

# **Advent 2020**

**Blessed Are Those Who  
Wait, Watch, and Prepare.**



## **Cardiff and Penarth Pastorate**

**Bethesda URC  
Beulah URC  
Canton Uniting Church  
City URC  
Elfed Avenue United Church  
Parkminster URC**

Advent is the church's time to prepare to welcome Jesus. We look forward to traditions and to possible new insights about how God is with us. This year our preparations and our celebrations will be different. While we cannot gather in the same way, we can still wait, watch, and prepare. These readings, prayers, and a candle lighting liturgy are provided to help you do just that—wait, watch, and prepare.

This material is offered by friends across the pastorate to connect us to each other and to God.

May your preparations and celebrations be filled with God's love.

**Reverend Martha McInnes**



# Hope

## 29 November

**Optional extra materials:** *Small piece of paper or newspaper for each person. Markers.*

We pause to breathe in together the life that God gives us.

The candle of this week is a candle of hope. Today the flame of this candle reminds us of the hope that came to this world when Jesus was born and his presence with us. Jesus said “I came so that everyone would have life, life in all its fullness.”

***Light the candle.***

When have you seen the gift of hope this week?

***Prayer***

God, we thank you for the hope you bring to us. We bring to you now prayers of hope for the people and places on our hearts this day.

Write or draw your prayers of hope for a person, place or situation on your heart this morning and place it at the base of



# Peace

## 6 December

*Optional extra materials: Leaf for each person.*

We pause to breathe in together the life that God gives us.

The candle this week is the candle of peace. Today the flame of the candle reminds us that Jesus brings peace into this world. Jesus said: “I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn’t like the peace that this world can give. So don’t be worried or afraid.”

***Light the candle.***

When have you felt the gift of peace this week? When have you known God’s presence driving out fear in your life?

***Prayer***

God, we thank you for the peace you bring to us. We bring to you now prayers of peace for the people and places on our hearts this day.



# Joy

## 13 December

***Optional extra materials:*** Confetti for each person.  
We pause to breathe in together the life that God gives us.

This week is a candle of joy. The flame of the candle reminds us of the joy that Jesus brings into this world. Jesus said “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”

### ***Light the candle.***

When have you experienced the gift of joy this week? When have you known God’s provision, bringing happiness into your life or life around you?

### ***Prayer***

God, we thank you for the joy you bring to us. We bring to you prayers of joy for the people and places on our hearts this day.

Pick up some confetti and pray joy for a person, place or situation on your heart this morning then come and place your confetti prayers at the base of the candle.





# Love

## 20 December

*Optional extra materials: Purple crepe streamers cut into ribbons for each person. Markers.*

We pause to breathe in together the life that God gives us.

This week is a candle of love. The flame of this candle reminds us of the love that came to this world when Jesus was born and his presence with us. Jesus said “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; remain in my love.”

### ***Light the candle.***

When have you shared in the gift of love this week? When have you known God’s love come into your life or life around you?

### ***Prayer***

God, we thank you for the relationships you bring to us. We bring to you prayers of love for the people and places on our hearts this day.

Write or draw your prayers of love for a person, place or situation on your heart this



# Christmas Day - Christ Candle

We pause to celebrate the life of Jesus Christ, born into our world, living through us today.

This candle focuses our minds on the birth of Jesus. Our celebrations begin. His life brings hope, peace, joy, and life together.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning. All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.

Where have you experienced God with you in the preparations for Christmas?

## ***Prayer***

We thank you, God, for your Son, Jesus, and his birth. We thank you for the ways he has brought love to the life of the world. As we celebrate today, we pray for all those far from us, for those not celebrating, and for corners of our world where this day brings no peace or hope.



## 29 November

‘But in those days, after that suffering,  
the sun will be darkened,

<sup>25</sup> and the moon will not give its light,  
<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup> Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with  
great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels,  
and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the  
earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>32</sup> ‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the an-  
gels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware,  
keep alert; <sup>34</sup> for you do not know when the time will  
come. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

*We wait. We watch. We prepare. God, in the coming days  
keep us on track with you. May hope fill our hearts and be  
embodied in our lives. Amen.*





# 30 November

The comma is where  
One takes a breath.  
Breathe in, for that brief  
Moment in time  
One waits, expectant,  
Ear pressed against the wall,  
One listens, eager,  
String taut between two tin cans.

