

A Journey to Hope: Expectancy – Isaiah 40:1-11

Sunday 29 November 2020

Before You Begin

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us to engage meaningfully with God's word and invite us into a sense of worship, despite being unable to meet face-to-face. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you.

A table of contents has been added to give you a sense of what will follow and allow you to move more easily through the worship elements.

Prepare

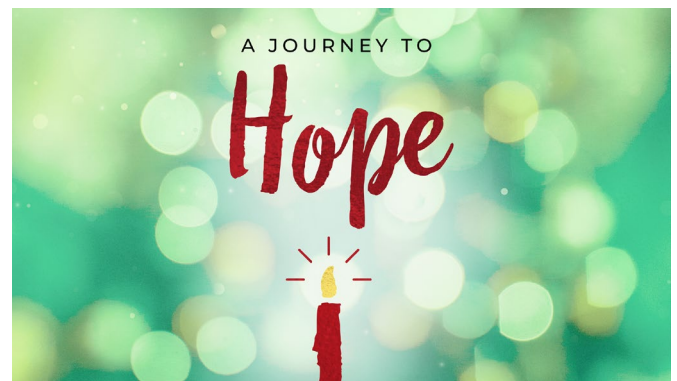
Have your Bible close by and some food and drink prepared for communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'Sacred' Space

Be intentional. Sit somewhere. Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image) or you might play some reflective music. Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

What will work for you in the space you have? If you have others in your house (housemates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.



What's Inside

On a computer, you can click these links

Call to Worship

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Call to Worship

Andy Whitby

Hello and welcome to the Ringwood Church of Christ worship resource.

This is the first Sunday of Advent – the start of a time of waiting and preparing. This year has often felt like it's been all about waiting and preparing. Waiting for the fires to go out, waiting for the lockdown to start, waiting for the lockdown to end, waiting for freedoms and normality to return.

Romans 13:11–12 reads, “And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”

As you join in with this worship resource, my prayer is that you would be encouraged and reminded that whatever you are going through, the message of Christmas is about hope realised and God's deep love for all.

And now as we prepare to celebrate, in whatever way we're eventually allowed to, Jesus' birth at Christmas, I invite you to pause and reflect on, or maybe share with another person, stories or memories of times when you had to wait for a celebration or something good to come.

Song: Angels We Have Heard On High

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echo back their joyous strains

Gloria
In excelsis Deo
Gloria
In excelsis Deo

Shepherds why this jubilee
Why your joyous strains prolong
Say what may the tidings be
Which inspire your heavenly songs
Gloria in excelsis Deo
Gloria in excelsis Deo

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Song: O Holy Night

O holy night the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn

Fall on your knees
O hear the angel voices
O night divine
O night when Christ was born
O night O holy night
O night divine

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming
Here came the wise men from Orient land
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger
In all our trials born to be our Friend

He knows our need
To our weakness is no stranger
Behold your King
Before Him lowly bend
Behold your King
Before Him lowly bend

Truly He taught us to love one another
His law is love and His gospel is peace
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother
And in His name all oppression shall cease
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we
Let all within us praise His holy name

Christ is the Lord
O praise His name forever
His power and glory
Evermore proclaim
His power and glory
Evermore proclaim

CCLI Song # 32015
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Bible Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11 (NIV)

If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out."
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.
The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.
The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever."

You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.

He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

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Advent Reflections

Dave Wilkins

2020: a year like no other. For many this is a year to put behind us. Yet as we look around, deep rhythms abound. We see the beauty of spring and summer beckons. New life has blossomed and flowered. And for us in the Southern Hemisphere, there is the joy of Christmas. There is the hope this year of reunion, of families and friends coming together. And even at this time, still weeks from Christmas Day, there is hope. More than any year in recent memory we know it is fragile. We don't know what it will look like.

Even so ...

We start our preparations. We start to plan. We look forward. One of the deep rhythms is that we are a people of hope. We trust in the goodness of creation, we trust in the boundless grace of a loving God. We expect God to touch our lives, in seasons of loss and seasons of bounty, to meet us in our pain and in joy, in our isolation and in our connection, in our times of feeling disoriented and when we see with clarity.

Today we begin to prepare, to get ready. To open boxes. To unwrap, to set up.

What are you expecting this year?

How can the deep message of hope and joyful expectation resonate in your life over these next weeks?

