

**29<sup>th</sup> November Advent 1 HOPE**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. Isaiah 9 : 2

**Lighting our Advent Candles**

As winter days dim and bow to early darkness, you, God of light, set watch in the night sky and beckon the wise to follow.

When hope hangs low in the human heart, you, loving creator, kindle compassion, breathing life into the early embers of change and empathy.

Light Candle 1           **We light a candle for hope. May it light the way.**

We light a candle for hope, sending prayers high into the inky heavens and dreams deep into the human soul.

As Advent dawns, God of all hope, shine your light on the story of the saints who journeyed before us. May the seeds they planted in the world – hope, peace, joy, and love – take hold in our hearts and stretch towards the light.

**HYMN The Candle Song**

Like a candle flame  
Flickering small in our darkness  
Uncreated light  
Shines through infant eyes

Stars and angels sing  
Yet the earth sleeps in shadows  
Can this tiny spark  
Set a world on fire?

*God is with us, alleluia (Men)*  
*God is with us, alleluia (Women)*  
*Come to save us, alleluia (Men)*  
*Come to save us (Women)*  
*Alleluia! (All)*

Yet his light shall shine  
From our lives, Spirit blazing  
As we touch the flame  
Of his holy fire

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**Readings**

**Psalm 80 : 1 – 7, 17 - 19**

**Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,** you who lead Joseph like a flock.

**You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,** shine forth

<sup>2</sup> before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us.

<sup>3</sup> **Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.**

<sup>4</sup> **How long, LORD God Almighty, will your anger smoulder against the prayers of your people?**

<sup>5</sup> You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

<sup>6</sup> You have made us an object of derision to our neighbours, and our enemies mock us.

<sup>7</sup> **Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.**

<sup>17</sup> Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

<sup>18</sup> Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.

<sup>19</sup> Restore us, LORD God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

**Prayers** Based on Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 which we will read shortly.

**‘Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel’**

- As we come to you in prayer this morning, Holy God, we ask you to hear us and we give thanks that you have said that you will.

**‘You who are enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth!’**

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- Although you are full of majesty and power, yet you humble yourself and draw near to us; shine your light on our worship today we pray.

**‘Awaken your might and come to save us!’**

- In our weakness and brokenness at this time we know how much we need you; knowing that we cannot save ourselves, we call upon your strength today.

**Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

- In our uncertainty we wonder what restoration might look like in these days, but we trust ourselves to you and ask again that you will shine on us and give us hope in the shadows.

**How long, LORD God Almighty, will your anger smoulder against the prayers of your people?**

- Amidst our worship we recognize that too often our lives let you down, our prayers are selfish, our compassion is cold, our witness is laughable....

In a moment of silence we say sorry...

*[Pause]*

And with thankfulness we receive your forgiveness.

**Restore us, Almighty God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

- As we call on your name this day, we pledge ourselves once more to you, O Lord God of hosts, you who have your hand upon us, you who makes us strong for yourself.

We will never turn back from you who gives us life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Reflection**

Each year during Advent I like to find a book with readings/reflections that I can use each day as I prepare for Christmas itself. There are plenty of such books or online materials around. Over the years I’ve found some more helpful than others but this year I would like to share with you from a book I used several years ago that each day focussed on a different name that is used in scripture for Jesus. And yes believe it or not Jesus has more than enough names to see us through each day of Advent. So today I want to look at the name Jesus itself. This is what we read in **Matthew 1 : 21**

<sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

The name Jesus is a transliteration of the Hebrew name Joshua which means ‘the Lord is salvation.’ In biblical times it wasn’t an uncommon name so Jesus himself wouldn’t have appeared to be out of the ordinary when he was growing up because of his name. Even in today’s world, in some cultures, Jesus is still a commonly used name. Some of you will have heard how I met baby Jesus in Venezuela. In fact this year, that baby Jesus will be celebrating his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Yet Jesus name holds great significance, it speaks of who He is and what He was to do on earth.

