

## HOME SERVICE FOR SUNDAY 11<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2022

Welcome to this act of worship on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent for you to use at home on your own or with others. If you have internet access, there are [links in red to click on](#) to take you to the songs, Bible reading and a spoken version of today's message. I would recommend that you say the words of the service aloud, rather than read them silently to yourself – this really does help. Whatever you decide to do, spend this time with God, knowing that other people are sharing this service with you, but in different places. Rev. Alan Boyd



### BEFORE WE BEGIN

Today in our various Churches, our fellow worshippers will be lighting a 3<sup>rd</sup> candle in the series of candles in their Advent ring to remember John the Baptist. To help us join with them in a few minutes, you will need either a candle that you can light, or a meaningful and important object or picture that you can focus on instead. If you can't find anything suitable, you could always look on the black and white picture of John the Baptist and Jesus above.

### INTRODUCING THE 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT

As the world moves towards Christmas, the weeks before the great day are an important

time of preparation. The Early Church lived in expectation that Jesus would return at any moment. In Advent we prepare for Christmas but also prepare for the second coming of Jesus.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent, a candle was lit as a sign of God's promise that Jesus Christ is coming, bringing hope to a world that's not at peace with itself. God's people needed freedom from slavery in the past. Now we need to be freed from our worries and fears, to live as citizens of God's kingdom. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent, the candle was for the Prophets who had angry words for some, and good news for many. They said that Christ would come.

Today, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent we call to mind John the Baptist. He was Jesus' cousin, a prophet, and was a voice in the desert crying out 'Prepare the way' and calling on people to always be ready for Jesus. We take comfort in the fact that Jesus' return nears each day. The days of darkness are numbered, and we glimpse the light of Christ breaking through.

### A TIME OF QUIET AND PREPARATION

As I enter this time of Advent worship, I pause to be still, to breathe slowly, to re-centre my scattered thoughts upon the presence of God.

*(Let's be quiet for a while)*

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ....

**O come, O come, Immanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Immanuel shall come to you,  
O Israel.**

## CALLING JOHN THE BAPTIST TO MIND TODAY

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*Place your candle, or your meaningful object, or your meaningful picture before you and let's begin by reading from Matthew 3:1-3:*

In those day John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'".

*(We light our candle - or focus on the object or picture that we have placed before us)*

I light this candle (or ... I focus on this object or picture) as I think of John the Baptist who called on the people to open their hearts and minds to God and to live in a new way. I pray that I might hear John's words, be open and be changed.

## OUR CALL TO WORSHIP

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Advent time. A voice cries out in the wilderness 'Make straight the way of the lord'. We too prepare for the coming of the Lord, the birth of Jesus, and make straight our lives to meet our God. So come, let's worship God together.

## AN ADVENT HYMN OF PRAISE & THANKSGIVING (StF 264 "Make way, make way for Christ")

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[\*\*\(CLICK HERE FOR THE MUSIC\)\*\*](#)

*You may know this as a hymn for Palm Sunday and Easter, but it is also a wonderful Advent hymn. Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ....*

- 1 Make way, make way, for Christ the King  
In splendour arrives. Fling wide the gates  
and welcome him into your lives.**

*Make way (make way),  
Make way (make way),  
For the King of kings  
(for the King of kings);  
Make way (make way),  
Make way (make way),  
And let His kingdom in!*

- 2 He comes the broken hearts to heal,  
the pris'ners to free; the deaf shall hear,  
the lame shall dance, the blind shall see.**

- 3 And those who mourn with heavy hearts,  
who weep and sigh, with laughter, joy and  
royal crown he'll beautify.**
- 4 We call you now to worship him  
as Lord of all,  
to have no gods before him,  
their thrones must fall.**

*(Graham Kendrick)*

## A PRAYER OF PRAISE

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We prepare to celebrate, once again, the birth of Jesus, a baby born 2000 years ago, who changes lives today.

We praise you, Father God: for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. For the Word, who existed before the world was created. For the promise of his coming again in glory.

