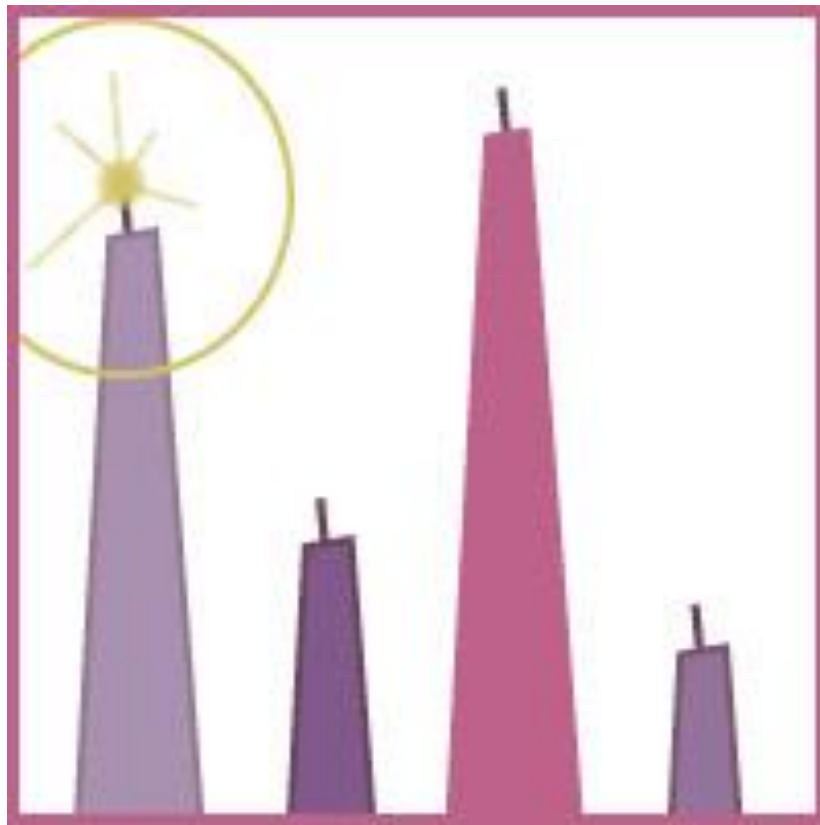


The First week of Advent Week Commencing 28th November 2016



“Be Prepared”

Matthew 24:37-44

When the Son of Man comes, it will be like what happened during Noah's time. In those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving their children to be married, until the day Noah entered the boat. They knew nothing about what was happening until the flood came and destroyed them. It will be the same when the Son of Man comes. Two men will be in the field. One will be taken, and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding grain with a mill. One will be taken, and the other will be left.

"So always be ready, because you don't know the day your Lord will come. Remember this: If the owner of the house knew what time of night a thief was coming, the owner would watch and not let the thief break in. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at a time you don't expect him.

Be Prepared is the motto for the Boy Scout, movement, but it is also a great motto for us to have as Christians during Advent. This week the Church begins new year, because Sunday saw the beginning of a new year in the Christian calendar, Advent – the word Advent comes from the Latin word "Adventus" which means "Arrival" It is a time of waiting for the arrival of Christmas, the coming of Jesus to earth when he was born as a baby at Bethlehem over two thousand years ago.

As Christians we are asked to "Be prepared" and "Stay awake" to the real meaning of Christmas.

These days we can get so carried away with the commercialism of Christmas that we see all around us, the buying of Presents, clothes, food, the organising of parties, that we can sometimes leave Jesus out of Christmas altogether and replace him with Father Christmas and Christmas trees, tinsel and decorations.

Advent, the season of preparation reminds us to celebrate the good news of the birth of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem and to also remember that one day he will return to earth as our judge.

This Advent how can we help ourselves to remain alert to the opportunities to grow in the love and service of others?

Prayer

Father in Heaven,
Our hearts desire the warmth of your love.
Increase our longing for Jesus as our Saviour.
And give us strength to grow in love as we wait for his coming at Christmas.

Amen

Monday

Scripture

The Word was the true light that enlightens all people. *John 1:9*

Image

Light bulb

Theme

Be Prepared - Bringing light into places of darkness

Action

Be a star for someone today

Reflection

As we journey into winter, the days shorten and we come to rely more on artificial light to guide us on our way. Jesus' birth over 2000 years ago is a bit like that: the world was a dark place that needed the light of God. It is true today, too, especially in our darkest moments: when we're struggling, unhappy, gloomy or in a bad place – we need the light of hope and brightness to cheer us up and help us see things differently. We need God's light.

Advent traditionally begins with the lighting of the first candle on the Advent Wreath. As Christmas gets closer more candles are lit to show that Jesus' birth brings real light real freedom into our world of darkness. Today, we're invited to reflect God's light, shining out in a gloomy world as signs of promise and hope, of brightness and goodness. Think for a moment about how you can shine today – perhaps thinking especially of *who* you can shine for: who can you help, support, encourage and enlighten today?

Prayer

Brilliant God of light,
as we start these days of Advent,
help us to get ready:
not just with presents and cards
and parties and celebrations,
but also in our mind and in our heart.
You came to earth bringing light to our darkness
help us to share this light today.
Amen.

