

## Circuit Written Service 21st December 2025 – Advent 4

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### Advent Liturgy – Advent 4 – with love from God

Symbol – a gift tag

Gift-giving God, **may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Holy God, as Advent draws to a close, your gospel shines

all the more brightly with messages of hope and promise,

of love and care, of gifts already given

and gifts for the present and for the future.

Gift-giving God, **may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Holy God, remind us afresh of the Angel's appearances, of the sparkle and shine

that their words and their messages add to our everyday lives.

May we be able to offer their messages and gifts with love, compassion and care.

Gift-giving God, **may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**

Holy God, sharing your love is work that is often hard. But when we sit back

and look at what a difference we've made we rejoice that we are made with love

and live to love in your name.

Gift-giving God, **may Advent be for us a time of giving and receiving**



### Call to worship: Isaiah 7: 13 – 15

Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore 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. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.'

### Prayers of Praise

We bring our praise and adoration to the Christ child, shortly to be born again in our midst, and our praise and glory to our generous God who saw fit not to send a warrior, a man of physical strength, a thunderbolt from heaven, but a baby, born into a human family, who would grow and learn, and make choices, as we are even able to.

We bring praise that a child would understand humanity, having lived it, and can therefore sympathise and empathise with all that we are and all that we do, two thousand years later. Help us not let our praise weary over this Christmas time, but grow with Christ, so that our lives are lived to honour and bless you, gracious God, and all of our fellow humanity. Amen.

### Hymn StF 183

Praise to the God who clears the way  
preparing room and space;  
for power and pride will lose their sway  
as peace comes in their place.

Praise to the God who comes to judge  
the truth of word and deed,  
who calls our minds and wills to change,  
rebuking wealth and greed.

Praise to the God who waits with us  
for hope and joy to reign,  
who shares our suffering and our loss,  
embodied in our pain.

Praise to the God who comes to bring  
comfort to all who mourn.  
The whole creation 'Glory' sings  
as Christ the light is born.

Jan Berry

### Prayers of Confession

Loving God, we are sorry when, especially at this time of year, we become grumpy during the celebrations, when we complain about the commerciality of Christmas, instead of being joyful that people celebrate in different ways. Help us to be generous and open in our festivities, instead of closed and curmudgeonly.

Forgive us when we fall short, forgive us when we grumble and complain, forgive us when we forget to welcome love, and joy, and peace. Help us to use this time of year to reset, re-welcome, and become again filled with awe and wonder at your birth.  
In the name of Jesus the Christ-child, born of Mary, saviour and redeemer of the world.  
Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please pray whichever version in whatever language you prefer

### Introduction

On the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, we traditionally remember Mary and her quiet, acquiescent part in the birth of Jesus. We talk of her as meek and mild, but we also see her strength and courage in following through what God had asked of her, at great personal cost. Mary is often held in the highest regard, but gives women impossible standards to fulfil. So today I want to think of Mary the woman (although probably still a teenager) and how beautifully impossible her task was, yet how wonderfully she completed it, not only the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, but his upbringing and education, to still be there at his death and resurrection. A truly remarkable journey with God, which started with an angel's message.

### Hymn StF 185

Sing we the King who is coming to reign;  
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!  
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,  
joy to the nations when Jesus is King:  
*Come let us sing: praise to our King,  
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:  
this is our song, who to Jesus belong:  
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;  
freedom shall flourish and wisdom  
increase;  
justice and truth from his sceptre shall  
spring;  
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:

Souls shall be saved from the burden of  
sin;  
doubt shall not darken his witness within;  
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;  
love is victorious when Jesus is King:

Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we  
pray;  
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day  
when this new song your creations shall  
sing;  
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King:  
Charles Silvester Horne

### Reading: Matthew 1: 18 – 25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' <sup>2</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

## Reflection

This reading from Matthew's gospel tells the story of Mary but, it seems, from Joseph's viewpoint. This is Joseph's reaction to what Mary has told him.

They are already betrothed/engaged, but not yet living together, as you would expect a couple to do after marriage, but Mary is pregnant. For Joseph this means that the child is not his and therefore he has every right to break the betrothal. He could do it in a way to shame Mary and blight any future she may have had, but he decides not to, but to do it quietly. We don't know if Mary would be able to go back to her parents, as they are not mentioned. We do, subsequently, know that she has a cousin Elizabeth, who may have taken her in, but since Zechariah was a priest, he may not have been happy about it either. Mary may have had to go it alone, difficult now, impossible then.