Song: You'll Come

I have decided I have resolved
To wait upon You Lord
My Rock and Redeemer shield and reward
I'll wait upon You Lord

As surely as the sun will rise
You'll come to us
Certain as the dawn appears

You'll come let Your glory fall
As You respond to us

Spirit rain
Flood into our thirsty hearts again
You'll come You'll come

We are not shaken we are not moved
We wait upon You Lord
Mighty deliverer triumph and truth
We wait upon You Lord

As surely as the sun will rise
You'll come to us
Certain as Your word endures

Chains be broken lives be healed
Eyes be opened Christ is revealed
Chains be broken lives be healed
Eyes be opened Christ is revealed

CCLI Song # 5012583
Brooke Ligertwood

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Message

Penny Martin

Welcome to Advent – I find it hard to believe we made it here and I am looking forward to the journey of preparation that unfolds in these weeks leading up to Christmas.

What are you expecting this Christmas?

In the original Latin the word ADVENT means 'coming' and the coming weeks are meant to be an opportunity to prepare our hearts and our minds for the arrival of Jesus, Emmanuel 'God with Us'. We are all supposed to feel the waiting time. How do you go with waiting for something?

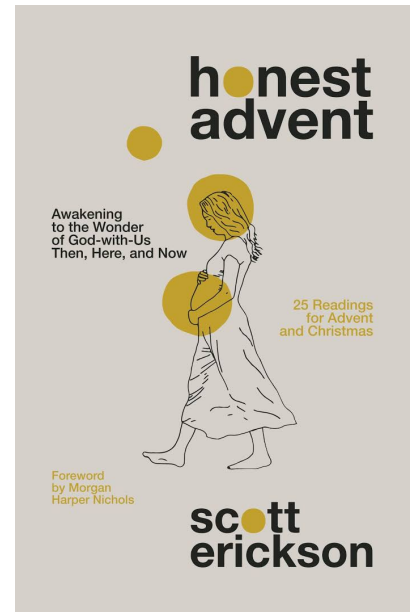
Sometimes we can become impatient, sometimes, excited, sometimes distracted. Some of us find a peace in the waiting and some of us feel frayed around the edges as we wait. Advent is an invitation to wait and anticipate something we want badly ... and by having to live in the 'wait' we feel an even greater sense of satisfaction in the celebration on Christmas Day – at least that is the hope, I guess.

I always find Advent an interesting wrestle with my expectations and reality – and it is good to be aware of the wrestle and the responsibility of this season – otherwise we can simply be overtaken with things.

I, for one, love many of the trappings of Christmas time ... I love the lights and the songs, I love the decorations and I love the anticipation of family celebrations – especially this year as we have lived in a lot of isolation and dislocation. I have some excited anticipation about being with my tribe this year. Sometimes, however, I get caught up in the mechanics of Christmas – planning, decorating, cooking, shopping, navigating etc., that I forget the person at the centre of the celebration.

Scott Erikson in his new book *Honest Advent* illustrates this in the use of a simple metaphor about a birthday party (which is essentially what Christmas kind of is). He says that we don't just go to a birthday party to eat cake and blast party poppers. We go to gather around a person we love – to spend time with them, honour them with our presence and interest, and bring gifts of love and thoughtfulness.

Sometimes Christmas can feel like it's all about the cake and not so much about the person.



There is nothing wrong with our love for the trappings of Christmas but it is important especially this season, to not forget who is at the centre – who we gather around. Jesus, God's generous gift to a frail and exhausted creation – born into a complex and divided world to bring the good news of hope and peace.

The reading from Isaiah today is full of expectation and anticipation
Isaiah 40:1-11:

(Vs. 1) Comfort, Comfort

(our expectation of God's gentle provision)

(Vs. 3) Prepare the way, make straight a highway for our God

(God's expectation of our intentional action)

(Vs. 5) The glory of the Lord will be revealed

(our expectation of God's powerful revelation in Jesus)

(Vs. 8) The word of our God endures forever

(our expectation of God's transformative word)

(Vs. 9) Lift up your voice with a shout "Here is your God"

(God's expectation of our participation)

I can and do expect God to bring about a miracle again this year and in this season of advent. I expect my powerful, enduring, nurturing, loving God to be fully present and in the mystery of faith to draw people once again into the possibilities of a kingdom of peace and goodwill that will know no end. But God expects something of us too ...

To bring our obedience, our yes, our trust, our hearts, our beautiful minds, our glorious diversity, our kindness, our resources to his loving embrace and in so doing we partner with God to bring about a new hope for our frail and exhausted world this Christmas.

What are you expecting this Christmas season?

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or via Facebook live rngwd.com/fb

If you are unable to join us, then please use the following reflection to take communion in your own way today and after, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,
and they all drank from it.*

Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.
Thank you!