

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

ADVENT REFLECTIONS BY FRIENDS
ACROSS THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION





USPG is the Anglican mission agency that partners with churches and communities around the world reflecting the call of God to enliven faith, strengthen relationships, unlock potential and champion justice. We were founded in 1701.

We are delighted to be able to provide you with this Advent resource free of charge, however, as you will be aware printing and postage costs continue to increase.

You may want to consider donating an amount to help us cover the cost of producing this resource. You can do this here: www.uspg.org.uk/donate

If you would like to order additional copies for your church or small group, you can contact us or download a copy online at www.uspg.org.uk/pray.

You are welcome to use this publication for public worship. All Bible verses are NRSV unless otherwise stated.

Please note that the views expressed do not necessarily represent the official position of USPG.

For more information about USPG, visit uspg.org.uk or call 020 7921 2200.

INTRODUCTION

Christians worldwide anticipate the four weeks leading up to Christmas - that special season which we celebrate as Advent.

This resource offers an opportunity to clear your mind from the hustle and bustle and stresses of the year, and to pause for a moment amid the busy preparations for Christmas. The weekly reflections will give you something fresh to contemplate and are prepared by contributors from around the world.

Whether you follow along individually, as a group or every week when lighting your Advent wreath at church, we hope this guide reminds you that we are all part of a global community. Take time to consider voices from various contexts as you read the reflections.

We wish you a rich and reflective encounter with the Christ child this Advent season.



MEET OUR CONTRIBUTORS

This Advent resource could not exist without the thoughtful contributions and reflections from our partners around the world. Please do remember them as you read and pray.



ESMERALDA PATO – ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

As representative for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Esmerelda (also known as Essie) is also the Chair of USPG’s Communion-Wide Advisory Group. In church and corporate institutions where she works, she is involved in youth and outreach ministries. Her administrative and organisational skills have led to her undertaking specific assignments for the diocese.



THE REVD NITANO MULLER - CANON FOR WORSHIP AND WELCOME, COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

The Revd Muller is responsible for the worshipping life of the Cathedral church including its liturgies and music, as well as its hospitality offered to visitors and pilgrims through its visitor engagement, architecture and social media.



THE REVD SONJA HUNTER – PRIEST OF ALL SAINTS ANGLICAN CHURCH, SAMOA

The Revd Hunter lives and ministers at All Saints Anglican Church in Apia, Samoa, a nation in the Pacific, part of the Diocese of New Zealand, Aotearoa and Polynesia. She is a member of USPG’s Communion-Wide Advisory Group. She is a proud Samoan, formerly occupying the role as CEO of the Samoa Tourism Authority. Her passion for ocean health and environmental concerns stems from her love of God and care for His creation.



THE REVD LOPA MUDRA MISTRY - PRESBYTER IN THE DIOCESE OF CALCUTTA, CHURCH OF NORTH INDIA (CNI)

The Revd Lopa Mudra Mistry is Presbyter at the Diocese of Calcutta, Church of North India (CNI). She is a board member of the Synodical Board of Social Service, CNI. Before ordination, she participated in the Training in Mission Programme 2015 with the Council for World Mission representing CNI. She currently serves in the diocese as clergy and is involved in all aspects of church ministry. The Revd Mistry is interested in leadership, missiology and spirituality. Her vision is to create a community for God’s region, responding to God’s call for the restoration of peace, justice, harmony and dignity of life.



WEEK ONE

HOPE

Esmeralda Pato – Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Read Luke 21:25-36

Luke flags three signs that will precede the Advent of God in Christ. He suggests that on the earth there will be “distress among nations”; “nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves” (v 25). “People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world” (v 26).

The scenarios that Luke paints speak to our lived experiences. War and violent conflicts in Sudan, the Middle East, Ukraine and elsewhere are highly distressing. The acts of genocide and displacement of communities from their homes and countries while the world is watching are inexplicable. People, especially the most vulnerable, are confused, anxious and helpless as they rely entirely on other people for support. Families are “fainting from fear” of missile and drone strikes. “Nations are confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves”. Greed has consumed the earth resulting in immeasurable plundering and destruction of the earth and its resources.

In such contexts, Luke says “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads because redemption is drawing near” (v 27-28). Such a sign is a sign of hope for communities who are in deep distress, anxiety, pain, and despair.



Luke submits that with the coming of the Son of Man, “redemption is near” for God in Christ has redeemed the creation from its traps and chains. Advent is a time of waiting and therefore a time for us to affirm and reflect on God in our time of distress and anxiety. It is a sign of hope for communities longing and waiting for peace and stability. A reminder and assurance of God’s commitment to intervene in human affairs where there is distress and suffering.

Hope is important. It helps us during significant trials or times of distress. It is not flimsy or merely wishful thinking. It can help us withstand fire, trials and despair. However, hope is not optimism. Optimism glosses over the present realities and invites us to sit passively and do nothing.

