

ADVENT 2020

FOR UNTO US  
A CHILD IS BORN!



## Introduction

It is hard to know what exactly our Christmas Celebrations are going to look like this year. We may be able to gather for our Christmas Services – we may not. Time will still lead us ever on and so we journey towards Christmas and beyond.

As a dispersed community we travel together: old and young; rich and poor; busy, very busy and not so busy. We have become used to this notion throughout 2020 that 'though apart, in Christ we are brought together, though separated we join as one about the throne of God in worship, prayer and praise.

Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, of waiting and of hope as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming (adventus) of Christ at Christmas. In many ways we find ourselves compelled into a slower pace of life, with time to be still, to hush the world around us, to listen for the song of the angel choirs singing aloud the message of God's hope come to the darkest of world. For each weekday of our Advent journey we have the chance to listen to a carol sung for us by either the choir of St Martin in the Fields or by the St Martin singers. Each carol is introduced for us by one of the staff team at the church in 2017 when they first broadcast a series of reflections and carols as an advent carol calendar. These carols will be available daily from the church website; [ilchester-district-churches.com](http://ilchester-district-churches.com) After listening to the carol take time to read, reflect and pray through the offerings included here each day.

From all to all I wish you Comfort and Joy this Advent and Christmastime

Bruce



## Sunday 29 November - Advent 1

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isaiah 40.3

**Reflect** The importance of preparing yourself for God when he appears is a theme that runs throughout the bible. Going into the wilderness was one way of preparing, since it removed distractions, allowing people to focus on God whom they waited. Most of us can't go into the wilderness but perhaps living through a pandemic is not that dissimilar. What are the important things right now that keep you going? Can we make more space for them? Can we make more space for God?

**Pray** that this Advent you will find the time and space to encounter God.

## Monday 30 November

Carol for the day: Carol 1 Hark the Herald Angels Sing

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8.9

**Reflect** Generosity is contagious. If someone is generous to you, it is so much easier to be generous in return. Generosity lies both at the heart of the Christian faith and of Christmas: we give to others because of Jesus Christ, who gave us his love, his life and his peace.

**Pray** that you might feel the love of God and the peace of Christ during Advent.

## Tuesday 1 December

Carol for the day: Carol 2 O Holy Night

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. Psalm 9.1

**Reflect** One of the most frequent commands in the Old Testament is to give thanks to God. Being thankful is transformative. It is all too easy to focus on those things that bring us misery and anxiety and overlook what brings us joy and pleasure. Giving thanks teaches us to focus on the good things in our life; the more we do this the more aware of them we become. Concentrating on what life is giving will not take our anxiety away but it will put it into perspective.

**Pray** give thanks for the good things in your life.

## Wednesday 2 December

Carol for the day: Carol 3 Away in a Manger

All who believed were together .... They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Acts 2.44-45

**Reflect** We live in world in which some people have too much; many others have too little. Even if we are not rich, it can feel as though our homes are filled with 'stuff'. The early Christians tried to share everything they had. While most of us can't do this, we can be inspired by their example and try to give away what we no longer need.

**Pray** that your life will be more filled with love and peace than with things.

## Thursday 3 December

Carol for the day: Carol 4 In the Bleak Midwinter

I give thanks to my God always because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1.4

**Reflect** People touch our lives in many ways, though actions as small as a smile on a grey and miserable day or as large as stepping in to save us when everything seems lost. Most of the time people touch our lives and go on their way having no knowledge of how they helped. Telling them might encourage them as much as they have encouraged you. Who has touched your life in the past 6-8 months?

**Pray** for someone who has been important to you this year.

## Friday 4 December

Carol for the day: Carol 5 A Spotless Rose

I praise you, for I am wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. Psalm 139.14

**Reflect** Have you stopped recently to notice quite how wonderful the small things are that God has created? So often we rush through life at such a pace that we simply miss its beauty, or sometimes we are so self-absorbed with the important things in life. What small things do you notice today?

**Pray** praise God for beauty and marvel at the small things God created.

## Saturday 5 December

Carol for the day: Carol 6 The Sussex Carol

If you then, who struggle know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give good things to those who ask him. Matthew 7.11

**Reflect** God loves to give us good things. The created world testifies to the fact that God loves to pour out good things for us in wonderful, beautiful abundance. The problem is that we are often very bad at accepting these gifts.

