

**WHEN GOD REIGNS THERE IS ROOM
FOR ALL OF NATURE**

You may wish to light a candle as you say this prayer:

It's Advent.

Not yet Christmas.

It's not just time for you and me to prepare,
it's time for all the world's different people to
prepare;

it's time to see God's message in all living
created things,

the cosmos, the environment around us.

For we are intertwined, earth and heaven and
people and plants

and birds of the air and fish of the sea and
beasts of the field.

Let us take time to see the glory of the created
world in all its bounty and beauty.

When God reigns

there is room for all of nature.

Let us take time to understand our
interconnections.

When God reigns

there is room for all of nature.

Let us take time to see how our words, our
deeds, our lives

help or harm God's created order.

When God reigns

there is room for all of nature.

Let us take time to see the environment
around us today, flooded fields

and parched wilderness, searing heat and icy
cold.

When God reigns

there is room for all of nature.

Let us take time to make time to be
passionate about God's gift of the created
world.

When God reigns

there is room for all of nature.

Let us light a candle for the **environment** and
its care.

Hymn STF 103

God is Love: let heaven adore him.

God is Love: let earth rejoice;

Let creation sing before him,

And exalt him with one voice.

He who laid the earth's foundation,

He who spread the heavens above,

He who breathes through all creation,

He is Love, eternal Love.

God is Love: and he, enfolding

All the world in one embrace;

With unfailing grasp is holding

Every child of every race.

And when human hearts are breaking

Under sorrow's iron rod,

Then they find the selfsame aching

Deep within the heart of God.

God is Love: and though with blindness

Sin afflicts each human soul,

God's eternal loving-kindness

Holds and guides and keeps them whole.

Sin and death and hell shall never

O'er us final triumph gain;

God is Love, so Love for ever

O'er the universe must reign.

Timothy Rees (1874-1939)

Prayer

Loving, living God, we praise and adore you for
the beauty of the natural world around us and
all that you have created.

We praise and adore you, for all the ways in
which you show your love for us;

We praise you for the love shown in the life,
death and resurrection of your son Jesus
Christ, in whom all things are held together
and through whom all things were created.

We praise you for the signs we see of your
presence with us;

We praise and adore you for your unending
love and for the gift of your saving, renewing
grace and forgiveness;

for the knowledge that even when we mess
things up and let you, ourselves, and others
down by our words and actions, you are
always ready to forgive us, offering a fresh
start with you.

We praise you for the gift of Your Holy Spirit
and for the signs of your transforming power
all around us.

We praise you for the hope we have the barren
times of winter will soon turn to the
abundance of Spring growth – in nature, in our
lives, in our churches, in our communities.

Please forgive us when we do things that don't
fit with your ways of love and grace; when
we're selfish or thoughtless;

Help us to see things with your eyes and your
heart of love.

Thank you that you hear our prayers, which we
offer in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Bible readings: Isaiah 35:1-10 (NRSVue)

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 shouting.

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 shall be opened;
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.

Matthew 11:2-11 (NRSVue)

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Hymn STF 181

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore.

By his word was all created;
He commanded, it was done,
Earth and sky and boundless ocean,
Universe of three in one.
All that sees the moon's soft radiance,
All that breathes beneath the sun,
Evermore and evermore.

This is he of who seers in old time
Chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word;
Now he shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord,
Evermore and evermore.

O you heights of heaven adore him;
Angel hosts, his praises sing;
All dominions, bow before him,
And extol our God and King'
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Every voice in concert sing,
Evermore and evermore!

*Prudentius (348-410),
tr. John Mason Neale (1818-66) and Henry Williams Baker (1821-77)*

Reflection

I wonder whether you enjoy gardening, as many people do? Perhaps as a child you loved playing with soil or mud? Did you know that there is a natural antidepressant in soil?

Bacterium found in soil can stimulate serotonin production, which makes you relaxed and happier. How wonderful that God has put something in the very ground we walk on that makes us feel joy and happiness!

So many people find God in nature, don't they? In flowers, plants and trees, in hills and sea and sky, in the stars, sun & moon, in the earth and the joy of working with God to nurture and encourage growth, in tending and caring for animals.

