

WORSHIP FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Advent candles are lit as we sing verses 1 to 4

**Hills of the North, rejoice, river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice; valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love, he brings salvation from above.**

**Isles of the Southern seas, sing to the listening earth,
carry on every breeze hope of a world's new birth:
In Christ shall all be made anew, his word is sure, his promise true.**

**Lands of the East, arise, he is your brightest morn,
greet him with joyous eyes, praise shall his path adorn:
Your seers have longed to know their Lord; to you he comes, the final word.**

**Shores of the utmost West, lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest in whom the dawn has come:
He brings a never-ending light who triumphed o'er our darkest night.**

**Shout, as you journey home, songs be in every mouth,
lo, from the North they come, from East and West and South:
In Jesus all shall find their rest, in him the universe be blest.**

Heavenly Father, you exalted the humble and meek:
give us humble and contrite hearts.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you grew towards birth in the Virgin's womb:
be planted also in our hearts and lives.

Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit, you overshadowed Mary, that she might become the God-bearer:
fill us once again with the gifts of your coming.

Lord, have mercy.

May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw you to himself and cleanse you from
all your sins, that you may behold the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus
Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Lord Jesus, light of the world, blessed is Gabriel, who brought good news; blessed is Mary, your mother and ours. Bless your Church preparing for Christmas; and bless us your children, who long for your coming. Amen.

PRIEST Hear the Gospel of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ
Glory to you O Lord

LUKE Many people have undertaken to draw up an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled in our midst. It has been handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and stewards of the word. So, most excellent Theophilus, since I had traced the course of all of it scrupulously from the start, I thought it a good idea to write an orderly account for you, so that you may have secure knowledge about the matters in which you have been instructed.

In the time when Herod was king of Judaea, there was a priest called Zechariah, of the priestly division of Abijah. His wife, who came from the Aaron family, was called Elisabeth.

Both of them were righteous in God's sight; they followed all the Lord's commandments and ordinances without fault. They had no children. Elisabeth was barren, and both of them were of an advanced age. It so happened, when Zechariah was performing his priestly service before God, according to the order of his division, that the lot fell to him, according to the priestly custom, to go in to the Lord's sanctuary to offer incense. The people were praying outside in a large crowd, at the time of the incense-offering. An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right-hand side of the incense-altar. Zechariah was troubled and terror-struck when he saw the angel. But the angel said to him

ANGEL Don't be afraid, Zechariah: your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. This will bring you joy and celebration, and many will rejoice at his birth. He will be a great man in God's sight; he will drink no wine or strong drink. He will be filled with the holy spirit from his mother's womb, and will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, and he will turn the hearts of fathers to children, and of unbelievers to the wisdom of the righteous. He will get ready for the Lord a prepared people.

ZECHARIAH How can I be sure of this?

LUKE said Zechariah to the angel.

ZECHARIAH I'm an old man! My wife's not as young as she used to be, either!

ANGEL Look here, I'm Gabriel. I stand in God's presence. I was sent to speak to you and give you this splendid news. Now, listen: you will be silent – you won't be able to speak – until the day when it all happens, because you didn't believe my words. But they will come true at the proper time.

LUKE Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and were surprised that he was taking such a long time in the sanctuary. But when he came out he couldn't speak to them, and they understood that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He made gestures to them, but remained speechless. So, when the days of his priestly service were complete, he went back home.

After that time, Elisabeth his wife conceived. She stayed in hiding for five months.

ELISABETH This is the Lord's doing. At last he has looked on me, and taken away my public shame!

We sing **Bless the Lord my soul, and bless God's holy name**
Bless the Lord my soul, who leads me into life.

LUKE In the sixth month, Gabriel the angel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man called Joseph, from the family of David. The virgin was called Mary.

ANGEL Greetings, favoured one! May the Lord be with you!

LUKE said the angel when he arrived. She was disturbed at this, and wondered what such a greeting might mean.

ANGEL Don't be afraid, Mary, you're in favour with God. Listen: you will conceive in your womb and will have a son; and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be a great man, and he'll be called the son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever. His kingdom will never come to an end.

MARY How will this happen? I'm still a virgin!

ANGEL The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. For that reason the holy one who is born from you will be called God's Son. Let me tell you this, too: your cousin Elisabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son. This is the sixth month for her, a woman who people used to say was barren. With God, you see, nothing is impossible.