**Pray** take time to feel God's love surrounding you.



## Sunday 6 December – St Nicholas Day

Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor. Proverbs 22.9

**Reflect** For many of us this time would usually be a time of feasting and parties - but his year is different. This year is more quiet, simpler perhaps. Time and time again in the bible God's people are called to remember those who are poor. To share what they have with others – give of the simple, ordinary things they have plenty of. How can we share the little we have with others?

**Pray** for those in this country and across the world that have very little, for who will go to bed hungry tonight.

## Monday 7 December

Carol for the day: Carol 7 Once in Royal David's City

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! Luke 12.24

**Reflect** God does care for all the animals in this world but he calls us, as well, to be stewards of creation. It can be a chore in the cold and the wet to go out and to top up a bird feeder or to express our care for God's world in another way, but in our caring with share with God in showing love for the world he has created.

**Pray** for those who work in caring for the environment, especially for all those who work hard during the Advent/Christmas season

## Tuesday 8 December

Carol for the day: Carol 8 The Coventry Carol

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established. Psalm 8.3

**Reflect** God creates. The whole universe is the work of his loving creativity. Human beings are made in the image of God and as such is made to share in his creativity. When we make or decorate something we join in with God's creative act, remembering his role in creation and honouring it with our creation.

**Pray** allow yourself to wonder at the intricacy of the world God has created and give thanks for God's care for you.

## Wednesday 9 December

Carol for the day: Carol 9 God Rest ye Merry Gentlemen

Sing to the Lord, bless his name: tell of his salvation from day to day. Psalm 96.2

**Reflect** We can become so used to Christmas music that we sing it without noticing what the songs really say. Most Christmas Carols are songs of praise to God for what he has done for us in sending his Son to be born into our world. Taking time to savour the words of a carol we know really well can bring it back to life again for us.

**Pray** give thanks to God for the gift of his Son.

## Thursday 10 December

Carol for the day: Carol 10 A Christmas Lullaby

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the turtle dove is heard in our land. Song of Solomon 2.12

**Reflect** In the middle of winter (especially this year) it can feel sometimes as though spring will never come. And while we cannot hurry winter along, we can prepare ourselves for new life – a life that comes at Christmas as well as in the spring months. As we look ahead during Advent, we prepare ourselves inwardly for the life that comes from God.

**Pray** that you will feel the joy of life in all its fullness deep within your heart.

## Friday 11 December

Carol for the day: Carol 11 Ding Dong Merrily

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him/her. Isaiah 42.1

**Reflect** Many of us long for the world to be a better place where people can live in safety and peace. We are not alone in this. The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God yearned for the world to be like that too.

**Pray** for justice and peace throughout the world.

## Saturday 12 December

Carol for the day: Carol 12 O Come all Ye Faithful

But Mary treasured these words and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2.19

**Reflect** The story of Christmas – a story that tells of God’s great love for us, a love so great he sent his Son born as a baby to live among us – it is almost too great a mystery to comprehend. Mary, Luke tells us, treasured everything that happened, everything that was said to her, so that she could ponder over them later. Advent invites us to make time to ponder, just like Mary did.

**Pray** in the middle of this pandemic take time to ponder the mystery of God’s love.

## Sunday 13 December

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Roman 12.12

**Reflect** Joy is different to happiness. Being happy is a fleeting feeling in which everything is good and uplifting. Joy, however, is a deeper-rooted sensation. Given by God we can experience joy even when we are struggling. Joy and sadness can be companions on our journey – one does not exclude the other. What is it that gives you joy?

**Pray** for that even in the darkest times of your life you may feel a sense of peace and joy.



## Monday 14 December

Carol for the day: Carol 13 The Shepherd's Pipe Carol

Martha, Martha you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need for only one thing. Luke 10.41-42

**Reflect** Many of us live our lives at a hectic and uncertain pace that increases as Christmas draws closer – and this year more than ever. Work, friends, Covid restrictions all make demands on our time. Life can get very full. In the gospel story Martha was distracted- and I am sure had a great deal to worry about. And because of that she risked missing the opportunity to sit and listen to Jesus.

**Pray** that in the midst of your busyness and worry you will not miss Jesus this year.

## Tuesday 15 December

Carol for the day: Carol 14 While Shepherds Watched

For God alone my soul awaits in silence, for my hope is from him. Psalm 62.5

**Reflect** Our world is a place of great activity and stimulation even during the pandemic: lights twinkle, music plays, screen flicker, messages ping onto our electronic devices. This kind of stimulation is energising and can be exciting but it can also distract us from the still small voice.