A comma creates a space  
So small that is can't be measured  
So large it can contain God.  
This God of commas  
Who always speaks  
Whispers in my ear,  
Breathe, breathe, breathe.

Margaret G. Borrelli



# 1 December

## Adult Advent Announcement

O Lord,  
Let Advent begin again in us,  
Not merely in commercials;  
For that first Christmas was not  
Simply for children,  
But for the wise and the strong.  
It was crowded around that cradle,  
With kings kneeling.

Speak to us who seek an adult seat this year.

Help us to realize, as we fill stockings,  
Christmas is mainly for the old folks –  
Bent backs and tired eyes  
Need relief and light  
A little more.  
No wonder it was grown-ups  
Who were the first to notice  
Such a star.

**David A. Redding, from *If I Could Pray Again* (1965)**



## 2 December

Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up.

Anne Lamott

Plan B; Further Thoughts on Faith, Riverhead Books, 2006.



## 3 December

‘I walked out on to the balcony and saw a boundless sea of people. . . I spoke from the heart. I wanted to be the first to tell the people that I was not a messiah, but an ordinary man who had become a leader because of extraordinary circumstances. . . I told the crowd that apartheid had no future in South Africa, and that people should not scale down their campaign of mass action. ‘The sight of freedom looming on the horizon should encourage us to redouble our efforts.’ I knew that people expected me to harbor anger towards whites. But I had none. . . We did not want to destroy the country before we freed it. . . We must do everything we could to persuade our white compatriots that a new, non-racial South Africa would be a better place.’

**Nelson Mandela about his release from prison in ‘A Long Road to Freedom’, Abacus, 1995.**

## 4 December

### **A Time for.....**

.....Waiting. We’ve done our fair share of that this year; waiting for the virus to loosen its grip; waiting to know who we can meet; waiting for medical appointments; waiting to know what exams we will take; waiting, sometimes patiently, sometimes impatiently, frustrated by not knowing.

Times of waiting are built into the rhythms of the Christian year. Advent is one of them as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ. We wait with anticipation, and with a tinge of anxiety. It’s natural when we wait for a birth, hoping for what might be. Luke portrays this in the stories of Mary and Elizabeth. Hoping for what might be shines through Mary’s Song of Praise, (the Magnificat) and Zechariah’s Prophecy (the Benedictus), “the hungry will be filled with good things”, light will be given to those who sit in darkness and our feet will be guided into the ways of peace. Turning to the great Advent readings Isaiah tell us “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed”. He encourages our imaginations to run riot as we try to understand what this will mean; “swords into ploughshares”, “the wolf shall live with the lamb”.

These are huge changes as we try to get our minds around them. There's a mixture of hope and uncertainty, as there was for Mary and Elizabeth. So, there is a time of waiting.

Then "the time came" for Mary to deliver her son. The tempo changes. When the shepherds heard the news they couldn't wait, "Let us go now to Bethlehem.....so they went with haste", or as a modern interpretation says, "they left running". (It was like that when our grandchildren were born). Mark tells us that Jesus began his ministry by saying, "the right time has come, .... the Kingdom of God is near".

When the time comes there is an urgency about it, but first we wrestle with the question, "are we ready to embrace the kingdom?" A time of waiting gives us that opportunity.

During the pandemic we've probably done a lot of thinking. Perhaps we spent time decluttering. Then having done that we thought about our lives in ways we rarely do. When our routine is taken from us, when we are limited in what we should do, we are faced with the question "what holds us together?" Is this what is involved in "preparing the way of the Lord?"

Brian Wren in his hymn "This we can do for justice and for peace" suggests six things we can do. Verse 3 has this, "we can see -- what is and what can be."

The Advent prayer from Iona builds on this suggesting God wants us to wait

"for the right time in which to discover  
who we are, where we must go,  
who will be with us, and what we must do.  
So thank you.... for the waiting time."

**Roger Bidnell**



## 5 December

I am writing my Christmas letter already so as to be on the safe side. If, contrary to all expectations, I should still be here at Christmas, the past eight and a half months have taught me that it is the unexpected that happens, and the inevitable must be accepted . . .

