

Prepare

An Advent Reflection



Reflecting Christ's Love this Christmas

As Christians we are commanded to love our neighbour, and to treat others the way we would like to be treated. It is important that we express concern and solidarity with those who experience hardship, especially in communities where resources are scarce at this festive time.

As this booklet highlights, Anglican Overseas Aid works primarily with Anglican partners. By doing so, there is an added benefit of building up church capacities and relationships across the globe, as we aspire to greater solidarity and equality within the Anglican Communion.

I know that Anglican Overseas Aid is the kind of organisation that reflects very carefully on its work. In its programs it seeks to leverage the grass-roots networks of partners, their reach and voice, and their deep local knowledge. At home, it shares with churches and supporters so that a greater sense of shared mission is imbued.

It is my pleasure to introduce this year's Advent Booklet.

The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier is the Archbishop of Melbourne and is also the current Primate of the Anglican Church in Australia



Photo: © Anglican Overseas Aid

What is Advent, and what does it have to do with Christmas?

Advent is about *preparing* for the coming of Christ. This is very different from just *waiting* or marking off time. Preparing is an intentional act of getting ready.

The coming of Christ is the focus of Advent. This is a past, present and future event. Advent can be a vital time of spiritual renewal arising out of the belief that Jesus is eternally present to us in his resurrection life.

As Christmas approaches, our homes are tidied up, made ready for guests, and decorated. But how do we prepare within our hearts?

*Cover photo: © Tony Schnell Text: © Anglican Overseas Aid 2016
All Bible verses taken from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.*

This booklet offers reflections on the meaning of Advent and how we can prepare for Christ's coming.

We invited our Anglican partners from around the world to share reflections and meaningful images from their context that could aid in our preparations for the coming of Christ. Their contributions offer fresh insights about the meaning of Advent from other cultures and places.

The traditional windows of Hope, Love, Joy and Peace are followed, although the actual thematic order varies from church to church or tradition to tradition.

For many the lighting of candles in an Advent wreath marks the journey through Advent. On Christmas Eve a white candle is lit symbolising that Christ has come. This year, as the Christ candle is kindled, may we know anew the joy, confidence, and wonder that can be ours.

Here is a framework that could be used for your own personal reflections on each Advent theme. It has been supplied by our partner, Cathedral Relief Service (CRS), in Kolkata, India.

Let us prepare our heart in five ways.

1. Prepare room at the inn
(Make room in our hearts)
2. Clean out the cobwebs
(Confess our failings after a time of self-examination)
3. Hang new curtains
(Decorate our heart with joy and hope)
4. Get out the fine china and set the table
(Let your attitude be one of enthusiastic expectation)
5. Open the front door wide
(Prepare for Christ's arrival silently and in a spirit of prayer)

Hope

Hope is incredibly powerful. Where there is hope people can endure just about anything. It provides personal and community resilience. Hope is not the same thing as wishfulness. The difference is that hope has a firm grounding, an anchor.

People's religious convictions are a source of hope. Advent affirms that Christ will come again, pointing to a time when God's reign will be established in the world. It also proclaims the message of God reaching out to us in the person of Jesus, the Christ child.

In the poor rural areas of South Africa's Eastern Cape where our partner works,

people living in poverty are affirmed with dignity and respect. This builds up hope among the vulnerable.

Preparing:

1. How do we both give and receive hope?
2. Where have you found hope in hard times?
3. How well anchored is your sense of hope?

Hope

“Let us approach with confidence the manger of our Saviour and exchange our wishes for real hope”

Tony Schnell, Diocese of Grahamstown, South Africa

Love

Love is the noblest of virtues. During Advent we reflect on God's love in action. The Christian understanding is that God gives himself to us unconditionally and at great cost. At Christmas, the Saviour Jesus comes as a vulnerable child, as God's gift of love to us. The lowly shepherds are witnesses to the humble beginnings which shake the world. God is motivated by a restless concern to renew his creation, including us.

In Solomon Islands, camp fires have a special significance during Advent. The fire is always a communal event offering warmth to all who gather around. "Advent fire is our way of sitting, remembering and praying with

those who are homeless, hungry, wounded and have lost their hope. They become the fire in our midst" (Revd Philemon Akao, Anglican Province of Melanesia).

Preparing

1. Who will you gather with this Christmas?
2. Reflect on the different ways we can show love to others and to creation. How can we help 'give birth to Christ' in the world?
3. How can we offer love in ways that are wonderful and surprising?

Love

**"The greatest gift that I can give
is to love others unconditionally"**

*Tagolyn Kabekabe, Anglican Alliance,
Solomon Islands*

Photo: © Tagolyn Kabekabe

Joy

Joy is our spontaneous response to the goodness and creative genius of God. The Christmas story is such an unlikely and inauspicious beginning that it may bring a smile. Authentic joy is never forced.

For many, Christmas is not a happy time, but joy is still available to us whatever our circumstances. As our Indian partner, CRS, reflects, “We need to assure ourselves that our weaknesses, limitations, imperfections and failings need not prevent us from experiencing the joy of God as and when it is revealed.” CRS urges us to look for glimpses of joy in the everyday.

Preparing

1. Is Christmas generally a time of joy for you? What things can stifle our wonder and praise?
2. Christmas is sometimes overtaken by busyness, commercialism, and over-indulgence. How can you take steps to counter these influences?
3. Where do you find joy, and do you experience the presence of the Divine on these occasions?

