

Dorset South & West. Written Service.
Sunday December 3rd 2023.
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Out of the ordinaryFirst Sunday in Advent.

Opening liturgy

Our Advent ring stands waiting, for candle light to lead us on.
We'll open up traditions,
with challenge and with change.

Advent God, challenge us today.

Our box of decorations stands ready to be explored.
We reassess the treasures in this bulging cardboard box.
Let's sort the treasure from the trash, the needed from the not.

Advent God, challenge us today.

Our living is refocused with preparations underway. Our ordinary and everyday
will be challenged along the way.
Letting go of stuff to do God's will, is here to stay.

Advent God, challenge us today.

In the mundane and ordinary,
stars will start to fall,
challenging and changing us
with holy goodness breaking through.

Advent God, challenge us today.

Advent God, as we think about, or light this, our first Advent candle
may we let go of what swamps us and serves no purpose for us,
so that we can meet the challenges that lie ahead of us.

May our ordinary lives be enriched by your extraordinary love for us. **Amen**

STF 455.

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend him,

beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

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

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge. God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

STF 178

Long ago, prophets knew
Christ would come, born a Jew,
come to make all things new;
bear his people's burden,
freely love and pardon:

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
When he comes,
when he comes,
who will make him welcome?*

God in time, God in man,
this is God's timeless plan:
he will come, as a man,
born himself of woman,
God divinely human:

Mary, hail! Though afraid,
she believed, she obeyed.
In her womb, God is laid;
till the time expected,
nurtured and protected:

Journey ends! Where afar
Bethlem shines, like a star,
stable door stands ajar.
Unborn Son of Mary,
Saviour, do not tarry!

Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
Jesus comes!
Jesus comes!
We will make him welcome!

Reflection

I am using the Methodist Connexional resources for some of this service, entitled, '**Out of the Ordinary**'. I guess as we prepare and plan for each and every Christmas that is perhaps in the back of our minds. 'Let's make this a Christmas to remember, something out of the ordinary!' Just watch the Christmas adverts and see how they try to out do each other and make their store's Christmas goodies seem just so much better than the competitors, something really special and out of the ordinary. Surely that is what the Christmas message is supposed to be about? Remembering something really 'Out of the ordinary', happened for us and for all people. Not a mince pie dressed up to be something a bit different but....!

Well actually when you think about it the humble mince pie was a pastry, originally made from meat and made in the shape of a manger to help us think about the Christ child born for our salvation. That's why when you bite into your first mince pie you are supposed to make a wish. Which is ironic because what it represents is that In Christ, our deepest needs have been met. So what is there to wish for? Rather we need to remind ourselves that in Christ, as the Christmas carol says, 'the hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight.'

The Connexional resource inspires us today on this first Sunday in Advent to prepare for the extraordinary and to let things go.

At Christmas time and in this preparatory period many people will be cleaning their homes from top to bottom. Getting ready for the special celebrations. Perhaps you have memories of the big clean? Or maybe your caught up in it now. Part of the clear up will inevitably involve getting rid of things.

I was having a quick look at traditions from around the world and came across one from Guatemala, In Guatemala cleanliness really is next to Godliness. Locals believe that the devil and other evil spirits live in the dark, dirty corners of your home.

Therefore, they spend the week before Christmas sweeping up, collecting rubbish and then piling everything in a huge heap outside. Finally, an effigy of the devil is placed on top and the whole thing is set on fire.

It's called La Quema del Diablo, the 'Burning of the Devil'. The idea for Guatemalans is to burn all the bad from the previous year and start a new year from out of the ashes. We might find the idea about the Devil a little uncomfortable but I do like the fact that for Guatemalan's the new year, the new start begins at Christmas. Surely there is something special about getting rid of the rubbish and symbolically getting rid of it from our lives. Letting the Christmas message reset our lives and ways.

In Scotland one of the old traditions of Christmas included burning a rowan twig as a way to get rid of any bad feelings between friends or family.

What rubbish do we need to get rid of in order to make this Christmas and indeed this period of Advent something, out of the ordinary?

No doubt we will soon be receiving and writing Christmas cards and greetings. What to write this year and who will be on the list? Could you write something like the words from our Bible reading today? So often when we write the 'round robin type of Christmas letters, we get so caught up with all that we and our nearest and dearest have done in the past year and only at the end of the letter we might put in a line or two about the recipient. St Paul turns everything around, just as the gospel message inspires us to. St Paul firstly blesses those he writes to. Then he remembers and recounts all the things that make him so happy to write to these people. He really puts others first and is so enthusiastic about them.

As we prepare for something out of the ordinary could it be you extend a greeting either by word or Christmas communication to someone who might not expect it from you? Do you remember the days when it was so important to give the dustman and the postman a Christmas tip? I remember as a child being given the joy of

dashing out with a little something for them. People who are there to serve us but are often so often invisible in our day to day lives.

I also remember how we often had people to share our Christmas dinner. People who we children would complain about, because they were different. But some of my happiest memories are about those 'odd' folks who made Christmas special. When we got to know them they were special indeed and their seemingly difficult differences, paled into insignificance.