During this time of Advent, fill us with joy, so that we may be ready to worship you. Fill us with hope, so that we may be ready to find you. Fill us with love, so that we may be ready to serve you.  
AMEN

## INTRODUCING OUR OLD TESTAMENT READING

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*We often hear this reading in our Carol services entitled "God Comforts his people." The setting of these words was the middle of the 6th century BC. Jerusalem lay in ruins and God's supposedly 'chosen people' were prisoners of war in Babylon. The prophet promises that God had come to rescue and take them home and that they needed to prepare for it. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight". So, among many other things this reading is also a prophecy about John the Baptist who would come to prepare hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus the Christ, the Messiah centuries later.*

## OUR OLD TESTAMENT READING:

[\*\*ISAIAH 40:1-5 \(CLICK HERE TO LISTEN\)\*\*](#)  
**A prophecy about John the Baptist**

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<sup>1</sup>Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.  
<sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup>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 TIME OF CONFESSION

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We ask your forgiveness, merciful God, for we share in the sin of the world. Though we claim to follow Jesus, we go our own way. Though we promise to be faithful, our words and deeds betray him. We are truly sorry for our sins. As we turn to you now, in penitence and faith, help us to know that you love and forgive us and enable us to make a new start; for the sake of Jesus.

*(A time of silence as we offer our confessions)*

Our hope is found in you; each day your return draws nearer. Our hope is alive; we see glimpses of your light breaking through. Our hope I sustained; your armour of light strengthens us. Come Lord. Bring your kingdom of light to our world. Ignite our hope as we wait for your coming kingdom.

### WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

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"I am making all things new", says the Lord. Hear the word of salvation to you and me : Your Sins are forgiven. AMEN. Thanks be to God

### CAROL 'THE TRUTH FROM ABOVE'

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*But how will God 'make things new' for me, for you, for our world? Perhaps the words of this traditional English Carol (the author is unknown,) sometimes called the 'Hereford Carol' or 'Shropshire Carol', might help. This is a beautiful choral piece arranged by R. Vaughan Williams*

[\*\*\(CLICK HERE FOR THE CHORAL SETTING\)\*\*](#)

*You can also sing it to "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (tune: O Waly Waly).*

[\*\*\(CLICK HERE FOR THAT TUNE\)\*\*](#)

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ....

- 1, This is the truth sent from above,  
The truth of God, the God of love,  
Therefore don't turn me from your door,  
But hearken all, both rich and poor.**

- 2. The first thing which I do relate  
Is that God did man create;  
The next thing which to you I'll tell  
Woman was made with man to dwell.**
- 3. Thus we were heirs to endless woes,  
Till God the Lord did interpose;  
And so a promise soon did run  
That he would redeem us by his Son.**
- 4. And at this season of the year  
Or blest Redeemer did appear;  
Yet he did live, and here did preach,  
And many thousands he did teach.**
- 5. Thus he in love to us behaved,  
To show us how we must be saved;  
And if you want to know the way,  
Be pleased to hear what he did say.**

### INTRODUCING OUR NEW TESTAMENT READING

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*Matthew, Luke and John all begin with some reference to the birth of Jesus. St. Mark, the earliest and shortest Gospel, tells us nothing about that but begins instead with the ministry and campaign of John the Baptist. Here, he harks back to those words we heard earlier in Isaiah 40 and its prophecy of salvation. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight". Jesus, the 30-year-old working man from Nazareth, makes the 70 mile journey to hear his cousin John's message. Using John the Baptists' voice, Mark underscores that this Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. He's fulfilling the Old Testament. Through him God is going to save his people and bring them home.*

### OUR NEW TESTAMENT READING:

[\*\*MARK 1:1-8 \(CLICK HERE TO LISTEN\)\*\*](#)

**The proclamation of John the Baptist**

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<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; <sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" ', <sup>4</sup>John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

## A SUNG ADVENT RESPONSE

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Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ....