Joy



“Advent reminds us of our thirst for the living God”

Rig David, CRS, India

Photo: © CRS, Kolkata

Peace

Peace has many dimensions. It can refer to peace with self, each other, God, or with creation. The brokenness of relationships however can rob us of peace. Christian faith says that Jesus comes as the Prince of Peace, and he pronounces blessing for peacemakers. Advent anticipates God's masterplan of restoration for the world. What we cannot do for ourselves, God does for us. He sends his Son who will show us how to live and who will redeem creation.

Peace may seem especially elusive at Christmas. Valerie Browning works in a remote part of Ethiopia and she paints a picture of clothes, donkeys and a pace of

life which is far removed from the glitz and glamour of many western Christmases. She counts it as a privilege to live in a simple community where the daily currency is caring and sharing. Is this a pointer to peace?

Preparing

1. Is there something you can do to be a peacemaker this Christmas?
2. How can we be serious about peace in this world without despairing?
3. Is it possible to experience peace in the midst of calamity? How?



Peace

**“There is nothing
just for me, only
things for the
common good”**

*Valerie Browning,
APDA, Ethiopia*

Christ has arrived!

Advent culminates in the lighting of the final candle, the white Christ candle. Our preparation is over and we are ready to receive the living Christ.

The themes we have been reflecting on are always available to us. They do not depend on our circumstances, our status, on anything we have done, or indeed, any particular time of the year. Nothing can separate us from them.

In Christ our hope, love, joy and peace find their full expression. The renewal of the world has begun!

Alleluia!

Bible verses for further reflection

Hope

Rev. 21:4; Jer. 29:11; Rom. 12:12;
Rom. 15:13; 2 Cor. 4:16-18

Love

1 Cor. 13:13; John 15:9; 1 John 4:7-8;
John 3:16

Joy

John 15:10-11; 1 Peter 1:8-9; John 16:22;
Philippians 4:4; James 1:2

Peace

Isaiah 9:6; Matt 5:9; Col. 1:19-20;
Rom. 12:18

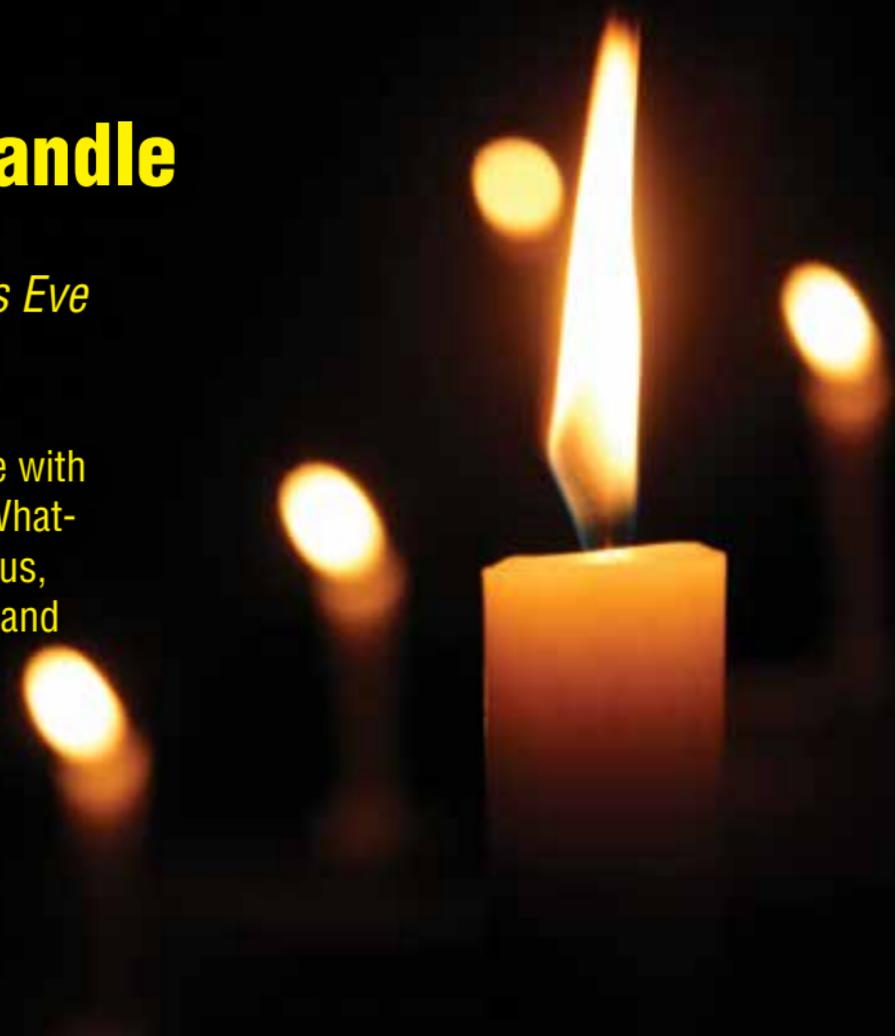
The Christ Candle

A Prayer for Christmas Eve

Dear God,

We each come to this time with different circumstances. Whatever the year has held for us, fill us with hope, love, joy and peace so that we can pass them on to others.

Amen.



Advent is a time of anticipation, expectant waiting and preparation for the coming of Christ into the world. It is a time to reflect on the themes of hope, love, joy and peace.

We have produced this Advent booklet in the hope that it will provide a sense of understanding about this time of year, and how we can prepare ourselves by setting time aside to be still amidst the busyness of this season.

Our focus on the traditional Advent themes of hope, love, joy and peace is reflected in our work with our Anglican partners overseas. Our aspiration is that poor communities experience these themes of Advent in their daily lives.

We hope this booklet has helped you reflect on what Advent means and has given you the space to be still and prepare for Christ to come.