

**Dorset South & West Written Service, December 19th 2021.
Last Sunday in Advent. Prepared by Revd Jean Quick'**

Advent liturgy for today: Sunday 4 – Love

Today we light a candle of Love.

Not just the slushy love we often see portrayed in the media but the deep caring love God calls us to; Your love, O Lord, brought to our world through Jesus and still here with us through your Spirit.

As we light the candle, we take a moment to think of those who really need to know God's deep love in their lives.

Light candles and be quiet for a moment

Remind us that in advent we think again about a love which is patient and kind, a love that isn't self-seeking or proud, a love that keeps no record of wrongs and rejoices in the truth. A love that perseveres.

Response – Lord we come to you, ready to share again that special love made known in Jesus, with all we know and meet. May they know your loving presence in this advent season. Amen

Sing together: STF 180 – O come, Come Immanuel – Verse 4 & Chorus

O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

Prayers

Those are fantastic thoughts aren't they. Open wide our heavenly home and close the path to misery. Do you always open wide your door? For some, for certain times we have to be careful of our safety, for others we really might not want to open our door, never mind wide; not even a fraction.

Take a few moments to think about times when doors have opened wide for you....and give thanks.

Take a few moments to think about how the door to our Heavenly Father is always open wide for us....and give thanks.

Think about the times life has looked as if it could be so miserable and then someone or something has intervened and stopped our misery in its tracksand give thanks.

Thank you dear Lord that you are always there for us and you find ways to break into our lives and end our misery. Like the sun that shines in the darkness so your love is reflected to us in innumerable ways. The smile of a stranger, the beauty of creation, the kindness that comes so unexpected and in so many ways you share your love to us, and we thank you.

Forgive us for the times we spread misery by our words and deeds. The times when perhaps we feel out of sorts and we take it out on others or we are too quick to speak the unkind thoughts and too slow to be kind. Forgive us and help us to end ways of misery with acts and words of love. **Amen.**

Born in the night, Mary's child (StF 193)

Born in the night,
Mary's Child,
a long way from your home;
coming in need,
Mary's Child,
born in a borrowed room.

Clear shining light,
Mary's Child,
your face lights up our way;
light of the world,
Mary's Child,
dawn on our darkened day.

Truth of our life,
Mary's Child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true,
Mary's Child,
go to your cross of wood.

Hope of the world,
Mary's Child,
you're coming soon to reign;
King of the earth,
Mary's Child,
walk in our streets again.

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:46b-55.**Mary's Song of Praise**

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.'

A few thoughts:

Are you ready to have a happy christmas? No, my spell checker is trying to correct that word but not yet. What is missing? The centre, the T which gives the word it's meaning. However these few words are inspired by my suffering Christmas adverts in November! All between my daily favourite quiz fest. If you understand my 'lingo' and 'the chase' hasn't got you to a 'tipping point!' to cryptically name some of my favourite shows.

Enough about quizzes. However what does 'quiz me' about these advertisements is the stress that Christmas is all about 'T', but the wrong 'T'. Their 'T' is the Christmas feast. Whereas the true Christmas is just that ..ChrisTmas . It's Christ's birth that we celebrate. God's greatest gift for us, freely given.

Ok a little fun quiz for you, so you can think about what this 'Grinch' means!
Can you name the supermarket from a line or thought from their adverts?

1. Heston makes the pies, but the hostess servers them up as her own!
2. You need to get your skates on to get enough of the festive food.
3. 🎵 It's a marshmallow world. 🎵
4. Santa Claus has to show a vaccine passport to gain safe arrival into the country. But, 'no one is going to stop me' and the cranberry sauce arrives at the table despite everything.
5. Christmas dinner is set to be the same here in the present, the future and the far, far future. With the table always overladen....quote... 'We're big on a Christmas you can always believe in.'
6. Stephen Fry: 'It's been a long time coming, so let's make it a Christmas to savour.'
7. the story of a Christmas loathing banana named Ebanana Scrooge. He receives a visit from Kevin the carrot (the 'spirit of Christmas'). Quote ...'For you to be happy, you need to be kind'.
8. Farmer Christmas and his reindeer lorry and the elves in his supermarket workshop making panettone rise like magic!

Answers at the end of the page!

