website: <http://www.cm.ireland.anglican.org>

The alternative words of introduction ‘We have come together in the name of Christ’ with actions is adapted from: <http://www.going4growth.com/downloads/All_Age_Worship_resource_pack_-_Jane_Tibbs.pdf>, by kind permission of the author.

Hymns

The permissibility of congregational hymn singing is of course subject to public health guidance. Where placement of hymns is suggested it may be preferable to substitute a recorded piece of music.

The Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Use of an Advent wreath may be appropriate if the context permits. If the service is taking place remotely, all may be encouraged to light a candle in their home. An example of a mini-Advent wreath that can be made at home is available on the Children’s Ministry Network website: <http://www.cm.ireland.anglican.org/advent-mini-wreath/>

Penitence

It may be appropriate to use visual prompts to symbolise aspects of confession, or to invite children to contribute drawings that represent their confession.

Reflection

The suggested service format moves from the scriptural reflection into the prayers, with time allowed for silence or for those participating in the service to write or draw their prayers. Suggested points for a reflection relating to the readings and themes for each week are provided in the supplemental materials.

The Lord’s Prayer

For a movement based version of the Lord’s Prayer see Messy Church:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOugEQpcc_k>

For a sign language based version of the Lord’s Prayer see the Makaton Charity version:   
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_a7mYX_9UlU>

If possible, in advance of the service invite the children to practice the version of The Lord’s Prayer most regularly used by your church family - either spoken or sung - so that they are confident to participate.

Service of the Word for Advent 1

‘Wonder’

Preparation

Greeting

God is spirit,  
 and those who worship him   
must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:24

Grace, mercy and peace   
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ   
be with you

And also with you.

Introduction

The following or other words of introduction may be used:

Advent is a season of preparation. We are preparing not just for the celebration of Christmas, when we remember the birth of Jesus, but also looking ahead to Christ’s coming again in glory. It is a season in which we set aside time to slow down and to reflect. We travel through these weeks, from darkness to light. As we gather, we make space to listen to God’s word and to offer our praise. In prayerful hope, we bring before God our concerns, our failures, and the many situations of pain and injustice that exist in our world.

We prepare our hearts to listen to God’s voice:

God of our days and years,  
we set this time apart for you.  
Form us in the likeness of Christ  
so that our lives may glorify you. Amen.

Or

We have come together in the name of Christ

Encourage everyone to nod or smile a greeting   
to all in the congregation.

to offer to him our sadness,   
our worries and our thanksgivings,

Lift up hands high as an act of praise and offering.

to receive God’s holy word and his healing,

Arrange the upward facing palms of your hands in front of your body, shaped as a ‘V’ formation like the open pages of a book.

to pray for our needs and the needs of the world

Put hands together,  
palm to palm and fingers pointing upwards, as for prayer.

to be drawn to His love and his works of wonder,

*Float your hand slowly down like a feather floating on a breeze.*  
that by the power of the Holy Spirit

Link thumbs and gently ‘flap’ the fingers as wings,   
imitating a dove – a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

we may give ourselves, as we are, to the service of God.

Put both hands across your heart and then move them outward in a gesture of selfgiving.

The Lighting of the Advent Wreath

This is the message we have heard from him   
and proclaim to you:   
God is light,  
**in him there is no darkness at all.** cf. 1 John 1:5

A candle is lit.

A hymn may be sung.

Penitence

The confession may be introduced with these or other words:

Christ the light of the world   
has come to scatter the darkness of our hearts.  
In his light, we bring before God our fears and hurts,   
wrongs that have been done to us   
and the wrong things that we have done to others.

Silence is kept.

For turning away from you,  
and ignoring your will for our lives;

Father, forgive us:

save us and help us.

For behaving just as we wish,  
without thinking of you;

Father, forgive us:

save us and help us.

For failing you by what we do,  
and think and say;

Father, forgive us:

save us and help us.

For being too busy to stop and notice  
The wonder that surrounds us every day;

Father, forgive us:

save us and help us.

The priest pronounces the absolution.

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent,   
have mercy on you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or if no priest is present the following prayer may be said:

Merciful Lord,  
grant to your faithful people pardon and peace,  
that we may be cleansed from all our sins,  
and serve you with a quiet mind;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A hymn may be sung.