I am not going to let this lonely Christmas get me down. It will always take place among the other unusual Christmasses of my life, in Spain, Africa, America, and England. In those years to come I will not want to look back on this Christmas with shame, but with a certain pride. This is the only thing no one can take away from me. . .

For a Christian there is nothing peculiarly difficult about Christmas in a prison cell. I daresay it will have more meaning and will be observed with greater sincerity here in this prison than in place as where all the survives of the feast is its name.

The misery, suffering, poverty, loneliness, helplessness and guilt look very different to the eyes of God from what they do to man, that God should come down to the very place which men usually abhor, that Christ was born in a stable because there was no room for him in the inn—these are things which a prisoner can understand better than anyone else. For him the Christmas story is glad tidings in a very real sense.'

**17 December 1943: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Letters and Papers from Prison', Fontana, 1959.**





## 6 December

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

<sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;<sup>[a]</sup>

lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,<sup>[b]</sup>  
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup> See, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God”?

<sup>28</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup> He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.

<sup>30</sup> Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup> but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

*We are tired. We need comfort. We want peace. God, give us the energy we need for the day ahead. With your energizing Spirit filling us may we offer comfort and work for peace. Amen.*

## Isaiah 40



## 7 December

We are called to stand with one foot on earth and one foot in heaven, with double vision that is the gift of faith, and to say out of our own experience that reality is not flat but deep, not opaque but transparent, not meaningless, but shot full of grace for those with the least willingness to believe it is so.

That is our common call. It comes to each one of us in a different way, calling for particular gifts of our particular lives. Each of us is free to respond or to play deaf. But God never stops calling. God calls us from the womb and calls us still, the tireless shepherd who never stops calling us home.

**Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, Cowley Publications, 1993.**



# 8 December

## Into The Darkest Hour

It was a time like this,  
War & tumult of war,  
a horror in the air.  
Hungry yawned the abyss-  
and yet there came the star  
and the child most wonderfully there.

It was time like this  
of fear & lust for power,  
license & greed and blight-  
and yet the Prince of bliss  
came into the darkest hour  
in quiet & silent light.

And in a time like this  
how celebrate his birth  
when all things fall apart?  
Ah! Wonderful it is  
with no room on the earth  
the stable is our heart.

**Madeleine L'Engle, 'Miracle on 10th Street and Other Christmas Writings', Harold Shaw Publications, 1998.**



# 9 December

## Advent

After the wideawake galaxies  
Each dawn is glass.  
Leavings of the night's kill lie,  
Twig-bones, ice feathers,  
The ghost of starlight.

Ewes breathe silver.  
The rose won't come—  
Stopped in her tracks.  
Everything's particular:  
Bramble's freehand,

A leaf caught out,  
The lawn's journal.  
Deep down even the water-table  
Stiffens its linen,  
And horizons pleat in a bucket.

The stars burn out  
To starved birds  
Watching my window,  
And one leaf puts up a hand  
Against infinite light.

**Gillian Clarke**



# 10 December

## Hanukkah begins at sundown

The lights to Hanukkah are a symbol of our joy. In the times of darkness our ancestors had the courage to struggle for freedom: freedom to be themselves, freedom to worship in their own way. Theirs was a victory of the weak over the strong, the few over the many.

Let the lights we kindle shine forth for the world. May they illumine our lives even as they fill us with gratitude that our faith has been saved from extinction, time and again.

“Blessed is the Lord our God,  
ruler of the universe,  
for you have help us in life,  
sustained us,  
and brought us to this holy season.”





# 11 December

What good is it to me  
If this eternal birth of the divine child  
Takes place unceasingly but  
Does not take place within myself?

And what good is it to me  
If Mary is full of grace  
And I am not also full of grace?

What good is it to me  
For the Creator to give birth  
To a child of peace  
If I am not also giving birth  
To that child of peace  
In my time and in my culture?

This, then, is the fullness of time:  
When the Child is begotten in us.

**Meister Eckhart**



# 12 December

Waiting is not a very popular attitude. Waiting is not something people think about with great sympathy. In fact, most people consider waiting a waste of time, an awful desert between where they are and what they want to do. In our particular historical situation, waiting is even more difficult because we are so fearful. The more afraid we are, the harder the waiting becomes.