So the advertisements sell us an image of happiness at Christmas if we load our tables to excess. Have the ability to gather with a crowd. Bend the truths and generally get lost in a whirlwind of glitter and frivolity.

In the light of those messages Advent seems so much more important. A time to really discover the true central message of the coming festive season.
A time of waiting, preparing re evaluating what is the essence of Christmas. A gift not just for a few days but for all time.

In our gospel reading Mary sounded excited. As if she had captured the Christmas spirit! But she would not be feasting to excess, seated around an overladen and crowded table. Dressed in her family Christmas cosy pyjamas. Nor seated in a bright highly decorated, warm room. The reality Mary would face was to be a long difficult journey because of the census. Called for and dictated by an occupying government. The only room available for the birth of her child would be in a stable and one cannot begin to imagine the hardships she was to endure. Then all the questions about the pregnancy. Immaculate? Angels? not her betrothed? So before we lose all the Joy of the season let us recall, that despite everything that we can hardly begin to capture this is what 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'

With everything happening at the time of her giving birth, Mary certainly knew lowliness! How does that contrast with our celebrations? Where are we prepared to be lowered so that the Christ child can be born in us?

I read of a school where one young pupil on hearing the Christmas story asked, "how can this be? Under normal conditions kings and shepherds would never hang out."

On this last Sunday before Christmas Day let us marvel at the love that breaks down all barriers, that sees only the good in us and will go to any lengths to redeem us. Let's look not just for the Christ child in our celebrations, but ways that we might truly make Him the central part.

Hymn **STF 210**

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus:
but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
love be yours and love be mine,
love to God and all the world,
love for plea and gift and sign.

Prayers for others based on the hymn: Heaven shall not wait for the poor to lose their patience (StF 701)

Heaven shall not wait
for the poor to lose their patience,
the scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend:

We think of the poor we remember the homeless, the refugees, those who are lonely. We think of those who feel compelled to spend beyond their means because of the pressure of advertising and peers.

We recall and pray,
Jesus is Lord;
he has championed the unwanted;
in him injustice confronts its timely end.

Heaven shall not wait
for the rich to share their fortunes,
the proud to fall, the elite to tend the least:

At this time of year we pray especially that we all might find ways to be a part of an equal sharing of ours and the worlds resources. We remember those who have so little in countries where the environment is difficult and for those who have lost so much of the basic necessities of life through acts of war or the ravages of extreme weather.

Jesus is Lord;
he has shown the master's privilege -
to kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast.

Help us to find ways to mirror those actions for the needy.

Heaven shall not wait
for the dawn of great ideas,
thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain:

As our nation rejoices in the progress in covid prevention and the vaccine program we remember those struggling with further lockdown restrictions and the fear of what might be. We pray for all suffering from any form of sickness. We hold in prayer all involved in healing and care giving.

Jesus is Lord;
he has married word and action;
his cross and company make his purpose plain.

Heaven shall not wait
for triumphant Hallelujahs,
when earth has passed and we reach another shore:
Jesus is Lord
in our present imperfection;
his power and love are for now, and then for evermore. **Amen**

We say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father.....

**STF 207.... set to Westminster abbey by Henry Purcell arr Ernest Hawkins.
(We often sing this tune to 677 Christ is made the sure foundation)**

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
give the Lord his rightful place!
Garlands, gleam with his charisma,
tinsel, glisten with his grace!
Jesus is the heart of Christmas
welcome him with love and praise!

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
light your candles from his flame!
Hang your holly in his honour,
trim each fir tree in his name!
Jesus is the heart of Christmas
celebrate the day he came!

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
share him in each card you send.
Give each gift in love and friendship,
share his gifts which have no end.
Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
Lord and Saviour, Guide and Friend.

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
find his peace on busy days.
May the messages of Advent
guide us through the Christmas maze.
Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
sing each carol in his praise!

Advent Prayer of Blessing.

Lord Jesus,
Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.
We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day,
We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.
We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.
We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.
We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.
To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!"

Amen.

- Henri J.M. Nouwen

Answers to supermarket advert quiz.

1, Waitrose, 2, Asda, 3, M&S, 4, Tesco, 5, Lidl, 6, Sainsbury's, 7, Aldi, 8, Morrison's.