Collect of the First Sunday of Advent

Almighty God,   
Give us grace to cast away the works of darkness   
and to put on the armour of light   
now in the time of this mortal life   
in which your Son Jesus Christ   
came to us in great humility;   
that on the last day   
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty   
to judge the living and the dead,   
we may rise to the life immortal;   
through him who is alive   
and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,   
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

First reading: Joel 3:15-17

The reader says:

A reading from the book of the prophet Joel, chapter 3 beginning at verse 15:

The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. So you shall know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

The reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 9:1-2, 16-18

I will give thanks to you, Lord, with my whole heart;  
I will tell of all your marvellous works.

I will be glad and rejoice in you;  
I will make music to your name, O Most High.

The Lord makes himself known by his acts of justice;  
the wicked are snared in the works of their own hands.

They shall return to the land of darkness,  
all the nations that forget God.

For the needy shall not always be forgotten  
and the hope of the poor shall not perish for ever.

I will give thanks to you, Lord, with my whole heart;  
I will tell of all your marvellous works.

I will be glad and rejoice in you;  
I will make music to your name, O Most High.

Second reading: John 3:1-17

The reader says:

A reading from the gospel according to John, chapter 3 beginning at verse 1:

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

A Reflection may take place at this point

Response

The Prayers of the People

Those participating may share the prayers they have written or drawn, with the following response

Loving God,

let your kingdom come.

or

Gracious Father,   
we give you thanks with our whole hearts;  
we will tell of all your marvellous wonders;  
we will be glad and rejoice in you.

Loving God,

let your kingdom come.

God of new life,  
we pray for the church,   
the body of Christ, in all the world.   
Carry us on the wind of your Holy Spirit.  
Guide your people  
to joyfully proclaim the Good News.

Loving God,

let your kingdom come.

God of justice,  
we pray for our world,  
the world you so loved that you gave your Son.  
We pray for all who suffer   
due to conflict, disaster or climate change.  
Help us to listen to those who are poor or marginalised,  
and to use our resources   
so that all may live healthy and fulfilled lives.

Loving God,

let your kingdom come.

God of mercy,  
we pray for our community.   
Send your light to those in dark places,  
to those who have lost hope.  
May those whose world has been shaken  
know you as their refuge and strength.

Silence The people may add their own petitions

Loving God,

let your kingdom come.

God our Creator,  
inspire us by the power of your Spirit  
to live with a sense of wonder and delight   
in the world that you have made  
and our place in it.

The prayers conclude with

The Lord’s Prayer

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
 on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

or

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say

Our Father, who art in heaven:  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
 on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
for ever and ever. Amen.

A hymn may be sung.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.

We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dismissal

A Dismissal Prayer

God of peace,   
you teach us that in returning to you we shall be saved:   
By the power of your Spirit lift us to your presence,   
where quietness and confidence shall be our strength;   
and where we may be still and know that you are God;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord be with you

and also with you.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The Blessing

If a priest is present:

God the Father who created you,   
guide your footsteps,

God the Son who redeemed you,   
share your journey,

God the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you,   
lead you on life’s pilgrimage,

and the blessing of God,   
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you wherever you may go. Amen.

The minister says

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Service of the Word for Advent 2

‘Letting Go

Prepation

Sentence of Scripture

The grass withers, the flower fades;  
 but the word of our God will stand for ever. Isaiah 40:8

Grace, mercy and peace   
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ   
be with you

And also with you.

Introduction

The following or other words of introduction may be used:

As our Advent pilgrimage continues, we make space for looking back and looking ahead. Looking back, we consider the things that have shaped us, our faith and our communities. Looking ahead, we hold in prayer our hopes and our plans as we place our trust in God’s care and protection for us now and always.

We prepare our hearts to listen to God’s voice:

God of our days and years,  
we set this time apart for you.  
Form us in the likeness of Christ  
so that our lives may glorify you. Amen.

Or

We have come together in the name of Christ

Encourage everyone to nod or smile a greeting   
to all in the congregation.

to offer to him our sadness,   
our worries and our thanksgivings,

Lift up hands high as an act of praise and offering.

to receive God’s holy word and his healing,

Arrange the upward facing palms of your hands in front of your body, shaped as a ‘V’ formation like the open pages of a book.

to pray for our needs and the needs of the world

Put hands together,  
palm to palm and fingers pointing upwards, as for prayer.

and to let go of the things that keep us from walking in God’s way,

Make fists and then open hands downward as if dropping something.

that by the power of the Holy Spirit

Link thumbs and gently ‘flap’ the fingers as wings,   
imitating a dove – a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

we may give ourselves, as we are, to the service of God.