Yet the whole meaning of our religious community lies in offering a space in which we wait for that which we have already seen. In this way, we can live with courage, trusting that there is a spiritual power in us that allows us to live in this world without being seduced constantly by despair, lostness, and darkness. This is how we dare to say that God is a God of love even when we see hatred all around us. That is way we can claim that God is a God of live even when we see death and destruction and agony all around us. We say it together. We affirm it in one another.

Simone Weil said, “Waiting patiently in expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life.” . . . Jesus says you must stand ready, stay awake, stay tuned to the word of God, so that you can survive all that is going to happen and be able to stand confidently in the presence of God together in community. That is the attitude of waiting that allows us to be people who can live in a very chaotic world and survive spiritually.

**Henri Nouwen, ‘Waiting for God’ as Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas, Orbis Books, 2001.**



# 13 December

<sup>7-13</sup> So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now *you* do it! Jesus, staying true to God's purposes, reached out in a special way to the Jewish insiders so that the old ancestral promises would come true for them. As a result, the non-Jewish outsiders have been able to experience mercy and to show appreciation to God. Just think of all the Scriptures that will come true in what we do! For instance:

Then I'll join outsiders in a hymn-sing;  
I'll sing to your name!

And this one:

Outsiders and insiders, rejoice together!

And again:

People of all nations, celebrate God!  
All colors and races, give hearty praise!

And Isaiah's word:

There's the root of our ancestor Jesse,  
breaking through the earth and growing tree tall,  
Tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope!

Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!

*We find joy in relationships—in family who support us and friends who listen to us. We are thankful for the surprising friendships that have come to us in surprising forms. We rejoice in the gifts of love we experience.*

**Romans 15.7-13 from The Message**

# 14 December

Advent should admonish us to discover  
In each brother or sister that we greet,  
In each friend whose hand we shake,  
In each beggar who asks for bread,  
In each worker who wants to use the right to join a union,  
In each peasant who looks for work in the coffee groves,  
The face of Christ.  
Then it would not be possible to rob them,  
To cheat them,  
To deny them their rights.  
They are Christ,  
And whatever is done to them  
Christ will take as done to himself.  
This is what Advent is:  
Christ living among us.

**Bishop Oscar Romero**



# 15 December

## Gaudete

*"Gaudete" is the Latin word for "rejoice."*

Because Christmas is almost here  
Because dancing fits so well with music  
Because inside baby clothes are miracles.

Because some people love you  
Because of chocolate  
Because pain does not last forever  
Because Santa Claus is coming.  
Gaudete  
Because of laughter  
Because there really are angels  
Because your fingers fit your hands  
Because forgiveness is yours for the asking  
Because of children  
Because of parents.  
Gaudete  
Because the blind see.  
And the lame walk.  
Gaudete  
Because lepers are clean  
And the deaf hear.  
Gaudete  
Because the dead will live again  
And there is good news for the poor.  
Gaudete  
Because of Christmas  
Because of Jesus  
You rejoice.

**Brad Reynolds**

**Link:**

<https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/596/poem/gaudete>

# 16 December

‘In the season of Advent, when we look at the characters in scripture—you know, Mary and Joseph and Zechariah and Elizabeth and the shepherds and Anna and Simeon—every one of them has this moment, perhaps, of which we could say, “That sounds like joy.” . . . But immediately before or immediately after, it transitions to something else. So does that mean that joy is negated? Is joy squashed? Is joy extinguished? Or is joy able to continue to exist side by side, to subsist, with a continued experience of longing or a sudden moment of sadness?’

**David Taylor**

**Link:** <https://artandtheology.org/tag/advent/>





# 17 December

## First Coming

He did not wait till the world was ready,  
till men and nations were at peace.  
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,  
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.  
He came when the need was deep and great.  
He dined with sinners in all their grime,  
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.  
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.  
To a world like ours, of anguished shame  
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,  
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.  
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh  
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane  
to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,  
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

**Madeleine L'Engle 'Cry Like a Bell', Harold Shaw  
Publications, 1978.**



# 18 December

## The God We Hardly Knew

No one can celebrate  
a genuine Christmas  
without being truly poor.  
The self-sufficient, the proud,  
those who, because they have  
everything, look down on others,  
those who have no need  
even of God- for them there  
will be no Christmas.  
Only the poor, the hungry,  
those who need someone  
to come on their behalf,  
will have that someone.  
That someone is God.  
Emmanuel. God-with-us.  
Without poverty of spirit  
there can be no abundance of God.