MARY Here I am; I'm the Lord's servant-girl. Let it happen to me as you've said.

LUKE Then the angel left her. Mary got up then and there, and went in excitement to the hill country of Judaea. She went into Zechariah's house, and greeted Elisabeth. When Elisabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby gave a leap in her womb. Elisabeth was filled with the holy spirit, and shouted at the top of her voice:

ELISABETH Of all women, you're the blessed one! And the fruit of your womb – he's blessed, too! Why should this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Look – when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the child in my womb gave a great leap for joy! A blessing on you, for believing that what the Lord said to you would come true!

**Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.**

**Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name, the Lord, the mighty One.**

**Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.**

**Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!**

LUKE Mary stayed with Elisabeth for three months, and then returned home.

The time arrived for Elisabeth's child to be born, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had increased his mercy to her, and they came to celebrate with her. Now on the eighth day, when they came to circumcise the child, they were calling him by his father's name, Zechariah. But his mother spoke up.

ELISABETH No, he is to be called John.

PEOPLE **None of your relatives is called by that name**

LUKE they objected.

They made signs to his father, to ask what he wanted him to be called. He asked for a writing tablet, and wrote on it 'His name is John.'

Everyone was astonished. Immediately his mouth and his tongue were unfastened, and he spoke, praising God. Fear came over all those who lived in the neighbourhood, and all these things were spoken of throughout all the hill country of Judaea. Everyone who heard about it turned the matter over in their hearts.

PEOPLE **What then will this child become?**

LUKE they said. And the Lord's hand was with him. John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke this prophecy:

ZECHARIAH Blessed be the Lord, Israel's God! He's come to his people and bought them their freedom. He's raised up a horn of salvation for us in David's house, the house of his servant, just as he promised, through the mouths of his prophets, the holy ones, speaking from ages of old: salvation from our enemies, rescue from hatred, mercy to our ancestors, keeping his holy covenant. He swore an oath to Abraham our father, to give us deliverance from fear and from foes, so we might worship him, holy and righteous before his face to the end of our days.

You, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest One, go ahead of the Lord, preparing his way, letting his people know of salvation, through the forgiveness of all their sins. The heart of our God is full of mercy, that's why his daylight has dawned from on high, bringing light to the dark, as we sat in death's shadow, guiding our feet in the path of peace.

LUKE The child grew, and became powerful in the spirit.

We sing

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation:
in God I trust, in God I trust.**

LUKE At that time a decree was issued by Augustus Caesar: a census was to be taken of the whole world. (This was the first census, before the one when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) So everyone set off to be registered, each to their own town. Joseph too, who belonged to the house and family of David, went from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judaea, David's city, to be registered with his fiancée Mary, who was pregnant. So that's where they were when the time came for her to give birth; and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him up and put him to rest in a feeding-trough, because there was no room for them in the normal living quarters. There were shepherds in that region, out in the open, keeping a night watch around their flock. An angel of the Lord stood in front of them. The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

ANGEL Don't be afraid. Look: I've got good news for you, news which will make everybody very happy. Today a saviour has been born for you – the Messiah, the Lord! – in David's town. This will be the sign for you: you'll find the baby wrapped up, and lying in a feeding-trough.

LUKE Suddenly, with the angel, there was a crowd of the heavenly armies. They were praising God, saying,

ANGELS **Glory to God in the highest, and peace upon earth among those in his favour.**

LUKE So when the angels had gone away again into heaven, the shepherds said to each other

SHEPHERDS **Let's go to Bethlehem and see all this that the Lord has told us.**

LUKE So they hurried off, and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the feeding-trough. When they saw it, they told them what had been said to them about this child. And all the people who heard it were amazed at the things the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured all these things and mused over them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

PRIEST This is the Gospel of the Lord
ALL **Praise to you O Christ**

We sing

**O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here,
until the Son of God appear:**

***Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee,
O Israel.***

**O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave:**

Rejoice! Rejoice ...

**O come, thou Dayspring,
come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows
put to flight:**

Rejoice! Rejoice ...

**O come, thou Key of David, come
and open wide our heav'nly home;
make safe the way
that leads on high,
and close the path to misery:**

Rejoice! Rejoice ...

