

## Advent Voices

Welcome to the first of 4 online outlines based on 'Advent Voices', the St Thomas' Advent evenings for 2021.

A word about these...

While the 2020 series 'Advent Encounters' (still available on our website, under Discipleship Resources) encouraged us to study, through the people we meet in scripture at this time of year, the aim for the 2021 'Advent Voices' series was to create a setting in which we could simply spend some unhurried, quiet time with God, reflecting on four of the many Advent voices that call to us from our church readings, hymns and songs at this time of year ... and take time to think prayerfully about what God might be saying to us through their words.

Each evening involved music. Different pieces, from different composers and of different lengths were woven into each evening, sometimes as a piece to listen to, sometimes as background to individual prayer. This is indicated by a \* so if at these points you would also like to pause and play music, please do so!

There was an opportunity for movement at a specific time in the first two evenings and this too is indicated in the outlines. But the emphasis was on sitting relaxed yet consciously in God's presence, listening to what God said to each of us through the voices of Advent. I hope you will also be able to do this in your own setting.

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### 1: The voice of God, that brings Light

We begin by hearing the voice of God, that brings Light, the voice of God from before the time of recorded history.

*'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light...'*

*Gen 1:1-3b*

At this point a large candle was lit in middle of chancel. \*

*'...and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.'*

*Gen 1:3b-4*

God has created light for the world – and yet there is still darkness ... Think for a moment of the different kinds of darkness in our world... \*

... and pray for each that comes to mind.

(People were invited to come and take a sheet from a selection placed around the light – including *climate crisis, named places of war, named places of fear or hunger, front doors behind which there is cruelty and abuse* – and sit with this and pray for a few minutes for the place, the people or the situation, however they were prompted to pray, maybe in conversation with God, maybe just repeating the words on the sheet, lifting them or it to God. )

Now hear the voice of God through the prophet Isaiah

*'Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn....*

*Is 60 :1-4*

... And hear the voice of God through the gospel of John

*'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'*

*John 1:1-5*

Give thanks to God

that the Light of the World has come,  
that God will dispel the thick darkness covering our world  
and that all people will see God's glorious light.

*(Prayer sheets were returned to the light; time was taken to give thanks to God) \**

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The voice of God brings light that will ultimately dispel all the world's darkness. And even as we wait for that time, God's voice can dispel the darkness that lurks in our own hearts and minds.

So Advent is a time that calls us to be both joyful and penitent. It's a season of joyful expectation when we remind ourselves of the light of God coming into our world to dispel the world's darkness – and it is also a season with a sober aspect, as it calls us to recognise our own darkness and our need of salvation and repent of the things that separate us from God.

Advent calls us to look at ourselves, our hearts, our minds and our lives – to look hard and deeply, and cry ‘Come and shine on those who dwell in darkness.’

Let’s think about ourselves in the light of God’s light ... \*

Now hear the voice of the writer of the epistles of John

*‘This is the message we have heard and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us but if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’*  
1 John 1: 5-8

Read that again, then take a few moments to let the words resonate with you. \*

The stark truth is that we deceive ourselves, over and over again. We acknowledge God’s light, we believe in God’s presence in our world and in our lives, we sing words of praise ... and yet we so often walk in darkness. Our actions ... our attitudes ... our voices ... our thoughts, do not stand scrutiny before God’s light. We condemn ourselves to the darkness.

Take time to silently recall your own actions and attitudes that condemn you to darkness... \*

Now as you sit, confess your sins to almighty God – and metaphorically hand these over to God in penitence and faith, using ancient words that may be familiar to you, adapted for individual prayer:

*Almighty and most merciful God;  
I have erred and strayed from thy ways like a lost sheep.  
I have followed too much the devices and desires of my own heart.  
I have offended against thy holy laws.  
I have left undone those things which I ought to have done;  
And I have done those things which I ought not to have done;  
And there is no health in me.  
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon me, miserable offender.  
Spare me, O God, who confesses my faults.  
Restore me, for I am penitent;  
according to thy promises declared unto us in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That I may hereafter live a godly,  
righteous, and sober life,  
To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen. ....*

Now hear God's promise through the voice of John:

*'If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness...'* *1John 1:8-9*

So May the God of light and love and power have mercy on us,  
forgive us and free us from our sins,  
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit  
and bring us to everlasting life,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

If we have confessed our sins, God, who is faithful and just has forgiven us our sins and has cleansed us from all unrighteousness...

This is not a one-off forgiveness and cleansing, any more than we only sin once, so take a minute to thank God that every time we stray into darkness, if we confess our sins, God will forgive us and cleanse us and bring us back into his glorious light. \*

As we draw to a close, let's consider ourselves, our attitudes, the way we live, no longer focussing on our darkness but as forgiven, holy children of God...  
Think ahead to the rest of this week, this month. Who will we meet? What will we do? What will we say?

How will those we meet see the light of God through us ?

Take some time to think that through. \*

Having heard the voice of God, through scripture, silence and music and as God has prompted our thoughts this evening, let's close, with renewed hope - God has ultimate power over the darkness of the world; in time all nations will come to God's light and all the darkness of the world will be dispelled.

And on a personal level, let's close with renewed gratitude - that God has forgiven us for all that makes us sorry, ashamed or uncomfortable and we no longer need carry any burden of shame or guilt. And let's leave this place, walking in the Light, as children of the Advent Light of God.

People were invited to pick up a tea light as they left, and as a tangible reminder of God's light in the world and in their own life, light this at some point each day during the coming week and be conscious of God's presence close to them.

If you have a candle, perhaps you could do the same.