Óscar Romero, The God We Hardly Knew



# 19 December

And art Thou come with us to dwell,  
Our Prince, our Guide, our Love, our Lord?  
And is Thy Name Emmanuel,  
God present with His world restored?

The heart is glad for Thee! It knows  
None now shall bid it err or mourn;  
And o'er it's desert breaks the rose  
In triumph o'er the grieving thorn.

Thou bringest all again; with Thee  
Is light, is space, is breadth and room  
For each thing fair, beloved, and free  
To have it's hour of life and bloom.

The world is glad for Thee! The heart  
Is glad for Thee! And all is well,  
And fixed and sure, because Thou art,  
Whose Name is called Emmanuel.

**Dora Greenwell**



# 20 December

**2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16 and Luke 1.26-38.**

David, King of Israel, was settled in Jerusalem in his house, but the ark of God was residing in a tent. In this reading in 2 Samuel, David has the idea to build a house for God, but God, through the prophet Nathan, says he does not want David to do this. In fact, God promised David that he (God) would build David a house- a house that would last forever. And David listened to and believed God, and put aside his grand building idea, even though God's words and promise must have made no sense at all to him.

In the reading in Luke, Mary is surprised and perplexed to have a visit from an angel: who presents to her the most frightening idea that she will be the mother of a baby who will be the Son of God, and a King following the ancestral line of David. And Mary also listened and believed, she put aside her fears, even though the angel's words must have made no sense at all to her.

As we begin Advent this year -recalling again what to many is a strange, surprising idea that makes no sense- that God has sent his son into the world to save the world, may we have the courage to really listen again to what God is saying to us, and to believe.

## **Prayer:**

Oh God, during this season of advent, as we anticipate and remember the coming of your son Jesus Christ into the world, may we have ears that hear, and eyes that see your presence in our midst. May our hearts believe, and may we share our belief with the people around us.  
Amen.

**Alison McQueen**



# 21 December

## Annunciation.

We know the scene: the room, variously furnished,  
almost always a lectern, a book; always  
the tall lily.

Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings,  
the angelic ambassador, standing or hovering,  
whom she acknowledges, a guest.

But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions  
courage.

The engendering Spirit  
did not enter her without consent.

God waited.

She was free  
to accept or to refuse, choice  
integral to humanness.



Aren't there annunciations  
of one sort or another  
in most lives?  
Some unwillingly  
undertake great destinies,  
enact them in sullen pride,  
uncomprehending.  
More often  
those moments  
when roads of light and storm  
open from darkness in a man or woman,  
are turned away from  
in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair  
and with relief.  
Ordinary lives continue.  
God does not smite them.  
But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.

She did not cry, 'I cannot. I am not worthy,'  
Nor, 'I have not the strength.'  
She did not submit with gritted teeth, raging, coerced.  
Bravest of all humans, consent illumined her.  
The room filled with its light, the lily glowed in it,  
and the iridescent wings.  
Consent, courage unparalleled, opened her utterly.

**Denise Levertov, 'The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov',  
New Directions, 2013.**



## 22 December

The great symbol of Advent is the increase of light. Candles are lit in ever greater number in growing expectation of the End. Advent is an extended meditation on the mystery of time. We look back to the moment of the incarnation, the pivot around which world history turns, in order to see the meaning of the flow of the events of human history towards their fulfilment. Assessing the importance of human events in this light gives hope even in the face of disaster and the failures of our politicising which are thereby set in their proper perspective.

**Luke Miller**

**Link: <https://reaction.life/reflection-meaning-advent/>**



## 23 December

In the place where I am, I feel both very small and... so tall !

Infini... dans ma finitude.

When you came, Lord Jesus, you were so small... but your presence was the greatest thing in the world.  
In my world.

