



Touchstone

Prayers for Advent 2023

An Aching World Cries for Peace

Lights and glitter, music, food, and drink dance around us at this time of year. But the competition for our attention flashes in stories from Sudan, Gaza, and Ukraine. It may be the happiest time of the year for some but for many the search for safe water, shelter and food trumps partying and consumerism.

It's into a world very much like this that Jesus entered time – God in skin and bone to live among us as one of us. The angels sang “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests”.

The Magi said, “Let's go and worship him”, as they traveled the hazardous trade routes of the middle east – war -torn even then. Herod said, “Let's create a massacre of infants to kill off this threat”.

It wasn't pretty then and it sure isn't now, but we live in hope that the power of love expressed in Jesus Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension will lead us to a day where peace wins, and sorrow goes.

In this selection of readings and prayers I offer reminders that in the darkest of days, the light is discovered and will never be quenched. It's in the voices of humble individuals like shepherds and Joseph and Mary that the pain of the world is acknowledged but the kindness and love of God responding to the pain of the world is expressed.

This is as good a time as ever to remind each other to live in hope and speak words of courage and encouragement to one another. Let's live the light of the love of God revealed in Jesus by word and deed.

Below are three brief haiku like prayers to help our reflections. They are from Pádraig Ó Tuama's lovely book, *Daily Prayer With The Corrymeela Community*. They give us words for our inexpressible thoughts.

Shepherds.

But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.'

Luke 2.10

God of fear,
God of the night,
God of the expectation,
You visited shepherds in the night with songs and sights of joy.

In all of our nights, turn us towards hope, because hope might just keep us alive.
Amen.

Joseph

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt.

Matthew 2.14

God of Exile,
You were carried into Egypt
by people fleeing danger.
We pray for all in exile
that they, like you, can find home
and shelter and safety.
Because you were exiled
and you remain with the exiled.
Amen.

Mary.

'He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.'

Luke 1.51–52

God of Mary, Son of Mary:
Neither birth nor death diminished you.
Neither power nor pain destroyed you.
Neither plenty nor little distracted you.
So lift up our arms in strength
so that we may lay down
our arms and our armies,
our fears and our prejudices.
Because, with Mary, we know that
the silenced have words to speak.
Amen.

“Wisdom from a Letter to Friends”

“Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along. The law code—don't sleep with another person's spouse, don't take someone's life, don't take what isn't yours, don't always be

wanting what you don't have, and any other “don't” you can think of—finally adds up to this: Love other people as well as you do yourself. You can't go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love. But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!”Romans13:8-14MSG

The Three Wise Men

The weather has been awful,
The countryside is dreary,
Marsh, jungle, rock; and echoes mock,
Calling our hope unlawful;
But a silly song can help along
Yours ever and sincerely:
At least we know for certain that
we are three old sinners,
That this journey is much too long,
that we want our dinners,
And miss our wives, our books, our dogs,
But have only the vaguest idea why
we are what we are.
To discover how to be human now
Is the reason we follow the star
(From *For the Time Being, A Christmas Oratorio*. W.H. Auden)

An Evening Advent Blessing

God of the watching ones,
give us Your benediction.
God of the waiting ones,
give us Your good word for our souls.

God of the watching ones,
the waiting ones,
the slow and suffering ones,
give us Your benediction,
Your good word for our souls,
that we might rest.

God of the watching ones,
the waiting ones,
the slow and suffering ones,
and of the angels in heaven,
and of the child in the womb,

give us your benediction,
Your good word for our souls,
That we might rest and rise
In the kindness of Your company
(The Northumbria Community. *Celtic Daily Prayer*
HarperCollins Publishers.)

A Prayer for Help

O God, who we call Father, you must grieve at how we misuse our power and abilities for selfish and destructive ends. Help us this Advent season to emulate Joseph – using our position to advocate for the weak, our resources to serve the kingdom and our love to protect the powerless. For Jesus' sake

Musings on the Magnificat

My soul glorifies you my God,
My spirit rejoices in you my Saviour!
For you have blessed me lavishly
and make me ready to respond.
You shatter my little world
and let me be poor before you.
You take from me all my plans and
give me more than I can hope for or ask.
You give me opportunities and the ability to
become free and burst through my
boundaries.
You give the strength to be daring,
to build on you alone, for you show yourself
as the ever greater one in my life.
You have made known to me this –
It is in my being servant
that it becomes possible
for your realm to break through
here and now.

(Adapted by John Veltri, sj. In *Orientations Vol 1*, Loyola House)

A Prayer to Begin

Lord, I admit that I often feel inadequate, in spite of your promises. Often I hold back. Help me to take the risks of faith, to be aware of your affirming presence in my life. Now, in Advent, sharpen my spirit and my senses, and enable me to pay attention to the moments of God-radiance when you ask me to look and listen. (Lucy Shaw in *God With Us*, Greg Pennoyer)

