

# ADVENT REFLECTION 2018

## Week 1: Be prepared

*Jesus said to his disciples:  
'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars;  
on earth nations in agony,  
bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves;  
men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world,  
for the powers of heaven will be shaken.*

*And 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 erect,  
hold your heads high,  
because your liberation is near at hand.'*

Luke 21: 25-28

This apocalyptic vision seems on first sight to be stark and terrifying. Here is a vivid reminder of the fragility of the natural world.

We know that we have not taken proper care of our planet. Overuse of its resources has upset the balance of nature and hastened climate change. To our cost, and the cost of future generations, we have ignored God's reminder that we are merely stewards with a responsibility to exercise proper care for the wonderful world he has created.

And yet if we look beyond the dire warnings of those first few verses we come to a passage full of hope and joy. Jesus' triumphant entrance echoes back to last week's celebration of the feast of Christ the King, marking the end of the Church's year.

But Jesus is not a king of this world, full of riches and majesty. He is a new kind of king, quite the opposite of what the world expects: a servant king; a helpless babe who will be born in our hearts at the end of this Advent season if we are willing to make a place for him.

As we ponder a radically different style of kingship, inspired by Jesus' example of humble service, we are invited to change our perceptions about what is truly important and to look at the world around us in a new way. Making quality time to prepare for Advent offers the chance to reassess our priorities, slow down, and respond to God's call.

*'The call to Advent is a call to live wide awake so that we can be alert to God working in us and in our world to bring about the Kingdom.*

*Awareness is another way of talking about being awake.  
Work today to be aware of the needs of people around you.*

*May the Lord be generous in increasing your love  
and make you love one another and the whole human race  
as much as we love you.*

1 Thessalonians 3:12

St Paul wrote these words to encourage the fledging church in Thessalonica. This was probably his earliest letter, dating from around AD 50. It still serves as a useful blueprint for our lives today.

How often do we read a 'good news' story? Thanks to modern technology we can be in touch with people from all over the world in an instant. But the downside is that comments can be posted anonymously and all kinds of hateful things said which can go unchallenged. Hate crimes – towards women, people of other races, asylum seekers and migrants, transgender, gay or bisexual people, anyone who is 'different' – are sadly all too common.

Jesus asked us to love our neighbour as ourselves. By responding to this call we can help build the Kingdom of God and bring comfort to those who live on the margins. Love and generosity of spirit is the key to preparing well for Advent.

### PRAYER LITURGY WITH PEBBLES

*Small stones are handed round in a bowl – each person is invited to pick one.*

Take time to choose a pebble from the bowl as it is passed round. Look at your pebble – turn it over in your hand. Each one is different – just as our God has created and fashioned each one of us to be different.

*Lord, you have created us in your own image and yet no two people are the same: we all have different stories to tell and different talents to offer. Help us to identify and use our gifts with wisdom and humility for the benefit of others.*

Feel the edges of your pebble – its sharpness has been smoothed away by the sea.

*We thank you, Holy Spirit, that your living water smooths away our rough edges when we let you come into our lives.  
We pray that you will continue to shape us so that each of us may become more fully the person God has created us to be.*

Each pebble is tiny – a mere drop in the ocean – but together they will send out ripples that will spread across the world.

*We pray that our pebbles will encourage us to work together to bring about God's Kingdom of love, justice and peace, no matter how small or insignificant our efforts may seem.*

▪ Keep your pebble somewhere special to remind you of the loving service you can offer to others this Advent.