

Music: O Little Town of Bethlehem.

INTRODUCTION: The Very Important Guest.

The Christian Church calls the four weeks before Christmas 'Advent' and that word means 'coming'. It is the time of year when we get ready for the coming of the most important guest of all time - Jesus Christ.

Advent reminds us of three different 'comings' of Jesus. The first is in the past. It happened long ago at the first Christmas. Jesus, God's son, came to live with us. The second coming refers to the present, because Jesus is waiting to come now to every person who invites him into his heart and life. The third coming of Jesus is in the future. One day Jesus will come back to our world, not as a helpless little baby, but as a king and judge of all.

So Advent is the season of getting ready - ready to understand the true meaning of Christmas, ready to ask Jesus into our lives and ready for the time when he will come again.

Reflection: Reader 1

Quite Music

I settle into the stillness. I am part of a great and mysterious history. My heart beats with the rhythm of the universe. It is that time of year when living things settle down and so on this Advent day I try to be still, in my heart, in my soul. My breath is Gods breath. It fills my body; it holds me together'. I am aware of this breath; it connects me to God. It is my most intimate link with God. I now turn to God in the quiet space of my heart and I say the words: **I belong to God and God belongs to me.**

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke. Priest

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young girl betrothed to a man named Joseph. Her name was Mary. The angel said to her,

" Don't be afraid, Mary. You have been greatly blessed, for the Lord is with you. You are to conceive and bear a son and you must name him Jesus." " I am the handmaid of the Lord" replied Mary, "Be it done to me according to your word."

In this time of prayer I feel Gods presence near me. I feel the peace of Gods strength flowing through my veins. I feel the healing of Gods love

taking away my pain and sorrow. I am not afraid. **I belong to God and God belongs to me.**

A reading from the gospel according to Luke. Priest

So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed who was with child. While they were there the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger - there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

When the road before me is difficult; when friends let me down; when I feel alone and confused I will raise my eyes to God, the One who called my name before I was born. It is Advent. I am watching with all people of good will for the Light of the world, for the hope of history. I am not afraid because **I belong to God and God belongs to me.**

The Christmas Story - according to the angels!

Narrator : God called a meeting of angels and archangels.

God : 'I have decided that my Son Jesus will be born tonight as a human child in a stable in Bethlehem.'

Angel 1: 'Did he say, "stable"?''

Angel 2 : 'Yes, but I'm sure he meant to say, "palace"!''

God : 'Make sure that there is plenty of hay for the manger, and clean strips of cloth handy for Mary his mother to wrap him in,'

Narrator : The angels ruffled their feathers in disbelief and were deeply concerned.

Angel 1 : 'There must be some mistake! Surely God doesn't mean this very night! There is far too much to arrange beforehand. The angelic choirs will need more time for rehearsals, and there is so much to organise and plan before the whole world can celebrate such a unique and joyful event properly. And as for the idea of setting all this in a smelly old stable!'

Narrator : And great debates about God's low-key plans broke out among the ranks of angels.

To put an end to all this squabbling, the angel Gabriel, who was one of God's favourite messengers, decided to check out God's plan and get some answers from the Boss himself. God smiled and listened patiently as Gabriel carefully explained the angels' concerns.

Gabriel : Perhaps a palace would be more appropriate for the birth of Your beloved Son than a stable with hay and strips of swaddling; and we need more time to arrange suitably important visitors to welcome this very special child into the world, because an ox and ass are all that are available at such short notice; and then there is the problem of...'

Narrator : But God stopped Gabriel before he could go any further.

God : 'My Son will be born in humility to serve the world in humility Do not worry, Gabriel, his glory and power will be revealed all in good time and according to my carefully prepared plan'

Narrator : Now Gabriel knew that although he seldom understood God's plans for the world and that people He loved above all else, normally things seemed to work out just fine. After all, God had made rather a good job of creation! So after further discussion with God, Gabriel returned to the hosts of angels and explained everything the Almighty had told him.

Later that same night, everything came to be just as God had planned. Christ the Saviour of the world was born in the humble surroundings of a simple stable, and wrapped in swaddling cloths by Mary his loving mother.

choir : Silent Night

God was so touched by the concern of Gabriel and the other angels that he was persuaded to make one final adjustment to his perfect plan. And so it came about that Gabriel and his fellow angels were allowed to announce their news of great joy to an unsuspecting group of shepherds on a hillside — the only available audience at that time of night — and, despite a serious lack of rehearsal time, wow them with their enthusiastic heavenly tunes as together they sang:

Angels : 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to all people on earth'.

Reader 2 : More than two thousand years have gone by since the Son of God was born in a place called Bethlehem, and laid lovingly in a manger by Mary his mother. Every year, during the season of Advent, we remember and retell the events that led up to the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We recall that God's love for the world was, and still is, so great that he sent his only beloved Son to show us the way to his love and his kingdom.

And yet, as we are caught up in the busy preparations for the Christmas celebrations, we need to remind ourselves that Jesus isn't simply someone who belongs in the past events of two thousand years ago, or someone who has promised to return at some unknown time in the future. He is here now — God living with us in the present. We bump into him every day in the people we meet all around us. So perhaps as Christmas draws closer, we should ask ourselves, 'Do we welcome Jesus into our lives every day or do we restrict our welcome to this special time once a year?'

choir : *Away in a manger*

Prayers of Intercession.

Response: O Lord hear our prayer! O Come to us
Abide with us, our God, Emmanuel.

Jesus is coming. We watch and wait. In this Advent time the whole Christian world is silent with expectation. Jesus is coming to you and to me. With all our faith in this moment that changed the face of the earth, we now offer our prayers of intercession.

1. For the Church (candle): God of our Advent watch, come to your Church at this fragile and difficult time. Give us strength to keep a faithful watch until you come again in glory. (Response)
2. For those who watch (candle): God of our Advent search, take care of all those who watch out for us. For our parents, families, friends. We pray also for doctors, nurses, police, traffic controllers and for all who watch through the night to keep us safe. (Response)
3. For the poor (candle): God of our Advent darkness, hear the cry of the poor this Advent season. Come into their hunger and their pain and let them know the hope of Christmas. (Response)
4. For those who are lonely, sick and afraid (candle):
God of our Advent silence, stay with your people who are isolated by sickness and old age. Come into their emptiness and fear, and till their hearts with your peace. (Response)

5. For people at war (candle): *God of our Advent peace, help us to be instruments of love and forgiveness. Heal the bitterness that separates brother from sister and lead us in the ways of peace and justice. (Response)*

6. For those who have died (candle): *God of our Advent hope, we place those who have died in your heart of mercy and love. Give them rest in your house forever. (Response)*

all:

C is for the Christ child lying in the crib

H is for the homeless who really need your help at this time of year.

R is for the risen Christ.

I is for the ivy that twists around the holly.

S is for the singers under the bright shining star.

T is for the tinsel and toys under the tree.

M is for Mary, the mother of Jesus.

A is for Advent and the Advent Wreath.

S is for Santa and his sack full of toys.

Choir - Once in David's Royal City.