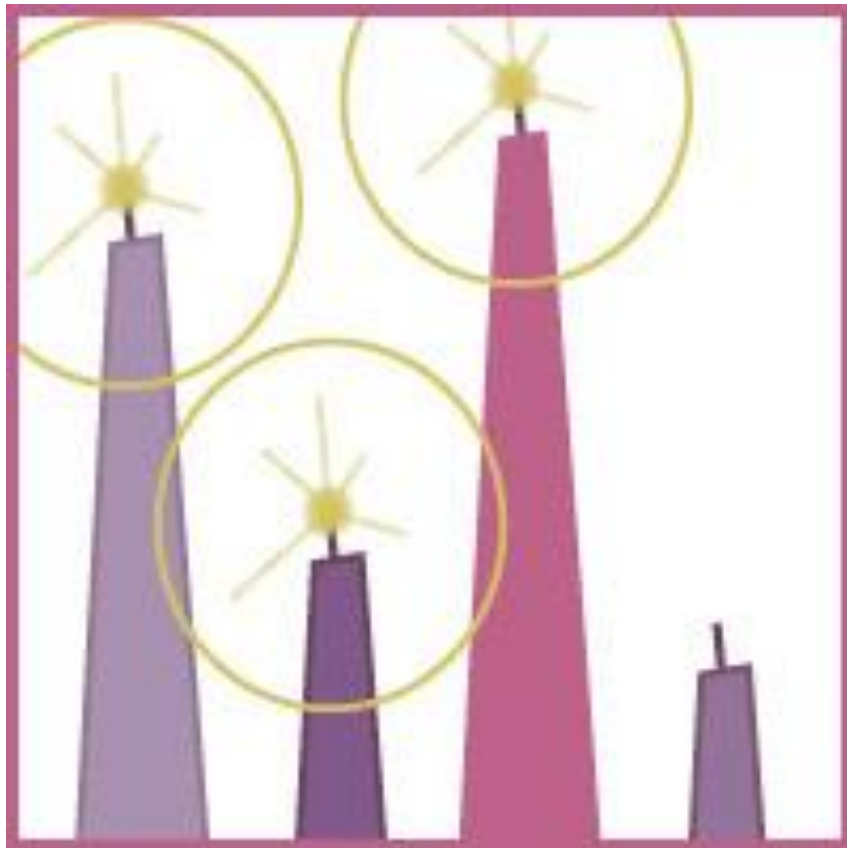


The Third week of Advent

**Week Commencing
12th December 2016**



“Are we there Yet”

Matthew 11:2-11

John the Baptist was in prison, but he heard about what the Christ was doing. So John sent some of his followers to Jesus. They asked him, "Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?"

Jesus answered them, "Go tell John what you hear and see: The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor. Those who do not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed."

As John's followers were leaving, Jesus began talking to the people about John. Jesus said, "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed blown by the wind? What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes live in kings' palaces. So why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, and I tell you, John is more than a prophet. This was written about him:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare the way for you.'
Malachi 3:1

I tell you the truth, John the Baptist is greater than any other person ever born, but even the least important person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

Christmas day is not so far away now. We all want to be happy don't we? That is how it should be. God made us to be happy. Things like the adverts on the television or in magazines or the National Lottery all suggest that happiness come from having more and more, or being famous and successful

Jesus the baby in Bethlehem had none of these things, later in his life he taught us that the true secret of happiness will come and stay with us if we lovingly do things for others, if we are unselfish. This week let's make each day an opportunity to be more aware of the need of those who are around us.

Prayer

Father, the whole world looks with eagerness to the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

May we, in our lives, know the real meaning of happiness and find it in the peace that your Son promises to all who follow him.

Amen

Monday

Scripture

The Lord Almighty is his name— the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. *Isaiah 54:5*

Image

View of the earth

Theme

Are we there yet - The global community

Action

Pray for people in another country

Reflection

Not long now until the Big Day... There's so much build up to Christmas that it can come as a bit of an anti-climax in the end. Which is a shame, because the Feast we celebrate is such an amazing event: God being born on the earth.

Christians across the world will celebrate in different ways, each bringing their own traditions and customs, both holy and worldly. Many more people will mark December 25th without even giving the birth of Jesus a second thought.

Yet God is born for all the earth. Our Creator looks over the world with gentle care and concern, longing for it to be a place of beauty and peace. As we start this final week of term, we're invited to join our prayer with people across the world. You might have family or friends who live in other countries, or have close connections with another place. Or perhaps you've visited or read about another country or culture. Modern communications and technology make us a 'global community' more than ever. We can also be a prayerful community, united with our sisters and brothers in God's name, whatever their needs and wherever they are.

Prayer

God of all the earth,
we praise you for your creative genius.
As we come closer to celebrating your birthday,
unite us with others across the world.
Hear the needs of your people
and bring peace and justice to us all.
Amen.

