



# Advent Prayers 2017



Christ Church  
Cathedral



Photo credits: David Thomson

## ADVENT 2017

Against the darkening days, Advent candles guide us on our path to the manger. As we walk these three weeks we have time to reflect: Who is Jesus to me? How would people know that meeting Christ changed my life?

In this Advent booklet, Christ Church Cathedral members share their thoughts, shining a light on their journey. We pray that this may be a holy season for you as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth.

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## ADVENT WEEK 1

December 3

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*



My parents were married in a church that paid absolutely no attention to the church year. Not even Christmas was celebrated. And here I am in a church where everything seems to revolve around the church year. Sometimes it seems like “pretend” to me. Let’s pretend that Jesus hasn’t been born yet—is that what Advent is all about?

The only way it makes any sense to me is to think that his advent really has a future aspect. After all, he said he would come again and bring the kingdom, which we affirm in creeds and prayers: “He will come again with glory . . . and his kingdom will have no end.”

That has tremendous meaning for me, because I am always struck at how unfulfilled all the hopes of the prophets are. How has the world changed since Jesus came the first time? It has, but not enough—don’t you agree? He obviously left some of his work unfinished. Some would say we have to do his unfinished work—and there is something to that. But there’s one thing we cannot do: we cannot bring in the kingdom. Only Christ the King can, and we just have to count on the king’s return, because all our human striving has got us nowhere. We’ve got to strive, but we also realize that only the king can set up the kingdom—he must return, as he promised he would. Otherwise faith in him is simply a huge disappointment. He will have to take the reins and reign, because nothing else can solve the human mess we have made. That’s the only Advent hope that makes any sense to me.

“Lo! he comes with clouds descending . . . Every eye shall now behold him, robed in dreadful majesty . . . Savior, take the power and glory; claim the kingdom for thine own.” –*Charles Wesley (Hymns 57 and 58, The Hymnal 1982)*

### A Meditation on An Advent Wreath

In gray winter's gloom, five candles stand upon a wreath of fragrant pine. These Advent sentinels—three arrayed in reflective purple rise; one non-conforms in lively pink; the last clad in holy white—give reverence to Christ, the “light that shineth in darkness” that sainted John foretold. The first candle casts its glow upon a prophecy from scripture that Isaiah proclaimed: “The Lord himself will give you a sign.” (Isaiah 7:14) The second flame bears the name of Bethlehem, where a child once in a manger would in his maturity affirm, “I am the light of the world,” to all who walk in darkness here. (John 8:12) The third pillar, the one arrayed in exultant pink, sends out its gleams of joy, reaffirming what certain shepherds in a field saw above. The Angel Candle, the light marking Advent's end, repeats the message winged beings from heaven brought, “Peace on earth.” Advent takes its leave on Christmas Eve. Now, centered within a circle of eternal green, the Christ Candle is set aglow. It is the perfect light. The light of Christ among us comes.

I am a nervous flyer, but I need to fly a lot because I love to travel all over the world. To mitigate this, I always reserve a window seat, as I must be able to observe everything going on outside the airplane or I become very anxious. Despite my feelings of terror (mixed with excitement to be traveling again), I have come to appreciate the marvelous light displays from my window seat that have helped to distract and calm me down. I have seen shooting stars, the twinkling lights of Bedouin camp fires across the Arabian desert, light flickering from remote settlements across the Sahara Desert, the Himalayas and the Siberian wilderness, sunrise over the Arabian Peninsula and the colorful swaying lights of small boats anchored in the South China Sea. However, the best was as I flew home from Cincinnati to England for Christmas. I was seated on the left-hand side of the plane, staring into the cold dark night as the rest of the passengers were softly snoozing. I was assuring myself that the wings and engines were still there, when I saw a faint colorful fluttering of light in the distance that increased in intensity as we jetted closer. I remembered my grandfather's

stories about hiking in Scotland and realized I was observing the same special phenomenon for the first time—the Northern Lights (or Aurora Borealis). For the next 30 minutes I witnessed amazing rainbow curtains of rippling light, dancing ghost-like across the Arctic sky as electrons and protons emitted from the sun collided with the oxygen and nitrogen molecules in the Earth's upper atmosphere. It felt like a special Christmas gift from God, guiding the plane safely back to Europe, and did indeed calm me down. The Northern Lights are more common in winter, around Advent. So, now on a pre-Christmas trans-Atlantic flight, you will always find me wide awake at my window seat on the left-hand side of the plane, searching again for the Aurora, and I have found it several times since.