Tuesday

Scripture

He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms.
Isaiah 40:11

Image Young boy with lamb

Theme

Be prepared - Care for others

Action

Spend time with someone you don't normally get on with

Reflection

In the Old Testament, Isaiah described God as a shepherd who cared for his sheep. He described God as one who is dedicated, caring, supportive and always there. Jesus' birth in a stable at Bethlehem showed that God was there in a very direct and obvious way. Later on, Jesus would show God's care and compassion through his healing miracles, his words of forgiveness and his invitation to love one another.
God asks us, too, to share the love and care that we receive with others.

Prayer

Jesus the Good Shepherd,
you gently care for us and watch over us,
showing us a great example of love and compassion.
Help the flock of our college today,
especially those who might feel sad or troubled.
Teach us to reach out to them with kindness.
Help all those today who suffer from life threatening illnesses, bring them
freedom from their fear

Amen.

Wednesday

Scripture

God, you are our Father. We're the clay and you're our potter: all of us are what you made us. *Isaiah 64:8*

Image Plasticine figure in mirror

Theme

Be Prepared - Being content with who we are

Action

Celebrate your good qualities

Reflection

Did you look at yourself in the mirror this morning? What did you see in the reflection? Hopefully you liked what you saw! Our Creator God forms us and moulds us into the beautiful and wonderful people that we are. We should be able to look at ourselves and be truly thankful for being so brilliant and awesome: that's just the way God has made us. Look in the mirror tomorrow morning and tell yourself, 'I'm gorgeous!' – it's true!

Of course, we can have our rough edges, and sometimes we can mess up – but just like the potter smooths away any imperfections, so God gently moulds us, softening out any tough bits and making us perfect again. It's easy to do when we recognise and acknowledge the bits we'd like to change.

Today, be that perfect creation! Celebrate the wonderful person that you are. Think about your good qualities and positive bits of your character (they're there, even if they sometimes seem hidden away!) Be content and happy with who you are.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for the gift of one another.
With our rough edges and our smooth,
you create us with such imagination and creativity.
We pray for humility today:
the humility to see our own sense of value and worth.
Amen.

Thursday

Scripture

Time's coming when I'll establish... a ruler who knows how to rule justly. He'll make sure of justice and keep people united... This is the name they'll give him: 'God-who-puts-everything-right.' *Jeremiah 23:5-6*

Image Scales of justice

Theme

Be Prepared - Justice in the world

Action

Treat people fairly

Reflection

Do you ever see those car stickers that say '*A dog is for life, not just for Christmas*'? We could just as easily substitute the word 'dog' for 'God'. It's great to celebrate Jesus' birth on Christmas Day – but it's equally important to celebrate just what his birth means for our world. The prophet Jeremiah expressed how much people were looking for God to put everything right, to remind us how to treat people equally, and to bring justice and peace to the world. Jesus showed this in the work he did: he challenged people to think differently, encouraging them not to judge others, but to be fair and just. And that's a message not just for Christmas, but for every day. In a just world everybody would be free from poverty, famine, conflict or war. A just world sees everyone having the same opportunity to flourish in life. So today we pray for justice in the world. It might seem like a big ask – like it's something beyond our own capability. But even by trying to treat the people we know fairly, we'll be joining in God's work of building a just world. Try not to judge others today. Avoid the temptation to bitch or gossip. Strive to be a good friend – try not to fall out. And as you do all this, think about those who really struggle to be treated fairly in the world.

Prayer

Give us a sense of balance, God.
Too often our world is tipped up on its side –
favouring the rich and the wealthy, and hurting the poor and the needy.
This isn't how you meant it to be!
You longed for equality and fairness, for a just world.
Help the things we do and say today
to reflect this sense of balance.
Teach us kindness and understanding, acceptance and friendship.
Help the justice we share here in college
spread widely through our world.

Amen.

Friday

Scripture

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. *Matthew 1:22-23*

Image Young woman

Theme

Be Prepared - Having courage and faith in God

Action

Be open to God

Reflection

During Advent we think about Mary and her choice to give up the freedom to live a normal life when she choice to become the mother of Jesus.

Why did God choose Mary? Did he know she'd agree so easily? What made her so special? Perhaps it is because Mary was so ordinary and so unremarkable that she was asked to take on this huge responsibility. She's ordinary, but extraordinary. The most important thing for Mary was her trust and faith in God. As crazy as it might sound to be told you were pregnant and about to give birth to the Son of God – by a strange bloke with wings at that – Mary seemed to take it all in with a remarkable sense of calm and acceptance. Maybe there's something the Gospel accounts don't tell us about her reaction!

We certainly know that Mary's life was changed beyond compare following the visit of the Angel Gabriel. And thanks to the example of generous faith shown to us by Mary, our lives are changed too. Through their witness, we come to know that God is with us always.

So today we're invited to be open to God – to trust in the Lord just as Mary did. Even if we only shared in a little bit of her faith, we'd be drawn ever closer to God.

Prayer

We thank you Lord, for the generous acceptance of Mary,
and for her example of real faith and trust.
Through her witness, deepen our own belief in you.
Help us to be open before you,

and to trust in your love for us.
Amen.