

Heaven on Earth

An Advent Reflection

Heaven on Earth

Our world has faced another calamitous year. Although the number of people impacted has disappeared from the front pages, COVID-19 has still claimed the lives of more than 11,000 Australians this year. Famine in Africa, a war in Europe and natural disasters across the globe and at home have brought devastating suffering to millions.

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 any power or circumstance – and is sovereign over time, as has been the case from the beginning.

Christmas is the beautiful story of God entering the world in the form of a helpless infant bringing hope, love, joy and peace. What a wonderfully uplifting story.

Reflecting on the Advent themes of hope, love, joy and peace leads us to consider how we each bring these blessings of the Kingdom of God to the world in which we live.

‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’ – Matt 6:10

As we approach the birth of the King of Kings, let us renew our commitment to working with God to bring those blessings.

I commend this year’s Advent booklet to you and hope that it provides both refreshment and peace after a challenging year.

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





What is Advent?

As a young person in my parish, I remember the season of Advent as not too dissimilar to Lent. There was a stronger penitential element to the season, and we were urged to prepare for the second coming of Jesus.

Advent study groups were encouraged, and any early Christmas parties or celebrations were discouraged. There was a solemnity about the season. The children's Christmas breakup and pageant were held on the afternoon of the fourth Sunday of Advent.

While there is much to be valued about the past, I find our present observance of Advent in the Church is an opportunity to embrace and share the freedom that Jesus promises.

Advent provides us with space and time to reflect and discern, to listen and to encourage, to rethink our priorities and

expectations, and to dig deeper into the scriptures as part of our regular mission, worship, and prayer life. For many, the lighting of Advent candles or using an Advent calendar are important ways of marking the journey towards Christmas.

The traditional themes of Advent are hope, love, joy, and peace. They reflect the gifts that God gave us through his Son, and remain an important lens through which to view the Christmas story.

As we approach the end of the year, may you use the Advent season to reflect on the events of 2022 but, just as importantly, to focus anew on the gifts of hope, love, joy and peace.

The Revd Canon Dr Ray Cleary AM is a Board member of Anglican Overseas Aid





Hope

In Isaiah 41:10 God is lovingly asking his people, the Israelites, to put their faith in him. He longs for their total trust in his power and might so they can always be saved under his righteous right arm. It may not have been easy for them to place their hope in these words, especially when there were a lot of challenges and injustices around them, but those who heard with their hearts and responded to the call with faith may have experienced the manifestation of God's power.

To those of us who choose to believe in the incarnation of God's only begotten son Jesus to be our personal Lord and Saviour, this same call is still going out. We are constantly reminded of the eternal hope through faith and trust in Jesus Christ our Lord, for he alone is the way, the truth and the life.

No one can go to the Father except through him who is our sure hope amidst all the changes and challenges of this world.


May this season bring forth powerful manifestations from above, and abundant spiritual blessings of hope, peace and love upon everyone. Amen.

Reflect:

- *As a Christian, how do I respond to the call of hope in the Lord Jesus?*
- *What drives me towards the goal which is eternal life?*

***Ethel George, Anglican Church of Melanesia – Vanuatu,
and senior member of Mothers Union Vanuatu***





'Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.'

Isaiah 41:10

Peace

Isaiah 2:2-5, calls on God's people to focus their lives and hopes on God with a vision of peace rather than politics and power. This is not some sentimental prayer as some may think but a call to action to live a life that embraces the other. For the Christian, it is the peace that Christ brings.

This is the seeking of peace as shalom, and includes care for neighbours, respect, compassion, forgiveness, sharing of God's bounty and fulfilling the Creator's dream for the whole of creation. This hope is the fulfillment of the love that God has for all. We all have a responsibility to pursue this peace.

The reign of Christ embraces this hope and dream and is to be at the forefront of

Christian mission to our world; to focus on all people irrespective of creeds, ethnic background, gender or status.

Advent is a time to focus on how best we can do this, by tackling that which energises and fulfills the God-given human potential of us all by supporting those who need help, by seeking the restoration of creation and peace as shalom.

As Isaiah 2:5 says, 'Come let us walk in the light of the Lord' – this Advent and for the days that follow.

