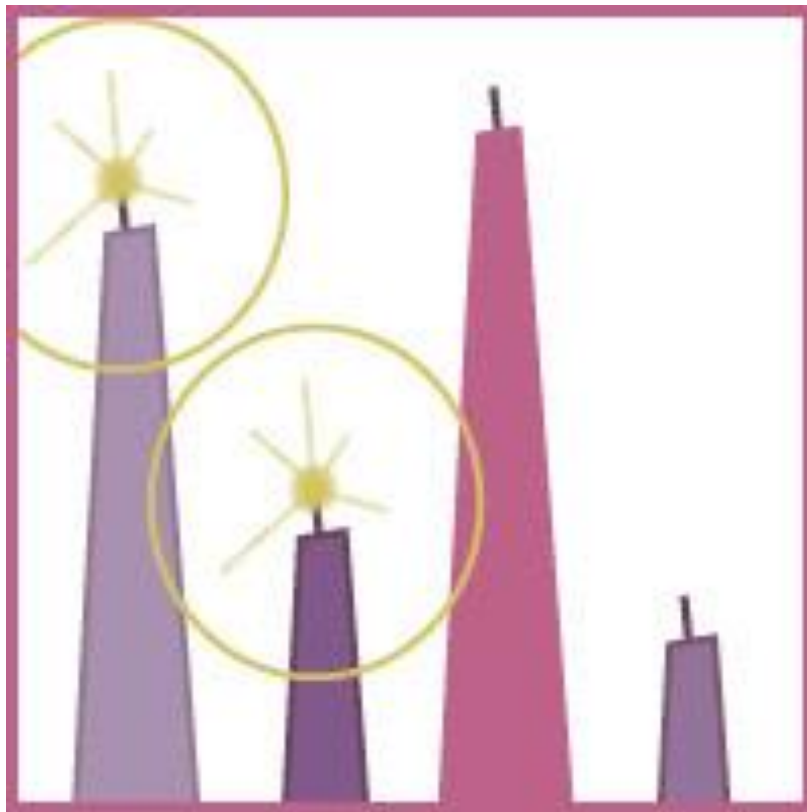


# **The Second week of Advent**

**Week Commencing  
5<sup>th</sup> December 2016**



**“Change your ways”**

## **Matthew 3:1-12**

About that time John the Baptist began preaching in the desert area of Judea. John said, "Change your hearts and lives because the kingdom of heaven is near." John the Baptist is the one Isaiah the prophet was talking about when he said:

"This is a voice of one who calls out in the desert: 'Prepare the way for the Lord. Make the road straight for him.'" Isaiah 40:3

John's clothes were made from camel's hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food, he ate locusts and wild honey. Many people came from Jerusalem and Judea and all the area around the Jordan River to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptised them in the Jordan River.

Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the place where John was baptising people. When John saw them, he said, "You are snakes! Who warned you to run away from God's coming punishment? Do the things that show you really have changed your hearts and lives. And don't think you can say to yourselves, 'Abraham is our father.' I tell you that God could make children for Abraham from these rocks. The axe is now ready to cut down the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptise you with water to show that your hearts and lives have changed. But there is one coming after me who is greater than I am, whose sandals I am not good enough to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He will come ready to clean the grain, separating the good grain from the chaff. He will put the good part of the grain into his barn, but he will burn the chaff with a fire that cannot be put out."

If you are going out in the evening or have been invited to a special celebration, you take your time to get yourselves washed and changed into your best clothes.

In our gospel this week John The Baptist told people they had to be baptised (washed) and changed their lives, to enable them to welcome the Messiah.

This is what Advent is really all about, preparing ourselves for the coming of Jesus the Messiah at Christmas.

John the Baptist came to help people get their priorities right. This Advent we are being asked to get our priorities right as well. There are more important

things to do than buying presents and decorating our homes, or buying nice clothes to wear and good things to eat.

Remember the story of Martha and Mary when Jesus came to their house. Mary stopped what she was doing to simply "be" in the presence of Jesus, while Martha her sister busied herself doing things in the house, she missed out on being in the presence of Jesus.

This advent we have to get the balance right. We can enjoy being in the presence of Jesus as well as preparing to celebrate, if we make our preparations flow from our prayers to God, then Jesus will really help us to make Christmas special this year.

### **Prayer**

Father, in Heaven your Son's birthday draws near .  
May the greed and selfishness, which tempts so many people at this time of year, not blind us to the real meaning of his coming into our world.  
Amen

## **Monday**

### **Scripture**

Trust in the Lord for ever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.  
*Isaiah 26:4*

**Image** A rock

### **Theme**

Change your ways - Strength for those who suffer

### **Action**

Pray for one person you know who is suffering

### **Reflection**

The prophet Isaiah uses many different images for the Lord. 'Eternal rock' suggests that God is strong and powerful, a strong foundation. It's why Isaiah talks about trusting in God: he's solid and won't let us down.

This remains true even when we're having a hard time. God encourages us to turn to him in our need. God is just always there for us, no matter what we're experiencing or how we are feeling. In the Gospels, Jesus showed this many times, reaching out especially to the sick and suffering and giving them strength, healing and hope.

Today we're invited to pray for just one person who you know is suffering at the moment. It might be a member of your family, or someone here in college, or if you don't know of anyone personally, you can choose somebody that you've heard about in the news. Take a moment as we reflect together to hold that person in your heart. Pray for that person, asking God to be a rock of strength for them today. And as you go about your day, keep this person in your mind, stopping every now and again to pray for them.

### **Prayer**

Eternal rock of strength,  
we pray to you, Lord,  
for those who suffer in mind, in body, in heart or in spirit.  
Be strong for them, generous God,  
and give them courage.  
Ease whatever problems they might have  
and help them to look to a brighter future.  
Amen.

