

# ~ Advent Wreath Reflections ~

## First Sunday in Advent ~ Hope

On the first Sunday we light the Prophecy candle, and think of the prophets who lived in **Hope** for Jesus' coming.

### Reflection

The Bible speaks of hope as being *"confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."* (Hebrews 11:1) It then goes on to list many heroes (and heroines) of the faith who trusted God to keep his promises even when they could not see how. Some, such as Abraham, never even saw the promises fulfilled in their lifetimes, but trusted God anyway.

As we light the first Advent candle, we think about the prophets of the Old Testament, who spoke God's words into their own times and situations, yet also looked forward to a time when God's many promises would become 'yes' and 'Amen' in Jesus.

They did not know how God could fix the mess that we humans had made of everything. I don't suppose that they expected the solution to be a tiny baby, born into a poor family in an insignificant backwater of the Roman Empire. That was all many centuries into the future for them. Not one of the prophets lived to see it happen, yet they trusted that God would keep his word.

It can be hard to hold onto a promise when we cannot see it happening, but that is what hope is all about.

### To Think About

How can we know whom to trust? How does it feel when you have a promise you can trust?

What do you hope for this Advent?

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign:  
The young woman will conceive and give birth to a son, and will  
call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

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## Second Sunday in Advent ~ Love

On the second Sunday we light the Bethlehem candle, and think of the great **Love** who was born there.

### Reflection

If you had to define God in one word, what would you choose? Hmmn, tricky.

John, who was one of Jesus' closet friends, picked a good one: Love. "*God is love*", he said, "*and everyone who lives in love, lives in God, and God lives in them.*" (1 John 4:16)

Love is a very big word for only four letters. I don't mean some wishy-washy, eye-lash-fluttering, gooey kind of love with pink hearts floating around. God's love is big, powerful, rolls up its sleeves, is tough when it needs to be and wears a leather jacket.

God's love reaches down into the slimy pit and hauls out the people stuck at the bottom. God's love reaches out to a scabby, flea-bitten, poxy leper and gives him the hug he has been needing for years.

God's love reaches up to heaven and pulls it down so that we earth-dwellers can be citizen of God's country too.

As we light the second Advent candle, we think about the love of a young couple in Bethlehem and the child that came to bring God's love to a world very much in need of it. In the two thousand years since that first Christmas, some things have changed, but much is exactly the same. We still live in a world very much in need of God's love.

### To Think About

Where in our world today needs to see God's love? What difference would it make?

How can you spread God's love this Advent?

The angel said, "This then will be a sign to you:  
You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:12

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## Third Sunday in Advent ~ Joy

On the third Sunday we light the Shepherd's candle and think of their great **Joy** when they heard the Good News.

### Reflection

What is Good News for you? For some of us it might be our favourite team has won, or pizza for tea. For others it's a good set of exam results, or a scan that shows 'all clear'. Some good news is big, some is small, and it's all good.

As we light the third Advent candle, we think about the greatest Good News that ever was – good news of great joy for everyone on earth. The shepherds were the first to hear it, and when they saw Jesus, they rejoiced all the way back to their hillside, spreading the Good News to all.

I wonder if they shouted for joy, like the prophet said: *“Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”* (Zechariah 9:9)

I wonder if those same shepherds were in the synagogue years later to hear Jesus read from the scroll, announcing Good News to the poor. I wonder if they were among the crowd who shouted and cheered him when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. I wonder if they stood around the cross on Good Friday when he became the sacrifice that redeems all humans. I wonder if they heard the Easter Sunday news that death itself had died, and life was alive for ever.

### To Think About

What would be good news for you? What would be good news for the world?

What can you rejoice in today?

But the angel said to them,  
“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today, in the city of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Luke 2:10–11

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## Fourth Sunday in Advent ~ Peace

On the fourth Sunday we light the Angel's candle and think of the **Peace** that they announced for all the world.

### Reflection

If I'm honest, 'peace' is not a word I associate with Christmas. What with all the busyness, the incessant Christmas music blaring from every shop, the pressure to make everything perfect for The Big Day, the modern Christmas is far from peaceful.

But was it any different the first time around? Sure, Mary and Joseph didn't have to worry about getting supermarket delivery slots, but Jesus was born in a country under the thumb of an invading empire, into a family who would soon be refugees. No secure home, no reliable income, no healthcare system, corrupt justice, riots, racism and systemic prejudice. Sound familiar?

The languages, countries and centuries may differ, but in the stuff that really matters we are still the same. Peace, real peace, is still in very short supply.

As we light the fourth Advent candle, we think about the angels who announced peace into a very not-peaceful world. Jesus, the Prince of peace, bringing "*peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.*" (Ephesians 2:17) All of us, in other words. For he himself *is* our peace.

It's more than just turning off the loud music, more than ending an argument, more, even, than fixing the world's problems. Peace is not simply the absence of strife, it is a tangible, positive, gut-level sense of GOOD. God's kingdom come. God's will being done, on earth, as in heaven.

### To Think About

What does peace mean to you? How can we know God's peace in the noise of life?

Where will you find peace today?

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,  
"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those on whom his favour rests."

Luke 2:13-14

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## Christmas Eve / Day ~ Light of the World

Finally, late on Christmas Eve or on the morning of Christmas Day, we light the Christ candle, and praise God for sending Jesus as the **Light of the World**.

### Reflection

Candles are great. I love to watch their flames, magically anchored to tiny pieces of string. I love the delicate, dancing light they produce. I love their associations with birthdays and romantic meals, with prayer and remembrance. I love that they seem almost alive: moving, breathing, consuming, turning dead wax into light and warmth.

Of course, an electric lamp gets you instant light – much brighter, cleaner and no fire risk – but still we are drawn to the light of candles. I wonder why. Perhaps it is to do with complexity. Candles have depth, have nuance, have shades and shadows in the brightness. A light bulb, on the other hand, is flick – it's on, flick – it's off.

It would be nice if life were like a light bulb, full of simple easy answers that everyone agrees on. But it's not. Life is more like a candle with shades of meaning, brightness and shadow, joy and pain. We still live in a world with plenty of darkness among the light and it seems that perhaps a candle expresses our human experience better than an on-off light bulb.

As we light the final Advent candle, we think about Jesus, the Light of the World. Jesus understands our darkness. He lived in it with us and brought us light that shines from the inside. *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* (John 1:4-5)

Not many people would sit and watch a light bulb, but I could spend time watching a candle, seeing its light overcome the darkness and letting my prayers ascend to heaven in the flame.

### To Think About

Where is darkness for you? How would you like Jesus' light to shine there?

How will God's light change you today?

Jesus said,  
"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