**O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer  
our spirits by your advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Immanuel shall come to you,  
O Israel.**

## FOR OUR YOUNGER PEOPLE

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Jesus had a cousin called John. He was also known as John the Baptist. He came out of the desert and called on people to turn from what was wrong in their lives come back to loving and serving God properly. When they wanted to do that, John baptised them to show that they had made a new beginning. His most important job was to get people ready for the special person called the 'Messiah' who would rescue all of God's people. That person turned out to be none other than Jesus. That's the story we're looking at today. Have a go at the activity sheet at the bottom of these pages. It'll help you think about what we can all do to be ready and how we might help others to prepare as well.

## A REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

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### **TODAY'S MESSAGE (CLICK TO WATCH/LISTEN)**

If you're a bloke, you always think you've got a deep manly voice until you hear yourself on a recording – when you wonder if that high pitched 'squirrel' sort of noise really could be you. I always come out sounding like someone from "Derby O'Gill and the Little People". A sort of preaching Leprechaun. Knowing my luck, women probably sound fine – but maybe you too are a bit surprised if you hear yourself and you sound like the 'Wicked Witch of the East' from the 'Wizard of Oz'.

I guess it's how you sound, nerves and a few other things that make people shy away from speaking or reading in public. Most folk are terrified of getting tongue tied and making a total twit of themselves. So, when I approach some poor unsuspecting member of the congregation to ask them to read for me, I'm usually in the habit of saying to them first of all: "Don't worry, in this reading, no-one begat anybody" and they breathe a sigh of relief.

You know the sort of thing where your reading starts out fine, you're getting into the flow, it's going well, nice and clear, variation in your voice, terrific storytelling and – horror of horrors – before you can cry for help just 4 verses in it starts to go: "And Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brothers; and Judah begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon. And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab" and so-on and so-on.

You wonder "Should I pretend to faint and they'll carry me off?" but usually that isn't on and you have to plough your way through a list of names that would floor anyone. Of course, what's happened is you're in the middle of a lineage. A lineage. A family line or tree.

Now the names I've just used as an example might sound strangely familiar - don't worry if it doesn't - but I bet that if I went on - they would. "and Booz begat Obed and Obed begat Jesse. And Jesse begat David the King and David begat Solomon". No clearer? What if I jumped on another 10 or so verses "And Elezar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Joseph the Husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ".

So there you have it. It's not any old lineage, but the Lineage of Jesus and the opening 16 verses of the Gospel of Matthew. That's Matthew's emphasis - the prophecy of the past fulfilled, and the long, long link back for the Jewish faith.

In the 3rd Gospel, Luke starts off by saying that he wants to persuade someone called Theophilus – a name simply meaning 'lover of God'- that he's setting down a true, ordered, account of the ministry Jesus.

In the 4th Gospel, John takes us back well beyond the birth of Jesus and sets it all in a bigger framework of God's purpose and plan - God's saving purpose and plan. This is more than the story of a carpenter from Nazareth. You remember his prologue: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*John 1:1*).

The Gospel of Mark - and the reading we've had - well that's a whole other thing. No lineage. No prologue. Nor promise of - or not even an attempt at - an ordered account. Action man Mark jumps straight into it. He says: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ" (*Mark 1:1*). No nativity story. No mention of any decree going out from Caesar Augustus that he wants a census. No theological reflection on the origin and the power, light and the life behind the cosmos. None of that.

Mark is concerned with one thing and one thing only. A critical moment. The critical moment. The critical moment when Jesus is called to his mission. The critical moment when Jesus is called to his mission to proclaim the reign of God. Mark's story starts with an obscure reform movement in the desert. He picks up on the leader of that movement - John the Baptist.

Times were turbulent. And we know all about what that feels like now don't we? Tensions across the world, numerous large and small conflicts, a major war on the continent of Europe. Government chaos, economic collapse, massive uncertainty, unaffordable energy and food, worry over how we're going to manage. More austerity on the way. The rashness, untruth and unpredictability of some national and international politicians. 'Fake news' seemingly being a way of life. The danger it all poses. Yes, just like now, times were turbulent.