Put both hands across your heart and then move them outward in a gesture of selfgiving.

The Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Prepare the way of the Lord,  
 make straight his paths.  
The uneven ground shall become level,   
and the rough places a plain.

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,   
all people shall see it together. *cf. Isaiah 40:3-5*

A candle is lit.

A hymn may be sung.

Penitence

The confession may be introduced with these or other words:

We bring before God our fears and hurts,   
wrongs that have been done to us   
and the wrong things that we have done to others.

Turn to us again, O God our Saviour,  
and let your anger cease from us.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Show us your mercy, O Lord,  
and grant us your salvation.

Christ, have mercy

Christ, have mercy.

Your salvation is near for those that fear you,  
that glory may dwell in our land.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

The priest pronounces the absolution.

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent,   
have mercy on you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or if no priest is present the following prayer may be said:

Merciful Lord,  
grant to your faithful people pardon and peace,  
that we may be cleansed from all our sins,  
and serve you with a quiet mind;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A hymn may be sung.

Collect of the Second Sunday of Advent

Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world and will send him again to be our judge: Give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

First reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

The reader says:

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 40 beginning at the first verse:

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’

A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’ See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

The reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 75:1-3

We give you thanks, O God,   
we give you thanks,

for your name is near,   
as your wonderful deeds declare.

‘I will seize the appointed time;   
   I, the Lord, will judge with equity.  
‘Though the earth reels and all that dwell in her,   
   it is I that hold her pillars steady.

We give you thanks, O God,   
we give you thanks,

for your name is near,   
as your wonderful deeds declare.

Second reading: Luke 1:5-17

The reader says:

A reading from the gospel according to Luke, chapter 1 beginning at verse 5:

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’

The reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

A Reflection is given

The Prayers of the People

Those participating may share the prayers they have written or drawn, with the following response

Mighty God,

reveal your glory.

Or

God of our salvation,  
we give you thanks that you speak to your people:  
through the voice of your prophets,  
by the example of the saints in scripture,  
and through those who have nurtured our faith.  
We pray for the witness of the church   
and for all who have the responsibility of leadership within the church.

Mighty God,

reveal your glory.

God of justice  
we bring before you those who suffer  
due to conflicts and violence.  
We pray for all who are mistreated and exploited.  
We pray for the leaders of nations   
to govern wisely and for the benefit of all.

Mighty God,

reveal your glory.

God of compassion,  
you care for us as a shepherd cares for the flock.  
Help us in our walk day by day.  
Strengthen all who have trouble letting go of the past.  
Reassure all whose future paths seem rocky or uncertain.

Silence The people may add their own petitions

Mighty God,

reveal your glory.

The prayers conclude with

The Lord’s Prayer

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
 on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

or

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say

Our Father, who art in heaven:  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
 on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
for ever and ever. Amen.

A hymn may be sung.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.

We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dismissal

God of peace,   
you teach us that in returning to you we shall be saved:   
By the power of your Spirit lift us to your presence,   
where quietness and confidence shall be our strength;   
and where we may be still and know that you are God;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord be with you

and also with you.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

If a priest is present:

God the Father who created you,   
guide your footsteps,

God the Son who redeemed you,   
share your journey,

God the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you,  
lead you on life’s pilgrimage,

and the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you wherever you may go. **Amen**.

The minister says

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Service of the Word for Advent 3

‘Take Heart’

**Preparation**

Sentence of Scripture

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,   
and all people shall see it together,  
 for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Isaiah 40:5

Grace, mercy and peace  
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ   
be with you

And also with you.

Introduction

The following or other words of introduction may be used:

As our Advent pilgrimage continues, we think of the journey of our lives. Sometimes we feel excitement for the road ahead and sometimes we feel worried or afraid. Sometimes we need to learn patience to help us make the journey well. As we gather in the season of Advent, we renew our trust in God to guide us and sustain us in all our journeys.

We prepare our hearts to listen to God’s voice:

God of our days and years,  
we set this time apart for you.  
Form us in the likeness of Christ  
so that our lives may glorify you. Amen.

