

# A Christmas Menu

An Advent Reflection



## A Christmas Menu

2020 has been a frightful year. Hundreds of Australians have died of COVID-19 and the virus has taken hundreds of thousands around the globe. The economic and social costs have devastated millions more. And the other global challenges we faced last year and before remain. Some of them AOA works hard to alleviate. Now, perhaps more than ever, Christians must look with the eyes of faith to Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Then we are reminded that God is not surprised or defeated by the virus – or by any power or circumstance – and is sovereign over time and chance as he has been from the creation.

The beautiful story of Christmas, in which God sends his only son to take on the helpless human flesh of an infant so that he might provide eternal life for all who turn to him,

cannot help but encourage us and bring us joy as we reflect on this. As the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us, he will never leave nor forsake us.

This year, Anglican Overseas Aid's Advent Booklet has the theme of 'A Christmas Menu', both to remind us that Advent is a festive time and to help us reflect more deeply on the choices and practices that really do sustain us in life. I commend it to you. The booklet is also available in a Mandarin Chinese edition.

*The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier is the Archbishop of Melbourne and President of Anglican Overseas Aid.*



## What is Advent?

Advent is a season in the church calendar which is about preparing for the coming of our Lord. Preparing is something different from passive waiting. It involves getting ready in mind, body and spirit.

While many of us wait until New Year to get our lives – and bodies – in shape, the spiritual preparation of Advent starts earlier.

Advent is a time for seriously getting into shape for Christmas. It is a period when we

look inside, clear out, make room, get ready and warmly anticipate the arrival of our Lord and Saviour. We welcome him again into our homes and lives.

*Advent is a time for seriously getting into shape for Christmas - where we look inside, clear out, make room and get ready.*

God loves us so much that he wants to come and be with us. In Advent he comes to us in the Christ child. As the wonderful story of the nativity is retold, we know that Jesus will be the one who comes to feed and strengthen us, and to save us. Importantly, God

never stops coming to us, and Advent is the perfect time to acknowledge this reality.

We pray that this year Advent will not simply be the bubbly prelude to a lazy summer vacation. It is much more important than that. It is a time when we can welcome our Lord with an enthusiasm and renewed commitment for the whole year ahead. This

year at Anglican Overseas Aid we dive more deeply into our Christmas menu – focussing on choices and practises that give us renewed strength and purpose.

*From all of us at AOA, we wish you a safe and blessed Advent and Christmas.*

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## Menu Week 1: “Humble pie”

Ever think priests talk too much? Then this is the story for you! In Luke 1:5-25 we read the story of Zechariah, a priest married to Elizabeth (Mary’s cousin). This righteous couple is blessed by God with a son in their old age.

While on duty in the Temple, Zechariah is visited by the angel Gabriel, who announces Elizabeth’s pregnancy and tells him to name the child John. Thinking they are too old, he doesn’t believe it and asks for a sign. Gabriel, ironically, makes this the sign, and Zechariah is prevented from speaking.

Ever wished you’d kept your mouth shut? To God, humility is about more than just having a modest view of one’s self; it is also about trusting