Reflect:

- *How have I worked towards 'Shalom' this year?*
- *How can I be an agent of peace this Advent season?*

The Revd Canon Dr Ray Cleary AM is a Board member of Anglican Overseas Aid

‘Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord’.

Isaiah 2:5



Love

John the Baptist's mission was to preach repentance in preparation for the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:4).

The coming of Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God; a kingdom where people would live life in abundance, where justice would reign, and where no violence, discrimination, persecution, abuse or other vices would be found.

The Kingdom of God requires faithful followers. Advent is a time for reflection and the opportunity to renew our commitment to serving others as a reflection of God's love for us. God showed us his love through the gift of his only Son.

In our days we can reciprocate God's love by showing love to our neighbours. Service to humanity is service to God.

Advent encourages us to demonstrate love by giving our all for God's service; service that is acceptable to him.

Advent is a time to bring God's Kingdom to the oppressed, the underprivileged, those suffering from disease, and those under the chains of poverty.

Any service we offer that impacts the lives of the 'little ones' is what is required by God, whether we are involved directly or give our resources for that service.

Reflect:

- *As a partaker of God's love, how can you show gratitude by serving him?*
- *How prepared are we to imitate Christ as we show love and serve the most vulnerable?*

**Venerable Canon Gerald Muriithi,
Mt Kenya West Diocese, Kenya**





'Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe.'



Hebrews 12:28

Joy

Advent invites us to a posture of joy because of the hope and promise of Jesus. Biblical joy is not a fleeting happy feeling. It does not remove the pain, uncertainty or injustice of our world. Indeed, Mary gave birth in uncertainty in a stable when Caesar's census decreed that she and Joseph travel to Bethlehem. With a baby, they fled as refugees to Egypt to escape Herod's massacre of young boys. Yet Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) reminds us of godly joy as her spirit rejoices. Joy is a gift of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Our joy is not dictated by circumstance but by our future with God.

The coming of Jesus is good news for the poor, bringing joyful expectations. Our partners work tirelessly to bring good news to those in their communities experiencing poverty, uncertainty and injustice.

In Mozambique, our partner, the Anglican Diocese of Nampula, is faced with the convergence of conflict and displaced peoples, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic – resulting in hunger, vulnerable communities and exhausted resilience capacity. Bearing God's grace and good news, local church workers and volunteers take responsibility for community education and action. We, too, are invited to give generously of our resources to others in need.

Reflect:

- *How will you respond to this invitation to a lasting emotion of godly joy?*
- *What might you do to help bring good news to the poor?*

Jo Knight is the CEO of Anglican Overseas Aid



'But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people".'

Luke 2:10



The work of Anglican Overseas Aid

Jesus said that he came so all people may have life, and have it abundantly. But for millions of people around the world, this is still far from reality.

Anglican Overseas Aid is an overseas relief and development agency. Our work is an expression of our Christian faith through which we seek to bring about a peaceful, just and sustainable world for all.

We believe that everyone has an important part to play in making abundant life a reality for all people.

We work with Anglican and like-minded agencies to create and strengthen partnerships in developing countries to overcome poverty, injustice and disaster.

Our partners assist marginalised communities to take control of their own lives and promote community wellbeing.

For more than 30 years we have been supporting communities around the world to lift themselves out of poverty regardless of race, religion, sexuality, gender, age or social standing within a community.

Our projects operate in countries across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific ranging across broad areas including women's empowerment, child protection, disaster response, maternal and child health, promoting the elimination of gender-based violence, climate change and more.

This year we once again invite you, your home group or church to prayerfully consider donating to our work and share the gifts of hope, peace, love and joy this Advent season.





'I thank my God every
time I remember you.'

Philippians 1:3

Our heartfelt thanks to
every supporter of
AOA.

Your faithfulness
enables our partners to
be agents of peace, joy,
love and hope in their
communities.

We pray these
reflections will unlock
fresh perspectives that
will feed your spirit.



'When I was hungry you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty you gave me something to drink.'

Matthew 25:35

Find out more at www.anglicanoverseasaid.org.au, call us on 1800 249 880, or scan the QR code with your phone.

Above: Rev Christine and Rachael who is hearing impaired in Uganda.