People hoped and really searched for deliverance. Just like now. Conflict in Syria, Ethiopia and Tigray, Myanmar, Yemen. Calamity for everyone caught up in a mad war in the Ukraine and fear for our world as the tension ratchets up. The shame of our government's language, obsession and draconian approach to those who need our help and welcome. Our environment literally in meltdown. Our amazing health service in crisis and its wonderful staff being ground into the dirt. Foodbanks becoming a necessary norm in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

Then, personal turbulence, uncertainty and the need for deliverance in our own lives. The worry over money, will it last, can we pay the bills, will I be able to stay on my own home, what if I need to be looked after? The relationships with our neighbour, or son, or daughter - with our kith and kin - that just don't seem to work.

Where the only words we hear or say are of bitterness or hurt or a grudge. Or when there's nothing to say to each other. Feeling unloved, fear of being alone or unwanted. When our weakness, habits - when our sins, mine and yours - when our repeated sins - just drag us down and down and down no matter how hard or how often we try.

Yes, just like now, times were stormy, confusing and people hoped and really searched for deliverance. And here is John the Baptist. He lives on the margins of society. He dresses like a prophet. He challenges and calls the people to a new way of life. He preaches an uncomfortable message. He calls the people to a new commitment to God's way and God's justice.

It's interesting how that picks up on how we may feel and how we are as a church sometimes. The census statistics published last week bring that home, with the attention-grabbing headline that for the first time since the dark ages, just less than half the population in England and Wales identifies themselves as Christian.

It's not QUITE the beginning of a new dark age, but it is a sobering thought. WE look to the Sunday-School room that used to be full that is empty now - just as most of the pews and seats are. We might long for the days when the great prophetic preachers used to seem to draw the crowds and people listened.

Like John the Baptist's reform movement, we feel like we're in a desert - on the edges of our society. What SHOULD be a prophetic message is lost in the noise of the crowd crushing into Sheffield's Meadowhall Centre in this morning, or the designer outlet on the A38, or down in Nottingham city centre, or in spending overload on Amazon or on eBay.

We might want to challenge and call our people - or even ourselves - to a new way of life - but most of them seem to be doing OK thank you very much. It certainly can feel like a desert and it often does.

But here's something else about the story that opens Mark's Gospel that should challenge us and inform us and encourage us. John believes with all that he has, that this is a story worth telling. He goes on preaching an uncomfortable message. God was with him as he is with us.

John goes on calling the people to a new commitment to God's way and justice. Just as we must keep on doing, not in our own strength, but in God's. Just as John did. John goes on telling of the one to come who will baptise with the Holy Spirit. Just as we believe and know for ourselves. John goes on doing this in the middle of the desert. Just as we do here and now.

Not because it's successful. Not because it packs them in or fills the Churches. But because - even in the desert - God's message of justice and hope and new beginnings needs to be heard. And in the desert - even the desert - God's Spirit moves. And it's in the desert - even the desert - that Jesus appears. And it's in the desert - even the desert - that God meets Jesus of Nazareth. And it's in the desert - even the desert - that the hope of all the generations that went before began to be fulfilled in Jesus the Christ.

What are we waiting for at advent? The next part of the story of: "the Good news of Jesus Christ" (*Mark 1:1*) and the good news for all God's people. In Mark's Gospel the story continues to unfold as it can - and will - for us.

For Mark goes on to say (*1:9-11*): In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased".

By my power through you anything is possible. Through you Jesus, and through you, maybe even me. You are my son. You are my daughter. You are my people. You are my world. The beloved. With you I am well pleased. And I believe that however you think you may sound - that is a story worth telling. AMEN

#### **A PERSONAL PRAYER**

*Let's be silent for a while, as we think about what's been speaking to us from today's message. Then we'll pray together:*

Thank you for the waiting time. You keep us waiting. You, the God of all time, want us to wait for the right time to discover who we are, where we must go, who will be with us, and what we must do. So, thank you for the waiting time. Constant God, whose love never changes, we strain to hear your voice among the noise and chaos of our world. Help us to seek you in all our journeying on straight or twisting paths, with confidence and trust. Help me, Lord, to prepare a way for you, in my life, in my dealings with others, in all that I do. Amen

#### **A HYMN ABOUT THE PROPHET'S CALL TO US ALL (StF 189 "Wild and love the prophet's voice")**

*We sing this to the well know tune of StF 202  
'Hark! The herald-angels sing'*

**[\(CLICK HERE FOR THE MUSIC\)](#)**

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ...