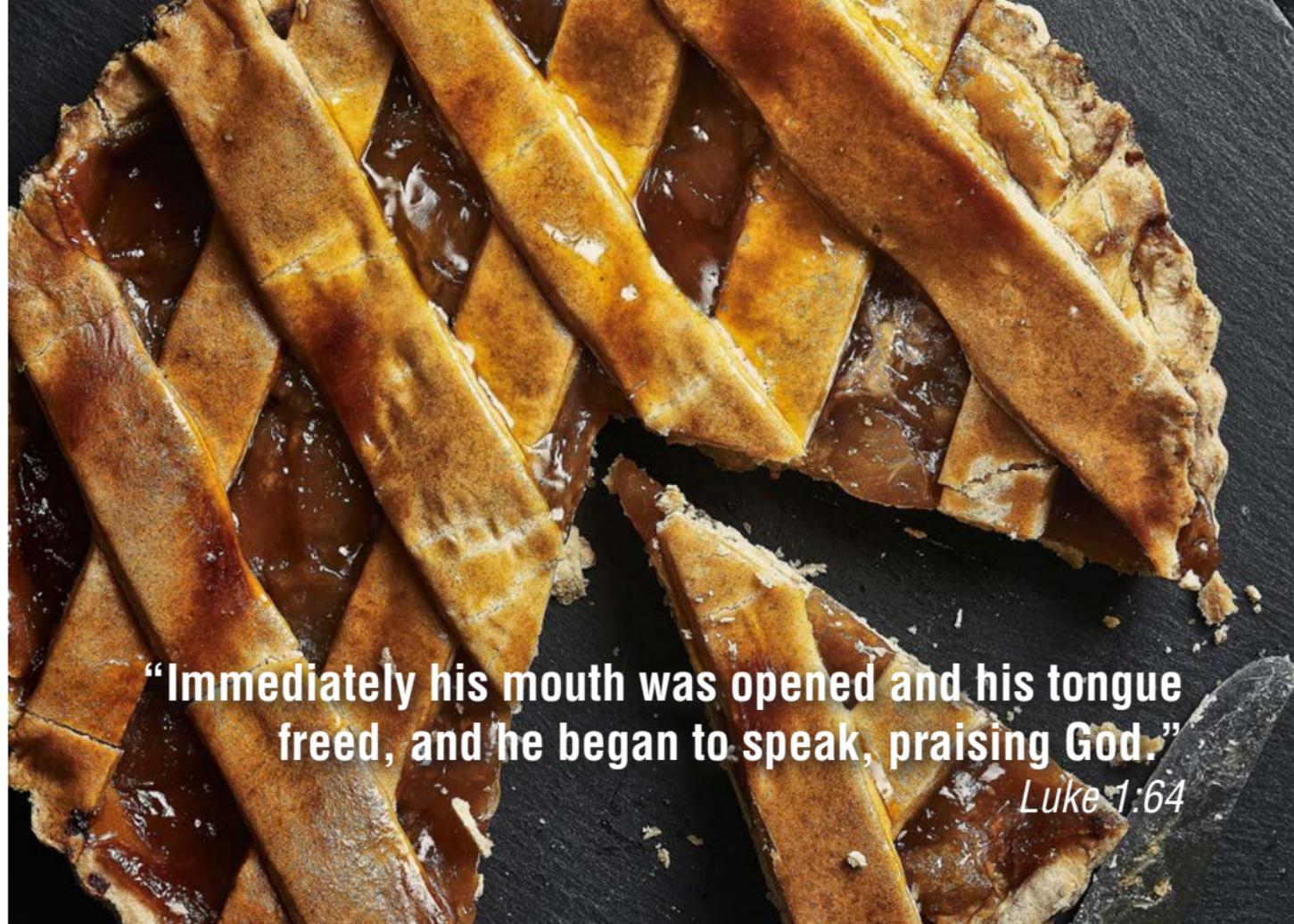
in his wisdom, providence and salvation.

The disbelieving Zechariah is silenced until after the birth. Eating humble pie can turn into an amazing blessing. It is a wonderfully clarifying experience for Zechariah. When he resumes speaking, at the time of John’s dedication, he passionately praises God. He speaks evocatively of God’s salvation, and the prophetic role that his son John the Baptist will have in preparing the way for the Saviour. This story teaches us to talk less, and trust and listen more.

### *Reflect:*

- *What does humility mean to you?*
- *Has there been a time where you have been humbled by God’s actions?*

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**“Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.”**

*Luke 1:64*

## Menu Week 2: “Honey and locusts”

For many, Christmas is a time of socialising, and too much food and wine. What a contrast with John the Baptist! As a Nazirite, John didn't drink. Instead, destined to prepare the way for Jesus, he was filled with the Spirit from birth, and even jumps at the presence of Jesus while in the womb. John's ministry is always focussed on the one to come, and it starts early!

John's formative years were spent in the wilderness. This solitary experience taught him about God's provision, training his thoughts on the promised Messiah. His desert existence also meant trusting in God to satisfy his daily needs. Honey and locusts were his food, and his clothing was made from camel hair. We could all learn much

from John's attitude of trust in a place of uncertainty and scarcity.

This year the COVID-19 pandemic has provoked some unseemly displays. People fighting in supermarket aisles, the hoarding of food, and appalling instances of public aggression. I wonder what John the Baptist can teach us about centring our thoughts on Jesus, trusting God for his provision, and the benefits of solitude and sober thinking.

### *Reflect:*

- *Are you able to rest confidently in God despite the chaos in the world?*
- *What does John the Baptist teach you about trust in God? Think about what you may have learned during COVID-19 within your own community?*



“In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea..”