Advent hope is action-oriented. It invites us to trust God; to live carefully; to be watchful and to pray in troubled times. Advent focuses our attention on the coming of Christ, not just at Christmas, but also in his promised return. So, Luke tells us, “be on guard” (v 34). Be alert but also remember that he is with us already, His reign is in our midst right here and now, transforming, recreating and redeeming.

Advent seasons of life can be long, difficult, and painful. But we never face those seasons without signs of hope and reassurance, signs that point to the one who is coming - the Son of Man, our source of strength, our saviour, and our peace. Every Advent season invites us to hope, but we are also invited to become activists of hope.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is currently weighing on your mind? What are you hoping for in that situation?
- Is it difficult for you to wait for answers? What attributes of God, Christ and His Spirit can you confidently ask for that will support you while you wait?
- In this present, less-than-perfect reality, how can you turn your hope into action? How does knowing the God of all hope help you to live differently?

LET US PRAY

- Lord, we lament that the earth, which should be full of your glory, does not reflect such. We are distressed and fearful; give us hope that anchors our souls in your sovereignty.
- Lord, we repent that our greed and flippancy have exploited this beautiful creation, damaging and wasting resources that belong to all creatures. Forgive us and lead us to an active hope.
- Lord, we cry out on behalf of anyone who is the victim of violence and exploitation, of atrocities unimaginable. May your Holy presence be a shining hope during the dark times.



WEEK TWO

PEACE

The Revd Nitano Muller

Canon for Worship and Welcome, Coventry Cathedral

Read Luke 3:1-6

John the Baptist's voice calls out from the wilderness, urging the people to prepare the way for the Lord by making straight paths and levelling mountains—metaphors for transformation. This passage captures a sense of urgency and hope: a new world is possible, but it requires transformation. It raises a fundamental question: Is peace possible in a world marred by violence?

Coventry Cathedral's story offers a resounding answer: Yes, peace is possible, even in the ruins of war. When the medieval cathedral was bombed in 1940, it could have become a monument to vengeance and loss. Instead, the ruins were preserved alongside the new building as a symbol of forgiveness, reconciliation, and the transformative power of peace. The decision to rebuild not with a spirit of revenge but with a commitment to reconciliation echoes the prophetic message of John the Baptist: prepare the way, make room for healing and restoration.

The contrast between the old and new Coventry Cathedral buildings is a powerful symbol of peace. The ruins serve as a reminder of the destructive capacity of war, while the modern, vibrant structure standing beside them points toward the hope of renewal and new beginnings.



Just as the prophet called for hearts to be softened and paths to be cleared for God’s arrival, Coventry Cathedral’s ministry of reconciliation challenges us to clear the obstacles that prevent peace—hatred, division, and indifference. In a time when conflicts rage and peace feels elusive, Coventry reminds us that another way is possible— that leads to healing and restoration rather than further destruction.

Peace is not just an abstract ideal but something that can be built, brick by brick, choice by choice. The cathedral’s Cross of Nails, made from the remnants of the bombed building, is now a global symbol of reconciliation, representing the Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN), a global network of organisations and churches who, in their own unique way and context, are voices in the wilderness.

Peace is an elusive word, especially for the millions trapped within the violent clutches of war and violence, gender-based violence, and abusive relationships. Peacebuilding is not an abstract idea but it requires brave individuals who will cry out. People who will name the injustices experienced in the world and call others to pay attention and act too. We are all called to consider our voice and part in the ministry of reconciliation, our contributions to domestic and systemic violence and our own experience of forgiveness (or the lack thereof).

As a South African working at Coventry Cathedral, I bear witness to what is possible, and I dare to remind us all that peace is not just possible—it is our calling. We must actively choose the way of peace every day, as a way of preparing our hearts, homes, churches and our communities for the arrival of the Prince of Peace who is birthed in every decision and action we take in building a culture of justice and peace.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does real peace look like?
- How can peace be difficult to achieve? What are some obstacles to real peace and how can they be overcome?
- God sent Jesus – the Prince of Peace - to reconcile the world to Himself. What role does reconciliation play in peace within our souls and for our world?

LET US PRAY

- Jesus, Prince of Peace, we ask for your Kingdom Peace to come to the lands and people trapped in conflict and war. Turn the hearts of leaders toward true and lasting reconciliation.
- Holy Spirit, send your wisdom and courage to people who speak out against injustice, giving voice to the oppressed. May their words bring about deliverance.
- Father God, in your mercy, quiet the hearts of people desperate, fearful, and distraught because of turmoil in their homes or communities. Send advocates to aid and restore peace in their lives.



WEEK THREE

JOY

The Revd Sonja Hunter – Priest of All Saints Anglican Church, Samoa

Read Zephaniah 3:14-20

In this Bible reading, we discover how the prophet Zephaniah warns Jerusalem of the punishment that will fall on them because of their rebellious and sinful nature. God warns that He will destroy all who continue to sin, and those who believe and are humble will be saved and receive His promise to live in joy and peace. And yet, they continue to sin. So, Zephaniah tells the believers to sing with joy, praise God, ask for forgiveness and inherit His promises and blessings. He tells Jerusalem that the King lives amongst them, highlighting His plan of salvation in Christ Jesus. God reveals to us that He is delighted with those who love Him and He will grant them blessings, forgiveness and joy.