Dans ma faiblesse, tu souffles ta force de Vie.  
Dans mon humanité, tu souffles ta faiblesse.  
Tu t'es fait homme.

You're present in this mountain. You're present in the mountain of my life - in the ups and downs.

En ce temps d'Avent, tu m'invites à être présente à mon présent.

Your presence  
In my life  
Your light in the world  
**It's Christmas !**

**Rafaele Gondran**





# 24 December

## Christmas Memories

Christmas a time of now, and memories  
It's a worldwide annual event,  
Time for family, friends and communities,  
Many a happy hour spent.

Christmas Eve in a little country church,  
Candlelit til start of first hymn,  
Christmas morning in village chapel—  
Shared denominations is a family thing.

Childhood memories of past times,  
When opening presents had to wait,  
Father's priority of feeding all animals  
“farm animals aren't aware of the date.”

Christmas lunch and the Queen's speech  
Traditions—they still carry on,  
Sprouts, turkey, lights and crackers  
To help celebrate a Saviour born.

Over years, some of life alters,  
Traditions continue, ne ideas come too,  
Play games and laughing together,  
With gifts, hopes and presents all new.

Life and work are sometimes so busy,  
Rushing around to get it all done,  
Presents, cards, feast and decorations,  
Let's not forget the birth of God's son.

Mary John



## 25 December

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, <sup>a</sup> and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, <sup>c</sup> and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, <sup>d</sup> full of grace and truth.



# The Legend of Robin Breast

The Legend of Robin Redbreast is from *A Christmas Stocking* by Louise Betts Egan. It tells the story of how the robin got his red breast after burning himself on a fire he fanned to keep the baby Jesus warm.

On that first Christmas, it is said, the night was wrapped in a bitter chill. The small fire in the stable was nearly out, and the Mother Mary worried that her baby would be cold. She turned to the animals about her and asked them for help.

“Could you blow on the embers,” she asked the ox, “so the fire might continue to keep my son warm?”

But the ox lay sound asleep on the stable floor and did not hear her. Next, Mary asked the donkey to breathe life back into the fire, but the sleeping donkey did not hear Mary either. Nor did the horse or sheep. She wondered what to do.

Suddenly, Mary heard a fluttering of little wings. Looking up, she saw a plain, brown-coloured little robin fly into the stall. This robin had heard Mary calling to the animals and had come to help her himself. He went over to the dying fire and flapped his wings hard.

His wings were like little bellows, huffing and puffing air onto the embers, until they glowed bright red again. He continued to fan the fire, singing all the while, until the ashes began to kindle.

With his beak, the robin picked up some fresh, dry sticks and tossed them into the fire. As he did, a flame suddenly burst forth and burned the little bird’s breast a bright red. But the robin simply continued to fan the fire until it crackled brightly and warmed the entire stable. The Baby Jesus slept happily.

Mary thanked and praised the robin for all he had done. She looked tenderly at his red breast, burned by the flame, and said “From now on, let your red breast be a blessed reminder of your noble deed.”

And to this day, the robin’s red breast covers his humble heart.

This Legend serves to remind us that even the smallest and apparently insignificant of us can play a very significant role in serving Christ and making our contribution to God’s kingdom.



# SHEPHERD

Until tonight I could not fit the size of God into my head,  
I thought he was a God for prophets and kings,  
Men of words and wisdom.

But tonight I am looking at God made small,  
Small enough for me,  
Small enough to pick up and hold like a lamb.

I could not talk to a God in the clouds;  
But tonight when I look and smile and talk nonsense to this  
Tiny thing, I know that I am taking to God.

And it is God who smiles back at me and waves his Perfect  
hands in delight.

And tonight in your smallness, God, You seem bigger and more  
powerful to me than you ever did before.

I can hold you now,  
Hold you in my head and hold you in my arms,  
And know that you are holding me in yours.

**Lisa Debney.**

**'Hay and Stardust; Resources for Christmas to Candlemas',  
by Ruth Burgess, Wild Goose Publications, 2005.**



To a weary world, a child comes  
bringing hope, peace, joy, and love.  
May you know you are loved by God  
and blessed with God's presence  
today and into the New Year.