In the Christmas story there are lots of animals aren't there? There are the animals around the feeding trough that became baby Jesus' crib. There were probably some sheep following the shepherds. The wise men most likely travelled on horses or camels.

Our lives are interwoven with the lives of the animals and plants which share our planet and whose fate is bound up with our own.

The story of Jesus' birth makes clear that there is room for all creatures and the whole cosmos: God loves every bit of it. And his creation brings him and us joy.

There is room for the whole of creation in God's story and as well as enjoying its beauty and diversity, we are called to care for it and enable it to flourish. So in one sense caring for creation is in itself an act of worship.

I wonder when and where do you get a sense that creation is worshipping too – and also crying out for redemption and healing? Where do you see abundance and flourishing in nature? And where might that be reflected or encouraged in the life of the church?

So often we see life reflected in nature. In this midwinter season, when much of nature seems to be dying or asleep, we know that beneath the surface, largely unseen, things are preparing and growing. What do you see that is similar in the life and work of the church?

The Bible reminds us that God created all things and that he loves all that he has created.

In Jesus, as Paul points out, we see the firstborn of all creation, in whom all things were created, and all things are held together.

Through Jesus God reconciled himself to the whole of creation.

So God's story isn't just for a handful of special people. In fact, it's not just for people. God made the whole cosmos, and he is part of it. So when we are hurting, God is hurting. When the world is hurting, God is hurting.

God's story is for the whole planet and the whole planet is telling the story of God. In God's kingdom there is room for all of creation. Alleluia! Amen.

Hymn STF 125 Praise and thanksgiving

Praise and thanksgiving,
Father, we offer,
For all things living
You have made good;
Harvest of sown fields,
Fruits of the orchard,
Hay from the mown fields,
Blossom and wood.

Lord, bless the labour
We bring to serve you,
That with our neighbour
We may be fed;
Sowing or tilling,
We would work with you;
Harvesting, milling,
For daily bread.

Father, providing
Food for your children,
Your wisdom guiding
Teaches us share
One with another,
So that, rejoicing
With us, our brother
May know your care.

Then will your blessing
Reach every people;
Each one confessing
Your gracious hand.
When you are reigning
No one will hunger:
Your love sustaining
Fruitful the land.

Alfred Frederick Bayly(1901-84)

Prayers

Lord Jesus, you came to us as a helpless child, in a war-torn land that your earthly parents had to flee.

As we begin again our journey to the stable,
we call to mind those who have fled their
homelands in fear and who seek a better life
for their loved ones and we pray:
*Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.***

For those in our world today who have no
voice, whose footprint on our planet is light yet
no less valid than that of any one of us – for
them, and for all who are oppressed, we cry
out ‘justice’:
*Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.***

For those who dwell in the darkness of grief
and for all who are battling disease of body,
heart or mind, we pray;
*Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.***

Let your light dawn in the darkness, your
healing spring up, and your peace flow as a
river of righteousness among nations, we pray:
*Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.***

We bring our prayers in the name of Jesus,
who taught us to 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.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us
from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
yours, now and for ever. Amen.***

Hymn STF 172 Hills of the north rejoice!

Hills of the north, rejoice,
River and mountain-spring,
Hark to the advent voice;
Valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love,
He brings salvation from above.

Isles of the southern seas,
Sing to the listening earth;
Carry on every breeze
Hope of a world's new birth:
In Christ shall all be made anew;
His word is sure, his promise true.

Lands of the east, arise!
He is your brightest morn;
Greet him with joyous eyes,
Let praise his path adorn:

Your seers have longed to know their Lord;
To you he comes, the final Word.

Shores of the utmost west,
Lands of the setting sun,
Welcome the heavenly guest
In whom the dawn has come:
He brings a never-ending light,
Who triumphed o'er our darkest night.

Shout, as you journey on;
Songs be in every mouth!
Lo, from the north they come,
From east and west and south:
In Jesus all shall find their rest,
In him the universe be blest.

Charles Ernest Oakley (1832-65)

Blessing (STF 648)

God to enfold you,
Christ to uphold you,
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight;
So May God grace you,
Heal and embrace you,
Lead you through darkness
into the light.

*John Bell (b.1949)
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