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December 7

The first time I ever got burned was the first time I ever tried to light a candle with a match. How ridiculous is it that something so small could hurt me so much? For a while I was afraid of being burned again, so I avoided fire. Looking back, I feel really foolish about fearing something I couldn't control. There were numerous challenges that I would have to face and that would hold me back from what I want to accomplish, and yet I was worried about a match. Through all the trials and tribulations, I would finally find a True Light. It's the only light that I would never fear. This light was here the whole time and I just failed to see it. I could touch it and it would fill me with comfort; I could hear it and know that I'm loved; and, if I paid enough attention, I could see it in other people. St. Francis of Assisi said, "All the darkness of the world cannot drive out the light of a single candle." I wish I had known that quote when I burned myself. A single candle can be so important and can alter the course of life. Even if we forget the candle with which we have been blessed, just like God's love for us, it can never be diminished.



## Homeless

He stopped on the church stairs to make ready. He put on layers just so. He smithed garments like links in armor. The last was the scarf, double-wrapped, tucked under. Then he squared up. He said good night and thank you for dinner. Zero degrees outside, and he walked into it, walked into a long night down by the river. Someone was with him, with me, with us all. Someone warm. Or so I said, with no degree of certainty.



## Advent

The first day of Advent does not receive as much attention as New Year's Day, but it should. What better time than the first day of the Church year to make resolutions?

An incredible source from which to create spiritual practices is our baptismal covenant, in which we reaffirm our faith, renew a right relationship with God, and pledge to continue in fellowship. We commit to be God's presence in the world by proclaiming "by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being."

God gives us gifts and abilities to realize our baptismal covenant. Through prayer, we discover how to actualize the Kingdom of God. Whether taking small steps, or serving on a larger scale, it is essential to do something! Racism is definitely an issue in Cincinnati. The University of Cincinnati was pressured by a white supremacist to allow him to speak publicly on the UC campus. Civic and religious groups will protest peacefully and encourage community involvement. Removal of Civil War monuments has caused a great deal of conflict. Finally, a University of Cincinnati police officer was acquitted of murdering an African-American citizen during a traffic stop, and both trials ended in mistrial. Although the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center is here, we have a long way to go in addressing and mediating racism.

At Christ Church Cathedral, in the Prayers of the People, the names of those killed by gun violence the prior week are included in Sunday worship services. The cathedral collaborates with other local organizations to reduce gun violence. As a part of its Third Century Vision, the cathedral is partnering in the construction of a Scholar House, which offers comprehensive services to support single parents and their children to become self-sufficient (adult and early childhood development, workforce development, substance abuse recovery for women, affordable housing, financial education and counseling, youth services, and neighborhood-based programs). The hopes, dreams, interests, and strengths of the participants are the focus, so they can succeed.



December 10

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

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December 11

### Advent: A Season of Joy

Advent is a wonderful time, when we await the celebration of Christ's birth. It occurs during a season of short days, crisp temperatures and an evening darkness that provides a backdrop for the stars and planets that illuminate our skies. How brilliant the stars must have been to travelers on that special night. It is a season of renewed hope and expectations for a better life to follow.

The airwaves, television, catalogs and newspapers all remind us that this is also the season of giving. We have plays, concerts, school and community events to attend. For many of us it is a time when we remember friends and loved ones with cards and gifts. With so much on our schedules, we are often overwhelmed by the stress of it all and find it difficult to seek the joy of being alive.

Although we are all blessed in the eyes of God, many struggle to obtain the bare necessities of life and to accept their self-worth. Some of us are privileged to have these things without the struggle. We can't give away privilege, but what we chose to do with it really matters in life. We can live in a way that our actions bring joy and hope to the lives, hearts and minds of others. Reach out and find your joy in love and service.

## Stepping into the Light

That small circle of light that our flashlight casts on a dark night at camp,  
The streetlight at the end of a dark and unfamiliar alley,  
The light that guides us along the hallway at home,  
A distant town as we drive through the darkness,  
reassured that we are not alone.

The door of the Navajo Hogan faces east to catch the first glimmer of  
morning light,

The sharp edge of a theatrical spotlight beckons us to step in as a  
different persona.

We need to embrace light—to become a part of its new energy.

Light is always changing

Advent is a special time of year when the church glows radiant with  
anticipation.

But I'll be honest. The light I usually see at this time of the year is the light  
of my phone screen blowing up with notifications, reminding me of my  
task list throughout the season. On top of that, each day approaching winter  
gives way for longer night to follow.

I dread this feeling of having so much to do, but losing daylight. This year,  
I want to enjoy Advent and the entire holiday season. Here's my plan for  
those faded evenings as I'm leaving work:

I will remember that day and night are God's creations, and that he called  
them both "good." There is no reason to dread the night.

I will revel in how God designed this universe. Because he set the cosmos  
into motion, this is the natural progression of day and night as our earth  
orbits the sun, God's gift to us and our constant source of light.

Just because the days are shorter does not mean that the sun isn't shining.  
The moon reflects the sun's light even though we cannot see its source.