Similarly, in the present time, we can find joy in God because despite our transgressions we have received forgiveness through our beloved Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Therefore, we express gratitude to Him for constantly caring for us, delivering us from sin, and bestowing upon us joy and peace. It is important to recall that Zephaniah instructs believers to "sing joyfully to the Lord" and emphasises that joy and peace are blessings that we receive as we honour and worship the Lord joyfully, as joy emanates from the Lord.

As we celebrate Advent it is with hope, faith, joy and love that we celebrate with God the Father, Jesus Christ our saviour and the Holy Spirit our counsellor. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How is joy superior to happiness? What is the source of each?
- What relationship do joy and gratitude have? Take time to reflect on the things in your life that bring great joy. With each one, offer a prayer of gratitude to Father God.
- How do you show joy? What are some ways you can express the joy of your redemption and all its blessings to God?

LET US PRAY

- Thank you, Father God, for your love, by which you gave your Son to the world to bring us back into relationship with you. What joy we have in knowing and being known by you.
- Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your life of obedience to the Father and for your redemptive self-sacrifice. Teach us to be filled with joy and share your story with others.
- Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your guidance and nearness as we seek to honour you with our lives. Help us to demonstrate lives of joy and gratitude.

Father God,

We thank you for your love which has drawn us closer to you through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can hear your voice and be guided on the best paths for our lives, according to your promise, to 'instruct and teach us in the way we should go'.

Amen.

(quote from Ps 32.8)



WEEK FOUR

LOVE

The Revd Lopa Mudra Mistry - Presbyter in the Diocese of Calcutta, Church of North India (CNI)

Read Micah 5:2-5

The birth of Christ signals God's unconditional love and presence with us throughout our lives. The symbol of hope that God's ultimate peace will one day be realised on earth and that darkness will be overcome - is what Jesus's life, death and resurrection are all about. Jesus described it himself when he said: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the blind, to release the oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19). The birth of Jesus is to bring us the good news about God's Kingdom and caring for people's needs.

The Synodical Board of Social Service (SBSS) Kolkata of CNI has been serving the 11 villages of West Bengal's 24 pargana(s) region for over 25 years, focusing on improving malnutrition and increasing family income to 70000 Rupees per annum.

In combating the malnutrition issues, from October 2022 a series of nutrition camps were organised by SBSS Kolkata CNI in each village. The community learned about healthy diets and local food benefits. Young people were educated to improve future family health. To increase family income, they learned multi-layer farming and how to make organic fertilisers and pesticides. Individual fishpond owners learned water testing procedures and can now test independently.



Families with chicken sheds learned to make chicken droppings into fish feed and fertilisers and which chicken breeds are better for meat production growth speed. Through this, the CNI SBSS Kolkata display God's love in action and has demonstrated to the community as in Micah 5:2-5a, that God cares for the least and with people who feel left behind- he does not leave them out. God is concerned for them so that they can live in security, the security that food will be available to them from their fields and that the produce of the earth will render to them the security of finance from the sale of their produce which is tastier, healthier and local produce.

In this way, while not overtly preaching the Bible platitudes in word, the CNI SBSS Kolkata has instead lived each word through its concerned and dedicated action and brought the good news that our Immanuel dwells with His people always.

In John 10:10 Jesus says "I have come that they may have life, and have to the full." God loved us from the very beginning even before he created this world. His love translated into action when he made us in his image to have communion with Him. The Sacrifice of our time and energy cannot be compared to the sacrifice of Christ, but in this season of Christmas, we can reflect this love in our actions.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- We often hear the expression ‘show love’. If love is an invisible idea or quality, how does it change from invisible to visible? How have you ‘seen’ love?
- The Bible says that God is Love. How has God demonstrated love to you?
- How do you share God’s love with others?
- Are there people near you, or on your mind, whose lives would be changed by love? How can you support in ways that are tangible expressions of love?

LET US PRAY

- Help us, Lord, to see all people through your eyes of love, created in your image and worthy of redemption. Remind us despite our busy lives to do what we can to help all people flourish.
- Teach us, Lord, how to live sacrificially. We trust you with our own needs so that we can act selflessly when the opportunity arises.
- Show us, Lord, ways that we can be instruments of your love in the world: through prayer, through acts of generosity. We want to be Christ-like in our love for others.

NOTES

NOTES



CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2024

DELIVER THE GIFT OF SAFE BEGINNINGS FOR MOTHERS AND THEIR BABIES IN BANGLADESH

Support the vital initiative of the Church of Bangladesh in partnership with USPG, bringing healing and health education to rural areas.

Find out more today at
christmas.uspg.org.uk

DONATE



@USPG GLOBAL

Registered Charity No : 234518

USPG

5 Trinity Street
London
SE1 1DB

020 7921 2200

info@uspg.org.uk
www.uspg.org.uk/pray
[@USPGglobal](https://www.instagram.com/USPGglobal)



ISSN 2631-4959

Registered charity number 234518

USPG[†] PARTNERS IN
GLOBAL MISSION