## **Tuesday**

### **Scripture**

That day it will be said: See, this is our God in whom we hoped for salvation; the Lord is the one in whom we hoped. Isaiah 25:9

### **Image**

Holding hands

### **Theme**

Change your ways - Hope

### **Action**

Be hopeful: think positively as you prepare to celebrate Christmas

### **Reflection**

We need hope! Chief Rabbi Jonathan Saks wrote: *'Optimism is the belief that things will get better. Hope is the faith that, together, we can make things better.'* As Christians, the birth of Jesus is the ultimate sign of the great hope and promise that God gives to us: he is the answer to our prayers and a sign of God's total love for humanity. Jesus proves this love on the Cross, bringing forgiveness and new life to a broken world.

Hope is one of the greatest gifts of this Advent season. Hope keeps us going when things are tough. It helps us to persevere and look to the future with confidence. Hope can help us through hard times, but it can also affect us in our good times too, giving us a positive attitude and a good spirit. So today's action invites us to be a community of hope: to be a family that thinks positively, acts generously, speaks lovingly, and treats fairly. Being hopeful, with faith in God, helps us to make our little bit of the world that little bit better. Doing this *together* helps that hope to grow!

### **Prayer**

In Mary's saying 'Yes' to God:  
we find our hope.

In the angels' song of 'Glory to God':  
we find our hope.

In the shepherd's rush to see their King:  
we find our hope.

In the Magi's following of the star:  
we find our hope.

In a child in a stable in Bethlehem,  
we find our hope.

In one another as we follow Jesus:  
we live in hope.

## **Wednesday**

### **Scripture**

Look, there is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.  
*John 1:29*

### **Image**

Enhanced healing plasters

### **Theme**

Change your ways - Forgiveness of others

### **Action**

Forgive someone that has hurt you

### **Reflection**

John the Baptist describes Jesus as the '*Lamb of God*' just as he is about to be baptised in the River Jordan. It seems like a strange description but it comes from some Old Testament images. John wanted to show that Jesus was one who would suffer for others, taking on all the sin and hurt of the world.

Throughout his life on earth, Jesus encouraged people to turn away from sin and to seek forgiveness. Through many stories, parables and miracles, he showed how massive God's power of forgiveness is – it's a generous, unconditional, limitless forgiveness: as long as we're able to forgive others too.

Advent is often seen as a time of excited preparation, but it's a time for forgiveness too. In these days, God asks us to take a good look at our lives and to see if we're really ready for Jesus. If we are generous in our forgiveness of others, we will be! So today we're asked to be forgiving. It can be difficult to forgive someone who has done something to hurt us. But it's much more difficult to carry a load of anger and resentment inside. Forgiving others takes courage and humility, but the healing and happiness it brings is well worth it.

### **Prayer**

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us.  
Let this mercy overflow today and change our hearts.  
We sometimes hold grudges  
or stubbornly refuse to forgive,  
but this only makes things worse.  
Instead, Lord, give us the grace we need to be forgiving.  
Help this day to be one of healing,  
of putting things right,  
and making peace.  
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us.

## **Thursday**

### **Scripture**

You, Lord, yourself are our Father, our Redeemer is your ancient name.  
*Isaiah 63:16*

### **Image**

Christ the Redeemer statue

### **Theme**

Change your ways - Saying sorry

### **Action**

Spend some time thinking about things you need to say sorry for

### **Reflection**

Yesterday, we thought about how we forgive others. Today, we think about the other side of forgiveness: how we say sorry and seek to be forgiven. Someone once had a t-shirt with the slogan *'It's hard to be ever so humble when you're perfect in every way.'* But, of course, nobody is perfect. Even the most "Saintly" of us will mess up from time to time – it's part of being human! The important thing is to humbly recognise where we make mistakes, to say sorry for those things and to learn from our experience.

In the Gospels, Jesus the Redeemer talked a lot about forgiveness, but he didn't do it so that we feel bad about ourselves. He recognised the fact that saying sorry helped us to grow peacefully and patiently with one another. It helps us to be real with each other. Even though it can be difficult to admit where we've gone wrong, the benefits of being forgiven are incredible – it just puts us in the right place.

So today we're asked to think about what we need to say sorry for. Be honest – and try to put it right today.

### **Prayer**

Christ our Redeemer,  
you know us through and through,  
our every thought, word and action.  
You know the places where we shine,  
you know the places where we mess up,  
yet still you love us!  
We ask you, Lord, to bless us today  
with the ability to say sorry.  
As we seek forgiveness,  
help us to be forgiving too.  
Amen.

## **Friday**

### **Scripture**

Sing and shout for joy for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.  
*Isaiah 12:6*

### **Image** (Slide 22)

Shadow of person on sand

### **Theme**

Change your ways - Recognising the presence of God around us

### **Action**

Try to see God in one another

### **Reflection**

Meister Eckhart wrote *'What is the good if Mary gives birth to the Son of God two thousand years ago if I do not give birth to the Son of God today? We are all meant to be mothers of God – God is always needing to be born.'* It's a reminder of how we are called to reflect the amazing mystery of Christmas each day in our lives. 'Giving birth' to the Son of God means making God present in every time, place and situation.

We might not always consider ourselves to be Christ-like or Godly. Yet we are called to reflect God in the way we live. And that's easier to do when we try to see the good (and the God) in one another. Give birth to the Son of God today – be God's witness, God's presence, and God's love.

### **Prayer**

In the things we say, remind us, Lord,  
we are your voice in the world.  
In the friendship we share, encourage us, Lord,  
we are your friends in the world.  
In the way we act, inspire us, Lord,  
to be your love in the world.  
And in the way we live, bless us, O Lord,  
for we are your presence in the world.