Tuesday

Scripture

Where is the infant king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage. *Matthew 2:2*

Image

Cartoon image of baby Jesus

Theme

Are we there yet - Bringing our gifts before God

Action

Spend some time in God's presence today

Reflection

The Magi (or 'Wise Men') joined in the journey to see the new born Jesus, following the star from the East. Their presence in the Christmas story reminds us that Jesus' birth was an event for all of humanity. We'll celebrate the arrival of the Magi properly on the Feast of the Epiphany. For now, though, they remind us of the magical wonder of Christmas. They follow the light of the star and come to Jesus, the Light of the World. In this child, they find the hope and promise they had longed for. They brought their gifts to Jesus – gold to express the majesty of God, frankincense as a sign of the priesthood of Jesus, myrrh as a sign that he was anointed and that he would suffer.

What gifts do we bring before God? What can we offer Jesus as we come to celebrate his birth in a few days time? Perhaps more than anything, we can give God our time. We live in a busy world that doesn't often give us time or space just to 'be'. The end of term and the start of the Christmas holidays can often be especially hectic. S

So today's action asks us just to spend some time with God today. Our prayer here and now is a good start.

But perhaps we can also find the odd moment just to pause and reflect a moment. Maybe even to spend a minute or two before the Crib in the Atrium. Just to make a little time for God and to remember why we celebrate in these days.

Prayer

Be still...
Be calm...
Be peaceful...
Be at the Manger in Bethlehem...
Be knelt before the infant King...
Be in the presence of God...
Be yourself in this moment...
Be with your God...
Just be...

Wednesday

Scripture

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.
John 1:14

Image

Lego backpack figure

Theme

Are we there yet - The Kingdom of God

Action

Be a good neighbour – think of how you can build God's Kingdom.

Reflection

With the birth of Jesus, God becomes human – real flesh and blood. Christmas tends to paint a cosy, cute kind of picture of this, with the familiar sights of the Manger at Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph gazing adoringly at the new born Jesus, with shepherds, wise men, angels and donkeys all looking on. It's a powerful and beautiful image, of course, and important that we remember this scene.

But the reality of the events of Christmas are most strongly felt when Jesus grows up and starts work: moving into the neighbourhood to start sharing God's word with the people. This is what the child Jesus is all about: building the Kingdom of God, bringing new hope, forgiveness, and healing to the world. Challenging us to look at our own lives and to think of others. Turning the world upside down by presenting an alternative way of doing things. That said, the idea of following Christ easily becomes mere lip service. We throw around phrases like 'love' and 'peace' and 'forgiveness' really easily. The concept of God's Kingdom sounds really nice and fluffy. But making it real is a whole different thing. Putting flesh and blood on God's way of doing things demands time, energy and commitment – it takes a load of courage and the guts to stand up for what you believe in.

Question is, do you think it's worth it? The choice is yours, it's free to

make. Today, if you choose God, you can choose to be good neighbour, a Kingdom-builder. It's up to you.

Prayer

Word of God, flesh and blood, be born in us today.
Be born in the homeless and hungry, and in the rich and the wealthy.
Be born in the sick and troubled, and in the healthy and happy.
Be born in the outcast and stranger and in the popular and the friend.
Word of God, flesh and blood,
be born in us today.

Thursday

Scripture

A child has been born – for us! His names will be: Amazing Counsellor, Strong God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. *Isaiah 9:5*

Image

Ultrasound scan

Theme

Are we there yet - Peace in the world

Action

Be a peaceful person – try to have a day without arguments or negativity

Reflection

During the First World War, the story is told of how German and British troops set aside their weapons to play a Christmas Day football match in no-man's land near Armentieres, France. (The Germans won 3-2...)

So it seems that Christmas has this magical quality that can stop war... even if only for a day. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, born in the mess and chaos of a barn in downtown Bethlehem, cuts through unnecessary dispute and conflict, instead promoting acceptance, tolerance and forgiveness. It's shameful if the effects of his birth last no more than a day a year...

Perhaps today could be our football match? A day to share in the peace of Christ. If you're already a peaceful person, keep it going! But if you can be grumpy, negative, argumentative or aggressive, lay your weapons down. Think about those places in our world that are at war at this time. Be a peaceful person – and see what a difference it makes.

Prayer

Jesus, heal our broken world
with its wars and conflicts and disputes.
Let there be peace on earth
and let it begin with us.
Teach us tolerance and patience through this day.
Help us to think before we speak,
to reflect before we act,
and to consider the consequence of our attitude.
Amen.

Friday

Scripture

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:8-10

Image

Christmas present

Theme

Are we there yet – Christmas Joy

Action

Make somebody happy today

Reflection

If there is a single word that describes what Christmas is all about, it's the little word "joy." When we sing O Come All Ye Faithful, we sing the words "Joyful & triumphant", we sing the word "Joyful" in lots of other carols as well.

But it's not always easy to feel joyful. Part of our problem is that we've got the wrong idea about joy. We tend to connect it with our happiness and think that joy depends on Making ourselves happy.

You can't have joy by going from one party to another or frantically racing through the Christmas Shopping. In fact, going shopping this time of year is an excellent way to lose your joy.

To be really Joyful at Christmas we have to think less about ourselves and more about others and then we will be able to really enjoy our Christmas Celebrations.

Prayer

Jesus, help me always to rejoice in your joy and to remain in your love, enable me to bring the joyful news of your birth to others this Christmas
Amen