I guess if I wrote the exact words of St Paul in my Christmas greetings I may well be thought of as a bit odd! However I hope I will try to put the recipient first and let go of the 'Me and mine'. Also I need to think about who needs to hear from me and receive the blessing of my time and attention?

What trash do we need to symbolically get rid of? When families get together we often reminisce about the past and sometimes the mistakes. Often said with humour but so obvious that what we did might have been forgiven but it is definitely not forgotten. The true meaning of the Christ story is that God through the birth of His Son did something and still does, something so, out of the ordinary. Through Christ we are forgiven when we are sorry about our wrong doings and he forgets and He remembers our sins no more.

As we get together all the Christmas trimmings from under the stairs or out of the attic, how often do we have to sort out what is trash and what is worth keeping. The lights that no longer work, the faded decorations and the tree that has seen better days. When my parents died, I found in our old attic every artificial Christmas tree we had ever owned! Even the old broomstick style one that had tatty coloured tinsel adorning it's make believe branches. Very modern in its day, but now an ugly abomination of all that Christmas is supposed to be about. Yet when I looked back at the photos of those Christmases and recalled the laughter and joy around that tree. Even the fun of watching Dad trying to untangle the lights and decorate the tree . I wonder what we choose to hold onto and if we need to let go of all that might destroy our Joy. Things that will get in the way of us remembering that in Christ we experience and receive all that is just, so out of the ordinary. Something to share and embrace. Let us do something out of the ordinary and with St Paul, always thank our God for each other, because of his grace given to us all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Prayers for others and ourselves based on material from the Connexional resource.

Using this star-shape or draw your own on another piece of paper.

Write in it something you're aware of that may be a challenge during this time, or something you'd like to invite God to help you with.

If you need any 'Pointers',
Think about the places in our world that are in the news
Places that need to find peace.

People who are struggling with the economic crisis.

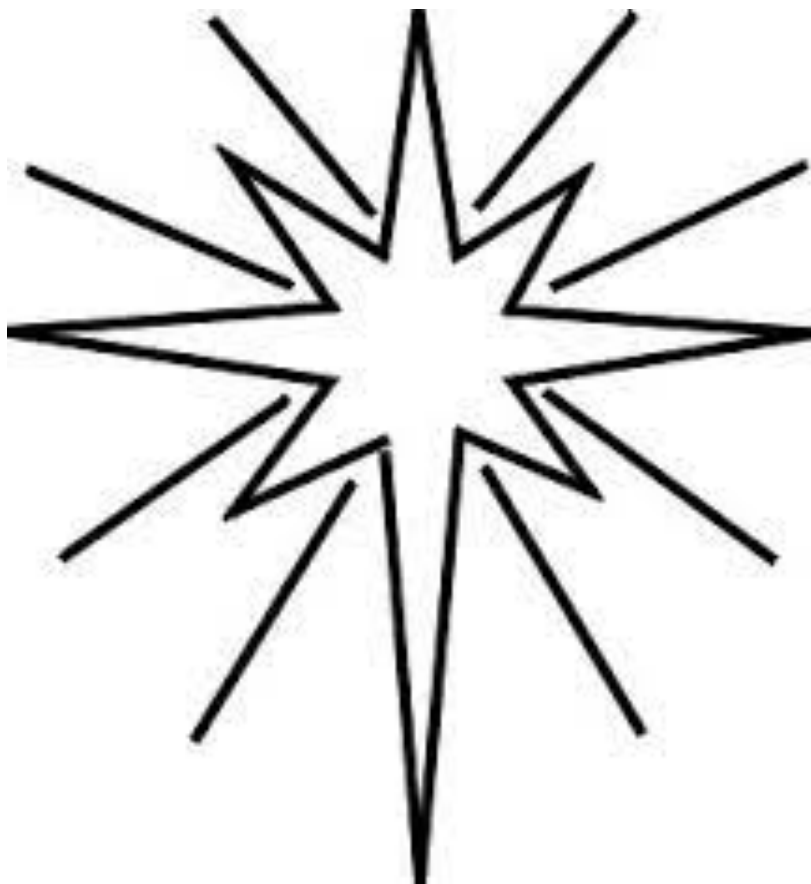
Those who are suffering from illness. Those who are bereaved.
Those for whom the Christmas emphasis on family only deepens their sense of loneliness.

Think about the people who need to be loved and forgiven.

Think about your own needs

And finally let us offer our prayers to God in

The Lord's Prayer.



STF 639

Through the love of God our Saviour
all will be well.
Free and changeless is his favour;
all, all is well.
Precious is the blood that healed us,
perfect is the grace that sealed us,
strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;
all must be well.

Though we pass through tribulation,
all will be well.
Christ has purchased full salvation,
all, all is well.
Happy still in God confiding,
fruitful, if in Christ abiding,
holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
all must be well.

We expect a bright tomorrow;
all will be well.
Faith can sing through days of sorrow
all, all is well.
On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
then in living or in dying,
all must be well.

The Blessing.

God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells between us.
God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells between us.
God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells between us.
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the centre, the focus of our lives
always, and particularly this Advent time. **Amen**

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