I will tell myself that, while we wait for the Child to appear on earth, I cannot let the shadow of stress that this time of year brings to shroud the light of peace. This year, I will be more like the moon because I know the Light of the world is coming soon, though the rest of the world around me may not be able to see. And I will reflect that Light back into the world for others, so that no matter where they are looking, if they can see me, they will see it, too.

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December 14

This Advent, as we wait and prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, is a time of increasing my outreach to others. Volunteering is a way of life for my husband and me. Most of the time I work with organizations and churches whose structures provide opportunities to improve the quality of life for individuals, their families and their communities.

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) Being the conduit of change and seeing the impact I have made lights up my life. There is a feeling within me, content with doing the right thing, not just for me but for others.

As you become a shepherd of God, your light will shine and bring others out of the darkness to join you. Blessings!

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December 15

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” The quote from Emma Lazarus’ poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty’s pedestal comes to mind every time I fly overseas. Because my medical diets don’t match the airlines’ (or many places), I am often hungry. I am jet lag tired. I switch uncomfortable positions in my seat restlessly. On the most recent trip, my entertainment screen regularly collapsed and banged my knee.

Amid all that I dislike, that flight was pleasant because the crew was the friendliest and most helpful I’ve ever met. Discomfort became an experience to be borne with the grace imparted by the crew.

This Advent season of light, I pray that the path of grace is illuminated for me, and that I choose it. That when I meet another poor, hungry soul like myself, together we shine.

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December 16

My daily cathedral is the light-filled fountain feature in Washington Park, a focal point of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. As a baptismal font at its “entrance” stands a low granite basin with a central mini-jet that continuously overflows with water and babies playing. The 50 or so main fountains are arranged like columns as a central aisle and cross aisles, in gently curved rows leading to a virtual transept, like the spreading arms of Christ on the Cross. At its head, the whole array of rising and falling water-jets is crowned by a circular fountain that has stubby low bubbles forming an altar beneath a dome of graceful taller sprays—a moving baldacchino—that continually lifts above it: sprays that soar like prayers to the Almighty and then droop downward, ever to rise again. A curve of oversized granite steps frames the “east end” of the dome with melodically rushing, rippling waters that evoke a choir.

Above all are the ever-changing, luridly-colored lights at the bases of the dozens of jets: like nothing so much as living stained-glass windows, medieval or otherwise, or a diapason of colorful organ pipes, their play sometimes coordinated with diverse music disseminated by loud-speakers, like jivey hymns. The fountain scene is usually enlivened by a dozen or more cupids or putti: children of various ages, colors, costumes fancy or minimal, and degrees of energy and inventiveness, plus the inevitable screams of terror or delight, whether mentored by their grown-ups or not.

And me, as the hermit, observing off to one side, admiring at evening the Gothic gables of Music Hall and the dazzling western sky-phenomena, dominated later in the dark—as the fountain sanctuary is finally turned off—by the moon.





## ADVENT WEEK 3

December 17

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

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December 18

*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* –Matthew 11:30

What is the “burden of light”? In all fairness, Jesus undoubtedly means the opposite of “heavy” when he calls his burden light, and that he wants to help us shoulder our burdens. Yet it’s my nature to be playful with meaning and metaphor, to fully explore other interpretations. In that playful vein, I ponder how light can become a burden.

We have a cultural preference for a superficial outlook of positivity and cheerfulness. When we ask each other “How are you?” we seldom want the truthful answer. In this season I’m particularly aware of harried store clerks who must be cheerful when exhausted, unemployed parents who cannot participate in the frenzy of shopping, and grieving families for whom this season is one of melancholy. There are times and situations when anyone can feel coerced into merriment when their personal situation feels anything but jolly. In these moments, lightness can be a burden.

Our stories are complex. We have experienced cruelty and kindness, hard times and those of great abundance. No one experience completely defines us. Our time on this planet will inherently combine the fragility of joy and the incumbrance of sorrow. We are made of both darkness *and* light. And

oh, how this wild concoction can enrich us! Authentic lightness results from our history with God's faithfulness.

God's promise is born under a star, the light of which will lead us to a radical revelation: God is one of us. God knows and shares our burdens.

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December 19

Light has many different meanings: it can be seen in the sky as bright stars that light up the night sky, or a flame on a candle. It can also be used to describe the weight of an object, or as a metaphor to describe someone coming out of hard time in their lives. For some people light holds the risk of getting hurt, but for others it gives them an opportunity to let go. It's interesting how one word can give so much depth and meaning; how light can be something that can inspire us to do better in so many different ways.

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December 20

Dark and Light is a game we played with our infant twins 30 years ago. We'd huddle on the floor with a sheet covering us in darkness, then raise it suddenly. Light would return. Squeals of delight!