- 1 Wild and lone the prophet's voice  
echoes through the desert still,  
calling us to make a choice,  
bidding us to do God's will:  
'Turn from sin and be baptised;  
cleans your heart and mind and soul.  
Quitting all the sins you prized,  
yield your life to God's control.'  
Quitting all the sins you prized,  
yield your life to God's control.**
- 2 'Bear the fruit repentance shows:  
lives of justice, truth, and love.  
Trust no other claim than those;  
set your heart on things above.  
Soon the Lord will come in power,  
burning clean the threshing floor:  
then will flames the chaff devour;  
wheat alone shall fill God's store.'  
then will flames the chaff devour;  
wheat alone shall fill God's store.**
- 3 With such preaching stark and bold  
John proclaimed salvation near,  
and his timeless warnings hold  
words of hope to all who hear.  
So we dare to journey on,  
led by faith through ways untrod,  
'til we come at last like John  
to behold the Lamb of God.  
'til we come at last like John  
to behold the Lamb of God.**

*(Carl P Daw, Jr)*

## PRAYERS FOR THE WORLD

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*As we share in God's concern for the world, we're going to speak and sing words from the hymn "O come, O come, Immanuel" to guide our prayers:*

O come, O come, Immanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.

Faithful God, we trust in your promise that one day your kingdom will come. We pray for those who suffer unjustly ... God of justice, we look for a world where justice is at home.

**SING: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you O Israel**

We pray for those who are anxious .... God of peace, we look for a world where peace is at home.

**SING: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you O Israel**

We pray for those who feel unloved ... God of love, we look for a world where love is at home.

**SING: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you O Israel**

God of justice, peace and love, may your kingdom come; and may it be seen in us, as we live for you day by day through Jesus Christ our lord.

**SING: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you O Israel**

O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by your advent here; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight. AMEN.

## WORDS AS WE TRAVEL ON THROUGH ADVENT

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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.

*(Geoffrey Ainger)*

## OUR FINAL HYMN OF GREAT HOPE

**(StF 455 (i) "All my hope on God is founded")**

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**[\(CLICK HERE FOR THE MUSIC\)](#)**

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ...

- 1 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.**
- 2 Pride of man 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.**
- 3 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.**
- 4 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.**
- 5 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.**

*(Robert Bridges)*

## A BLESSING

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The night is past. The day is at hand. Advent, a time to take stock, a time to listen, a time to learn, a time to look forward, a time to change. As you wait through Advent and prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, may God bless you and keep you, fill you with hope, calm you with peace, and inspire you with love. AMEN

*Some words and prayers are taken from, based on, or inspired by, those in "All We Can Advent reflections and prayers", 'The Iona Community Worship Book', 'The Methodist Worship Book', 'Companion to the Lectionary', 'Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary', 'Lectio 365', 'Roots'. Hymns used by permission under CCL.*

FOR PARENTS

### Bible reading

Mark 1.1-8

John came out of the desert and told people: 'Someone special is coming. Get ready to come close to God'. Today we talked about how people prepare for someone special coming and what John and the People of God might have felt and done so long ago.

### Activity



What can you add to the picture to show you are ready for the Master coming?

### Living faith

Talk with the people you live with and decide on something special you can do to help each other get ready for this Christmas.

**FAIDEE PRAYER**

Help us, Lord, to prepare for your special visit. Amen.

### Talk about...

Who helps us get ready for special visitors and special events?

Is there anyone you know who might need some help or comfort this Christmas?

What can you do to help other people get ready?



### Book to read together

Mig Holder, *Papa Panov's Special Day*, Lion Hudson, 2003, ISBN 0745945643.