**O come, O come, thou Lord of Might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times didst give the law,
in cloud and majesty and awe:**

Rejoice! Rejoice ...

Today's Intercessions

Prayers at the Table

With this bread that we bring

we shall remember Jesus

With this wine that we bring

we shall remember Jesus

Bread for his body, wine for his blood,
gifts from God to his table we bring

We shall remember Jesus

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Lift up your hearts

We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

It is right to give thanks and praise

It is right to praise you, Father, Lord of all creation;
in your love you made us for yourself.

When we turned away you did not reject us, but came to meet us in your Son.

You embraced us as your children and welcomed us to sit and eat with you.

In Christ you shared our life that we might live in him and he in us.

He opened his arms of love upon the cross

and made for all the perfect sacrifice for sin.

On the night he was betrayed, at supper with his friends he took bread, and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to them, saying:

Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.

Father, we do this in remembrance of him: his body is the bread of life.

At the end of supper, taking the cup of wine, he gave you thanks, and said:

Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,

which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins; do this in remembrance of me.

Father, we do this in remembrance of him: his blood is shed for all.

As we proclaim his death and celebrate his rising in glory,
send your Holy Spirit that this bread and this wine may be to us
the body and blood of your dear Son.

**As we eat and drink these holy gifts
make us one in Christ, our risen Lord.**

With your whole Church throughout the world
we offer you this sacrifice of praise and lift our voice
to join the eternal song of heaven:

**Holy, holy, holy, holy,
Lord of power, Lord of might.
Heav'n and earth
are full of your glory.
Sing hosanna evermore.**

**Blest and holy, blest and holy
he who comes from God on high.
Raise your voices, sing his glory,
praise his name for evermore.**

*The Lord's Prayer is used
and the bread is broken*

We break the bread of life,
and that life is the light of the world.
**God here among us,
light in the midst of us,
bring us to light and life.**

This is Christ's table.
He welcomes all.
Come and be fed.
**Voices old and new,
Lives young and old.
This is who we are.
This is who we are becoming.
Amen! Together we come!**

Prayers after Communion

**Almighty God,
who in Jesus Christ has given us
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed,
forgive us our sins,
open our eyes to God's truth,
strengthen us to do God's will
and give us the joy of his kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen**

Father of all who wait this Advent, we thank you for meeting us at your table and feeding us with the mystery of your love. Here you strengthen us to wait with courage that endures confusion, with peace that changes what it touches, with joy that startles the heart awake, and with faithfulness that holds fast in the dark, until we see your glory made fragile in Bethlehem's manger once more. **Amen.**

May the Eternal God,
who sustained Mary as she waited
for the birth of His Son,
strengthen you as you wait
for His coming in glory.
May He bring you through
the birth pangs of this present age to see, with her,
our great salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord.
And the blessing ...

Glory to God,
**whose power,
at work among us,
can do infinitely more
than all we can ask or conceive;
to him be glory in the Church
and in Christ Jesus,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

People of God: awake!
God above all, maker of all,
is one with us in Christ.
Love is on the way!
Come Lord Jesus

People of God: be glad!
God the mighty God
bends down in love to earth.
Love is on the way!
Come Lord Jesus

People of God: return!
We are God's children,
we seek the coming of Christ.
Love is on the way!
Come Lord Jesus

People of God: prepare!
God with us
comes soon to the world
he has made.
Love is on the way!
Come Lord Jesus

People of God:
shout and sing!
Love is on the way!
Come Lord Jesus.

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
'Through all the earth, goodwill and peace
from heaven's all-gracious king!'
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

With sorrow brought by sin and strife
the world has suffered long
and, since the angels sang, have passed
two thousand years of wrong:
the nations, still at war, hear not
the love-song which they bring:
O hush the noise and cease the strife,
to hear the angels sing!

And those whose journey now is hard,
whose hope is burning low,
who tread the rocky path of life
with painful steps and slow:
O listen to the news of love
which makes the heavens ring!
O rest beside the weary road
and hear the angels sing!

And still the days are hastening on
by prophets seen of old
towards the fulness of the time
when comes the age foretold:
then earth and heaven renewed shall see
the prince of peace, their king;
and all the world repeat the song
which now the angels sing.