Or

We have come together in the name of Christ

Encourage everyone to nod or smile a greeting   
to all in the congregation.

to offer to him our sadness,   
our worries and our thanksgivings,

Lift up hands high as an act of praise and offering.

to receive God’s holy word and his healing,

Arrange the upward facing palms of your hands in front of your body, shaped as a ‘V’ formation like the open pages of a book.

to pray for our needs and the needs of the world

Put hands together,  
palm to palm and fingers pointing upwards, as for prayer.

and to take heart that God is with us on our journeys,

Hold your hands over your heart.

that by the power of the Holy Spirit

Link thumbs and gently ‘flap’ the fingers as wings,   
imitating a dove – a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

we may give ourselves, as we are, to the service of God.

Put both hands across your heart and then move them outward in a gesture of selfgiving.

The Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Prepare the way of the Lord,   
make straight his paths.  
The uneven ground shall become level,  
 and the rough places a plain.

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,   
all people shall see it together. *cf. Isaiah 40:3-5*

A candle is lit.

A hymn may be sung.

Penitence

The confession may be introduced with these or other words:

We bring before God our fears and hurts, wrongs that have been done to us and the wrong things that we have done to others.

Turn to us again, O God our Saviour,  
and let your anger cease from us.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Show us your mercy, O Lord,  
and grant us your salvation.

Christ, have mercy

Christ, have mercy.

Your salvation is near for those that fear you,  
that glory may dwell in our land.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

The priest pronounces the absolution.

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent,   
have mercy on you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or if no priest is present the following prayer may be said:

Merciful Lord,  
grant to your faithful people pardon and peace,  
that we may be cleansed from all our sins,  
and serve you with a quiet mind;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A hymn may be sung.

Collect of the Third Sunday of Advent

O Lord Jesus Christ,   
who at your first coming sent your messenger   
to prepare your way before you:   
Grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries   
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way   
by turning the hearts of the disobedient   
to the wisdom of the just,   
that at your second coming to judge the world   
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;   
for you are alive and reign with the Father   
and the Holy Spirit,   
one God, world without end. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

First reading: Isaiah 35:1-10

The reader says:

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 35, beginning at verse 1:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.’

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.

No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 50:1-6

The Lord, the most mighty God, has spoken

and called the world from   
the rising of the sun to its setting.

Out of Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth;   
our God comes and will not keep silence.

Consuming fire goes out before him   
and a mighty tempest stirs about him.

He calls the heaven above,   
and the earth, that he may judge his people:

‘Gather to me my faithful,   
who have sealed my covenant with sacrifice.’

Let the heavens declare his righteousness,  
for God himself is judge.

The Lord, the most mighty God, has spoken

and called the world from   
the rising of the sun to its setting.

Second reading: Luke 1:26-38

The reader says:

A reading from the gospel according to Luke, chapter 1, beginning at verse 26:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.’

The reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

A Reflection may take place at this point

The Prayers of the People

Those participating may share the prayers they have written or drawn, with the following response

God of glory,

strengthen your people.

or

We bring all of our worries and all of our prayers to the God who spoke to Israel through the prophet Isaiah saying ‘Be strong, do not fear’.

God of glory,

strengthen your people.

We bring all of our hopes and all of our fears to the God who spoke to Mary through the angel Gabriel saying, ‘Do not be afraid’.

God of glory,

strengthen your people.

Holy God,   
thank you for empowering your church  
to share your Good News.  
Give us courage to live as your disciples  
and remind us daily of your presence with us.

God of glory,

strengthen your people.

Holy God,  
thank you that your Spirit   
is always at work in the world.  
Guide the leaders of nations, and all in authority.  
Give courage to those who face danger  
in order to help others.

God of glory,

strengthen your people.

Holy God,  
thank you that you are close to the broken hearted.  
Comfort all who carry heavy burdens.  
Bring healing in body, mind and spirit to those who suffer.

Silence The people may add their own petitions

God of glory,

strengthen your people.

The prayers conclude with

The Lord’s Prayer

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
 on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

or

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say

Our Father, who art in heaven:  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
 on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
for ever and ever. Amen.

A hymn may be sung.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.

We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dismissal

God of peace,   
you teach us that in returning to you we shall be saved.  
By the power of your Spirit lift us to your presence,   
where quietness and confidence shall be our strength  
and where we may be still and know that you are God;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord be with you

and also with you.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

If a priest is present:

God the Father who created you,   
guide your footsteps,

God the Son who redeemed you,   
share your journey,

God the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you,   
lead you on life’s pilgrimage,

and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you wherever you may go. Amen.