Mary has told Joseph that the child is from God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that an angel has foretold great things for the child, but Joseph has his doubts, as you may expect. But he too has a visitation in a dream and it is stated that what Mary has said is true, and the angel backs it up with the passage from the prophet Isaiah, that we read earlier.

The angelic dream is convincing enough for Joseph to change direction and continue with their original plans, letting everyone assume that the child is his, and marrying Mary. Joseph is often seen as a background character, necessary only for a few parts in the narrative to allow everything to happen as God planned, but I think he was equally as courageous as Mary, even though he had far less to lose.

The prophecy tells of a young woman or virgin, depending on whether you have a Hebrew or Greek translation, giving birth to Emmanuel, God with us, and Joseph doesn't sleep with Mary, even though they are married, until after the baby is born so that that part of Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. He is also told to name the child, the Son, Jesus, which he does. Jesus is the English form of a name that originates from the Hebrew Yehoshua (later shortened to Yeshua), meaning "Yahweh is salvation" or "The Lord saves", which is what the prophet Isaiah says, and he also says that he will be known as Emmanuel/ Immanuel, which is a name we use for Jesus, especially at Christmastime.

It is sometimes difficult to know if the story of Jesus is tweaked so that it fulfils the prophecies, or is just an amazing coincidence, but there are far too many resonances, to my mind, to make it anything other than this is the Messiah, who we were waiting for, whom the prophets foretold, who is born in Bethlehem, the city of David, a descendant of David, who will go on to be great than Moses the law-giver and all the prophets, and change the world irrevocably so that, even if we do not normally profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, we are drawn into that very human Christmas story of a mother, and father, and a baby.

May you and yours be blessed this Christmas.

## Hymn StF 186

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit  
voice;  
tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his  
name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm  
has done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;  
his holy name – the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his  
might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;  
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to  
flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my souls, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my souls, the greatness of the  
Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!  
Timothy Dudley-Smith

### Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

For all of our human relationships, past and present, we give thanks. For family and friends, fellow Christians and neighbours of every faith and none, we give thanks. For sharing the meaning and celebration of Christmas, we give thanks.

And we remember:

- those that we will not be sharing Christmas with, maybe for the first time  
**God is with us**
- those whose Christmas will be meagre, through no fault of their own  
**God is with us**
- those who hate the season, for the memories it brings  
**God is with us**
- those who don't believe, but still join in the festival  
**God is with us**
- those who have to work, to ensure everyone is looked after  
**God is with us**
- those who have no work, but wish they did  
**God is with us**
- those who are put into mental and financial hardship trying to do their best  
**God is with us**
- those who can rest and recharge for the New Year  
**God is with us**
- all those who we love and care for, nearby or far away  
**God is with us**
- the promise of the child born in a stable, laid in a manger, who will bring joy and peace to the world. **God is with us**

May it ever be so, this Christmastime and in the year to come. Amen

### Hymn StF 188

There's a light upon the mountains,  
and the day is at the spring,  
when our eyes shall see the beauty  
and the glory of the King;  
weary was our heart with waiting,  
and the night-watch seemed so long;  
but his triumph-day is waiting,  
and we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation,  
and a quiet in the air;  
and the breath of God is moving  
in the fervent breath of prayer:  
for the suffering, dying Jesus  
is the Christ upon the throne,  
and the travail of our spirit  
is the travail of his own.

He is breaking down the barriers,  
he is casting up the way;  
he is calling for his angels  
to build up the gates of day:  
but his angels here are human,  
not the shining hosts above;  
for the drum-beats of his army  
are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark! We hear a distant music,  
and it comes with fuller swell;  
'tis the triumph-song of Jesus,  
of our King, Immanuel:  
Zion, go now forth to meet him;  
and, my soul, be swift to bring  
all you finest and your noblest  
for the triumph of our King!

Henry Burton

### Blessing

Lord Jesus, light of the world,  
blessed is Gabriel, who brought good news,  
blessed is Mary, your mothers and ours.  
Bless your Church, preparing for Christmas;  
and bless us your children, who long for your coming. Amen.