In the OT Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan. He saved the people through courageous leadership, charging into battle, leading hundreds of thousands of his people into the Promised Land. In contrast to the first Joshua, the second Joshua, (Jesus) saved through an epic battle the He fought alone, quietly making the way for His people to enter the Promised Land of God’s presence.

Jesus came to save people from their sins. What the first Joshua was powerless to do, the second Joshua was born to accomplish.

During Jesus lifetime the Israelites were waiting for a political leader like Joshua, someone who would free them from the yoke of Roman oppression and allow them to live in the land God had promised them, just as their forefathers had been freed from Egyptian slavery and led into Canaan. They wanted a macho man who would reinstate Israel as an autonomous country and make the Romans run in fear.

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But Jesus' perspective is always bigger than ours. His gaze was set on something much greater than the earthly Roman Empire, his gaze was upon the universal dilemma of sin. His battle was so much more than an earthly one, his was one of cosmic proportions, to deliver all who believe in Him from the bondage of soul-deadening sin and to welcome us into the very family of God himself.

So as we enter this Advent season here is a challenge for you. What are your expectations of Jesus. Are you expecting him to provide finances, or to heal a loved one, or to mend a broken relationship or to fulfil some other request? It's possible that He might do just that .... But he may not. Regardless of what happens or how He answers, open yourself to his saving touch, and ask him to show you what **he** wants to do in your life, rather than what you want him to do. Begin the Advent season with an open heart filled with hope because of Jesus our Saviour.

**Prayer**

Precious Jesus, thank you for coming to save not just Israel but all those who call on You. We often get wrapped up in our own self-righteousness and feel like our salvation is over and done with, but you desire a continual renewal of our hearts. You want to save us from our own self-righteousness and transform us into your own image. So today, "Search me O God and know my heart ... See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Amen

**Prayers of intercession**

Advent God, you heard the cry of your people and came to the world in Jesus Christ; come near to us now as we pray:

- We pray for all affected by sickness around the world; for those who will die today of malaria, tuberculosis, cancer, Covid-19... Faithful God, **give your strength.**
- We pray for all who work to bring healing to those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit; for the NHS, for counsellors, for all who support others... Faithful God, **give your strength.**
- We pray for all who are grieving the loss of family and friends; for those who feel helpless, powerless, guilty, distraught... We remember those known to us and especially this week David and Maureen. Faithful God, **give your strength.**
- We pray for all who are caught up in situations of violence; for those in lands where war is raging, for those in homes where abuse takes place... Faithful God, **give your strength.**
- We pray for all who have lost their way in life; for those contemplating suicide, for those who don't know which way to turn, for young people confused by these strange times, those lost in the confused world of dementia... Faithful God, **give your strength.**
- We pray for governments and local authorities; for all who have to make difficult decisions, for teachers struggling to make schools safe places, for our leaders trying to find safe ways for families to enjoy Christmas together... Faithful God, **give your strength.**
- We pray for the church here in our own part of Sutherland, across these islands, and throughout the world; may we be alert to your presence in the world and draw others closer to your love... Faithful God, **give your strength.**
- We pray for ourselves; we too suffer, we too grieve, we too struggle with abuse and confusion, with anxiety and selfishness... we cling to your promise to come into our lives and we open ourselves to your coming. Faithful God, **give your strength.**
- We offer all our prayers in the name of Jesus, who came, who comes, who will come. Amen.

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**Hymn: Come thou long expected Jesus**

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us,  
let us find our rest in thee.

2. Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art;  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.

3. Born thy people to deliver,  
born a child and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever,  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

4. By thine own eternal spirit  
rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all sufficient merit,  
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley  
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**Blessing**

May we go out to disrupt all that is wrong, unjust and hateful in this world.  
May we nurture and plant seeds of hope.  
May we celebrate your coming amongst us, Immanuel.

Amen.