The minister says

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Service of the Word for Advent 4

‘Hope’

Preparation

A Sentence of Scripture

The night is far spent, the day is at hand.   
Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness   
and let us put on the armour of light. *cf Romans 13:12*

Grace, mercy and peace   
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ   
be with you

And also with you.

Introduction

The following or other words of introduction may be used:

Our Advent pilgrimage will soon come to an end. Our season of preparation will give way to a season of celebration. May we be renewed in hope as we look to the coming of Christ, the Light of the world and the Prince of Peace.

We prepare our hearts to listen to God’s voice:

God of our days and years,  
we set this time apart for you.  
Form us in the likeness of Christ  
so that our lives may glorify you. Amen.

Or

We have come together in the name of Christ

Encourage everyone to nod or smile a greeting   
to all in the congregation.

to offer to him our sadness,   
our worries and our thanksgivings,

Lift up hands high as an act of praise and offering.

to receive God’s holy word and his healing,

Arrange the upward facing palms of your hands in front of your body, shaped as a ‘V’ formation like the open pages of a book.

to pray for our needs and the needs of the world

Put hands together,  
palm to palm and fingers pointing upwards, as for prayer.

and to remember again that our hope is in Jesus,

Hold out your hands in front of the body – palms up.

that by the power of the Holy Spirit

Link thumbs and gently ‘flap’ the fingers as wings,   
imitating a dove – a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

we may give ourselves, as we are, to the service of God.

Put both hands across your heart and then move them outward in a gesture of selfgiving.

The Lighting of the Advent Wreath

My soul proclaims the greatness∙of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices∙in God my Saviour,

the Almighty has done great things for me   
and holy is his name.

A candle is lit.

A hymn may be sung.

Penitence

The confession may be introduced with these or other words:

Christ the light of the world   
has come to scatter the darkness of our hearts.  
In his light, we bring before God our fears and hurts,   
wrongs that have been done to us   
and the wrong things that we have done to others.

Silence is kept.

We have lived by our own strength,  
and not by the power of your resurrection.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes,  
as faithless and not believing.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone,  
and doubted our home in heaven.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

The priest pronounces the absolution.

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent,   
have mercy on you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

if no priest is present the following prayer may be said:

Merciful Lord,  
grant to your faithful people pardon and peace,  
that we may be cleansed from all our sins,  
and serve you with a quiet mind;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A hymn may be sung.

Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

God our redeemer,   
who prepared the blessed Virgin Mary   
to be the mother of your Son:   
Grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,   
so we may be ready to greet him   
when he comes again as our judge;   
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,   
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

First reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

The reader says:

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 11, beginning at verse 1:

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

The reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 131

O Israel, trust in the Lord,

   from this time forth for evermore.

O Lord, my heart is not proud;

   my eyes are not raised in haughty looks.

I do not occupy myself with great matters,

   with things that are too high for me.

But I have quieted and stilled my soul,  
      like a weaned child on its mother’s breast;

   so my soul is quieted within me.

O Israel, trust in the Lord,

   from this time forth for evermore.

Second reading: Luke 1:46-55

The reader says:

A reading from the gospel according to Luke, chapter 1, beginning at verse 46:

And Mary said,  
‘My soul magnifies the Lord,  
   and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.  
   Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
   and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
   from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
   he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
   and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
   and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
   in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
   to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’

The reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

The Prayers of the People

Those participating may share the prayers they have written or drawn, with the following response

Maranatha:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

or

In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid   
we pray to the Lord.

Come to your Church as Lord and judge.  
Help us to live in the light of your coming  
and give us a longing for your kingdom.

Maranatha:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to your world as King of the nations.

We pray for…

Before you rulers will stand in silence.

Maranatha:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to the suffering as Saviour and comforter.

We pray for…

Break into our lives,  
where we struggle with sickness and distress,  
and set us free to serve you for ever.

Maranatha:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay;  
give new courage to your people,  
who trust in your love.  
By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of your kingdom  
on earth as in heaven,  
where you live and reign with the Father and the Spirit,  
one God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

The prayers conclude with

The Lord’s Prayer

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray:

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hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
 on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
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thy will be done,  
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from whom every family  
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A concluding prayer may be said:

God of peace,   
you teach us that in returning to you we shall be saved.  
By the power of your Spirit lift us to your presence,   
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and where we may be still and know that you are God;  
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