Today I dig and place tulip bulbs as a burial for spring resurrection. We plant for miracles. In the depths of soil and frost, light bides its time as the bulbs spread their roots and prepare.

Advent is like that. Skies grow dim. Days grow short. Trees go bare. Animals flee to their lairs. We don wool and fleece against the cold. And yet, there is that faith, that certainty, that the clutch of night will release. Psalm 30:5 says, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning."

Indeed it will. This is the season to turn and look at what is to come, hope itself. Light returns to conquer false resignation, to overcome our fears that the dark might prevail.

Our granddaughter was born this November. I'm getting the sheet ready for Dark and Light.

*A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. –Isaiah 11:1*

One of my fondest memories of growing up at my Episcopal church on Main Street in Orange County, New York, was the preparation for Christmas. Following Eucharist on Christ the King Sunday, Fr. Kelsey set forth on an adventure with Sunday School students and members of the youth group to gather twigs and branches. Over the course of a week he tied together these branches and twigs to make a Jesse tree. Every week during Advent we were invited to make ornaments and discuss the many people, prophecies and events that led to Jesus' birth. On Advent Sundays we hung the ornaments on the rather bare tree.

Miraculously in time for Christmas Eve Mass, these branches and twigs came alive to become a stately green pine fully ornamented with the beautiful (and not so beautiful) homemade decorations. All of us looked forward to this greening of the church and considered it a miracle to see the dead twigs and branches of the Jesse tree become a beautiful Christmas tree. As years passed, we realized that Fr. Kelsey was the master muscle that transformed the dead branches of the Jesse tree to the mighty pine that littered the sanctuary with needles, to the consternation of many. Yet we continued to feign surprise at the miracle on Main Street.

In Advent, we are preparing for the miracle of Incarnation. With the majestic sounds of "Gloria in Excelsis Deo," our careful anticipation transforms into joy as we commemorate the birth of our Lord. Our twigs and branches become the majestic tree that blesses the room with the fragrance of freshness. May our lives emanate the fragrance of God's grace as we celebrate Christ's birth.



When I think of light, I always reflect on daylight and the many different kinds of daylight there are. Have you ever noticed how bright the sunlight is on a white sandy Florida beach or on a black volcanic sandy beach in the Caribbean, or when taking off in an airplane on a cloudy day as you burst through the cloud cover into the blinding sunlight? Then there is the early morning light, soft and gray, that eases you into your day before the sun rises above the horizon. And that light is very different from that at the end of the day. I always look forward to light. I am awakened daily by the slightest shift from dark to the barest semblance of light, so I rarely need an alarm clock unless I need to wake up in darkness.

When I think of Advent, I think of light and all the lights of the season. When our daughter was a little girl, we often traveled several hours by car at Christmas to visit grandparents. With much younger eyes and a lot more energy, I preferred to drive at night. One of our favorite games was to yell “Christmas lights” every time we saw decorations. My wife and I usually tired of this game long before my daughter, but we played on to humor and occupy her on the long drive. Every year now feels like a shorter and shorter drive until Advent rolls around again. I always say after Halloween, the year is over. Time just seems to speed up racing to year’s end.

Advent is the opportunity to slow down and take in the light of the Christmas season, and remember the wonderful gift from God, his only Son, sent to be our Savior and Redeemer. Jesus brought light to a very dark world, and the world has never been the same. The much needed light of Jesus is just as bright today as it was over 2,000 years ago. This Advent season, I will reflect on that light, and try to shine my own light on those in need.



*Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion  
and turneth the shadow of death into the morning.*

*Alleluia, yea, the darkness shineth as the day, the night is light about me.*

Inspired by Amos 5:8 and Psalm 139, Jonathan Dove wrote these lines for *Seek Him that Maketh the Seven Stars*, a profound anthem for choir and organ.

As the days continue to shorten and the lectionary propels us inexorably toward the Feast of the Incarnation, I find myself praying with Dove's anthem as a devotional aid. I invite you to join me in this. Several times this Advent season, let us turn off our phones, dim the lights and immerse ourselves in the music. A beautiful recording by the vocal ensemble Tenebrae is readily available on the internet. Let the yearning repetitions of "Seek him, seek him" become our own prayer; and let us thrill with joy as the music explodes in dazzling radiance: "Yea, the darkness shineth as the day, the night is light about me."

On January 7 at 6:00 p.m. our Epiphany procession will culminate in Dove's *Seek Him that Maketh the Seven Stars* sung by the Cathedral Choir. During this service of readings, prayers, music and pageantry we continue to celebrate Christ, the Light of the World.



**ADVENT WEEK 4**

December 24

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

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December 23	Stephan Casurella
December 24	Book of Common Prayer





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