*Matthew 3:1*

## Menu Week 3: “Spiritual digestion”

Overeating tends to be synonymous with Christmas, and this can have negative consequences: weight gain, bloating and the lethargy of self-indulgence. While we receive too much physical sustenance, are we at the same time starved of spiritual nurture? Is there an inverse relationship at work?

The circumstances for Mary at the first Christmas were extremely rustic, but her praise was full and resounding. Her story is a corrective to self-indulgence. For Mary, Christmas is an eternal and spiritual joy. Her song, the Magnificat, provides many clues to this. Mary accepts God’s agenda for her life, she is humble in spirit and she cherishes the things she has seen and heard.

Mary sings fulsome praise to the Lord and enthusiastically recites the many great things that God has done and will surely do.

As we carve the turkey and gulp down the plum pudding, do we equally digest the important things God is saying to us and our world? Our celebrating doesn’t have to be extravagant – sometimes simple is more fulfilling. Mary reminds us that God wants to fill the truly hungry with good things.

### *Reflect:*

- *Are you left hungry by the excesses of life? If so, how?*
- *How can you, like Mary, be ready to praise God in the simple and rustic moments?*

*Photo by Alexander Schimmeck, unsplash.com/@alschim*



**“He has filled the hungry with good things.”**

*Luke 1:53a*

## Menu Week 4: “The best food of all”

Jesus is the best food of all. He is ‘God with us’, the one who will save all his people. Jesus invites us to feed on him, the bread of life – our true nourishment. We feed on him daily through the Scriptures and prayer, and in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving. Jesus comes as true light from heaven, but also as food. His teaching, example, and Spirit are real sustenance for us.

Jesus is laid in a manger after his birth, a sign of the humble nature of the nativity. The manger is usually depicted as being shaped like a cradle. But a manger is also a receptacle for food, a trough for animals.

How does Jesus provide food for us? He teaches us that just as the body needs food to

survive and thrive, so too we need spiritual nourishment. He is the shepherd’s delight, and the object of the wise men’s worship. In the manger lies the long awaited source of our hope, strength and satisfaction. In Jesus our true nature and destiny is revealed; God and humans united. Poised over the manger we see the true bread of heaven, and the beginning of a wonderful journey of hope and renewal.

### *Reflect:*

- *In what ways does Jesus satisfy your hunger for life? If you are part of a small group, give a short testimony about this if you are comfortable doing so.*
- *Why do you think Jesus used the metaphor of bread to describe himself? What metaphor might he use today, in the 21st century?*

*Photo by Helen Ast, [unsplash.com/@helenaast](https://unsplash.com/@helenaast)*



**“I am the bread of life.  
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.”**  
*John 6:35a*

## Rapid Response Emergency Fund: food where it's needed

As we plan our Christmas meals, many of us remember how blessed we are to have access to good, nutritious food to share with our family and friends.

Many people do not know where their next meal is coming from. One of the main causes of not having reliable access to food is disasters.

At Anglican Overseas Aid, we have a Rapid Response Emergency Fund which enables us to respond quickly to emergencies around the world when they strike. This allows us, among other things, to provide food for hungry communities in times of real trouble. In recent years we have also called upon our Rapid Response Emergency Fund to provide vital agricultural supplies after disasters.

This year we invite you, your home group or your church to prayerfully consider donating to our Rapid Response Emergency Fund so we can continue to act quickly when we need to.

### *Pray:*

*Lord, thank you for being the sustainer for all areas of our lives.*

*Give us today our daily bread, as we do all we can to give it to others.*

*We want to feast on you this Advent, to have you fill us with your Spirit so that we can go out and be your hands and feet and show how you are sustenance for a hungry world.*

*As we work with you for your kingdom to come on earth as in heaven, help us to share your generosity with others.*

*Amen.*

*Photo: Food supplies are delivered post Tropical Cyclone Harold in the Solomon Islands. Credit: CAN DO*



This year's Advent booklet is entitled 'A Christmas Menu'. Advent is a time of intentional reflection on the coming of Christ into the world and in our lives. As we prepare to receive him again, we ask some questions focussing on the true source of our nourishment and hope. Christmas is rightly an occasion for festivity, family and friendship. We also hope that it will be a time in which we are fed by Jesus in soul and spirit.

At Anglican Overseas Aid we recognise God's heartfelt desire to reconcile and renew the whole world. This is reflected in our work, which aims to achieve greater health, prosperity, opportunity and dignity for all people. Advent is a wonderful time to think about the surpassing love of God expressed in Jesus. Please join with us as we welcome our Saviour and re-commit ourselves to his work.