**Pray** that this Advent you might know the peace that can come in stillness

## Wednesday 16 December

Carol for the day: Carol 15 Unto Us is Born a Son

I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. Ephesians 1.16

**Reflect** We are often very good at thanking people for the things they have given us or the things they have done for us. The most important people in our lives, however, affect us not because of what they do or say but simply of who they are. There is nothing they have to do; their very existence and presence changes our lives.

**Pray** for those people who have touched and transformed your life by just being who they are.

## Thursday 17 December

Carol for the day: Carol 16 O Little Town of Bethlehem

Jesus said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while.'  
Mark 6.31

**Reflect** The last few days before Christmas are always hectic. And this year even more so as you have to think on your feet. What is your family Christmas going to look like? Amidst all this can you allow yourself to slow down a bit, rest a while and be with others in less hurried way?

**Pray** the Lord's prayer but say it slowly with a pause between each phrase.

## Friday 18 December

Carol for the day: Carol 17 I Saw Three Ships

Out of the ground the Lord God made grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. Genesis 2.9

**Reflect** Genesis tells us that God made the world for human beings to enjoy. He didn't just grow any old trees but trees that are 'pleasant to the sight and good for food'. It seems such a great shame, therefore, that we often speed through life without even noticing that they are there. God's gift of creation calls out to us to stop, to notice and to enjoy its beauty.

**Pray** give thanks for the beauty and pleasure we can find in creation.

## Saturday 19 December

Carol for the day: Carol 18 Angels from the Realms of Glory

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against one another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Colossians 3.13

**Reflect** As we approach the end of another year it is good to look back and reflect. And what a year it has been! It is easy to write the whole year of 2020 off as bad or difficult. While this is probably true- I wonder, have there been good things happening? Can you treasure them, however small they may be?

**Pray** for God to show you the life-giving, God-given moments that have brought you safely through this year.

## Sunday 20 December

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the robe of Asher. She was of great age. Luke 2.36

**Reflect** Years of watching and waiting had prepared the prophet Anna to recognise Jesus when his parents brought him to the Temple. Her wisdom was the kind that can only be gained through years of experience. During Advent we have been learning more of who Jesus is so that we might know him more fully.

**Pray** that you may be ready to recognise God in your own life.

## Monday 21 December

Carol for the day: Carol 19 Nkosi Jesus

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1.5

**Reflect** Candle flames suggest defiance in the face of darkness and despair. As they flicker in the darkness they appear to push it back, spreading light through the gloom. Jesus, the light of the world, came to push back the darkness of our world, to spread light, hope and joy in the midst of gloom, misery, death and futility.

**Pray** that the light of God will shine brightly in our world, overcoming the darkness or hate and despair.

## Tuesday 22 December

Carol for the day: Carol 20 Jesu Good Above All Others

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever. 1 Chronicles 16.34

**Reflect** When we get caught up in the hard work of getting things sorted for the big day, we can easily believe that everything depends on our own efforts. Taking a moment to pause and be thankful can remind us that all that we have – even life itself – is a gift. Remembering the steadfast love of the giver might even take some pressure off us.

**Pray** that you, and all whom you love, might feel peace this Christmas.

## Wednesday 23 December

Carol for the day: Carol 21 Joy to the World

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you."

Luke 1.26-28

**Reflect** What do you think Mary felt when the angel addressed her as 'favourite one'? Perhaps she was scared? Or perhaps curious what this was all about? Mary was young in age but she was wise; wise enough to hear God speaking to her. Can you image God looking at you with tenderness and love and address you today saying 'Greetings, favourite one! The Lord is with you.'

**Pray** for the gift of discernment so you can sense God speaking to you though situations or people in your life.

## Thursday 24 December

Carol for the day: Carol 22 O Come, O Come Emmanuel

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2.1-7

**Reflect** Many people will be walking the streets tonight: those without a place to call home, those fleeing wars and famine and terror, those walking away from an abusive relationship.

**Pray** for all who will spend the night outside. Pray for their safety.





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The Carols can be found at:

[ilchester-district-churches.com](http://ilchester-district-churches.com)

Or on the Facebook pages for

St Peter's Podimore

St Mary Limington