

DIOCESE OF WAIKATO & TARANAKI



# ADVENT

HOPE

PREPARATION

JOY

REFLECTIONS & RESOURCES

# "CLEAR THE WAY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS FOR THE LORD! MAKE A STRAIGHT HIGHWAY THROUGH THE WASTELAND FOR OUR GOD!"

(Isaiah 40.3)



## WELCOME

As a small boy, Advent was filled with anticipation, hope and yearning - for Christmas presents...

When the first purple candle was lit, my brother and I knew we were on the countdown! There was a race each morning to be the first to open a calendar window, or perhaps hang something on a Jesse Tree. As more candles were lit we began to search the house for hidden presents. Such rituals became entrenched and in some ways have been passed on to our own children.

However, things changed for me a few years ago. One Advent, while driving the roads of our Diocese, I actually looked beyond the cones to what they marked.

And there, stretching into the distance, was "a straight highway through the wasteland" with a bulldozer. Now I cannot shake the association.

Advent charts a course through our spiritual lives. It is intended to level the hills and valleys so that God can gain direct access to our hearts. That requires planning and action, which I hope this resource will enable.

What follows is a series of three reflections with questions, prayer, and a Scripture reading plan. Alternately, you may wish to go straight to the *Resources* page to review the books, movies, poetry, & art that might inspire your own study.

I pray that this helps you clear the way to the One who loves you.

*Ven Stephen Black*  
*Advent 2020*



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Prepare a way in the wilderness, make straight paths. Don't muck about, bring a bulldozer.

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A selection of books, movies, poems, art, and music.



Delhi Durbar of 1903, by Roderick McKenzie

Phoenix Publishers, *Nativity Play* (Advent Calendar)

## PREPARATION

Advent is by definition a time of anticipation. As the year draws to a close we all know that something is coming. There is a change in pace and orientation as we try to turn our hearts and minds towards Christmas: that day which is the **E**vent of our **Ad**vent.

Because of that event we must be cautious. We cannot allow ourselves to see Advent as a holy countdown.

If we get caught up in the countdown-to-Christmas mode we can miss out on what it means to engage with this important season.

If we are not intentional we will become one of those people who see the year

as culminating in the exchange of presents, or a brief reprieve from work, or a source of anxiety caused by complicated family dynamics unfolding over an awkward lunch...

And so, let us set all that aside and reorient ourselves – quite literally.

In the first instance Advent is a new beginning – it is the start of the liturgical year. All those new year's resolutions people make on January 1, really belong to Advent 1. That's when we are called to start again.

And I use re-orient in its literal sense of turning to the east; and of observing the rising sun. In our English-speaking tradition the language of 'rising sun' has always invited a deeper significance.

It is at Advent that we anticipate the arrival of God on earth.



But sometimes I wonder whether we have confused the anticipation of Advent with plain old 'waiting'.

Waiting is what we do in supermarket queues and bus stops: a passive way of killing time – a frustration.

Advent anticipation is meant to be much more than that. It's a mixture of expectation, preparation, and yearning.



In Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist cries out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, / make his paths straight." God's return is imminent. For the first century Jews the Messiah was imagined as a great king travelling through the wilderness on a highway headed to Jerusalem - a royal procession descending on the holy of holies.

This scene was meant to evoke images of the frenzied preparations that would be necessary to welcome an important ruler. Such preparation requires action (and elephants).

In many homes throughout the western world the weeks leading up to Christmas are indeed a time of preparation. There are:

- Advent calendars (elaborate Christmas countdowns filled with chocolate elves),



*Delhi Durbar, Roderick McKenzie, 1903*

- Decorations of all sorts,
- Trees,
- Songs,
- Carol evenings, and even ...
- Frosted glass – because what's a southern hemisphere Christmas without a little fake snow?

Lots of time consuming, costly rituals that have become established practices. And I'm not asking you to give any of those up.

However, they were not the rituals the church intended when it made Advent up. For 'make it up' is precisely what the church did. As you know, Easter is the preeminent Christian festival. It is the defining moment, and it enjoys a long build up. As the significance of the incarnation (God made flesh) was given more thought it was felt that a Lenten-style preparation for Epiphany (the recognition of Jesus as God) was also appropriate.

### **Epiphany**

In the early church, Epiphany always took priority over what came to be known as Christmas Day. At Epiphany (early January) we celebrate a series of scriptural moments that reveal Jesus as God (the Visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, etc).





Saint Martin of Tours was born about 316. Like his father, he joined the army but found this incompatible with his Christian commitment. He famously cut his cloak in two to share with a beggar. Ultimately became a monk and worked to convert rural people to the Way of Jesus Christ.

Relevant? Not really.

He was just a popular saint whose day of remembrance fell about 40 days before Epiphany. Over time that 40-day period has been reduced (like a good gravy) to the four weeks we are accustomed to now - and the emphasis has shifted to Christmas Day.

Therefore, we light candles for peace, hope, love, and joy, and recall that Advent has always been intended as a time of self-examination and preparation.



The reason we make these preparations is because we earnestly desire God's return and we want to live as though Christ is on the way. We yearn for it like the return of a loved one after a separation, or like we cry out for relief from pain.

Yearning is not an intellectual disposition so much as a physical and spiritual need to receive something.



Augustine of Hippo sincerely wanted people to yearn, he wrote:

"Give me one who yearns; ... give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the spring of the Eternal country. Give me that sort of man: he knows what I mean."

Likewise, Mathew Woodley says: "Advent trains us to ache again. Of all the seasons of the church year, Advent is the time to acknowledge, feel, and even embrace the joyful anguish of longing for Messiah's birth and the world's rebirth. So we sing our aching songs while we light candles and festoon the church with greenery. That is Advent longing, and we couldn't imagine it any other way."

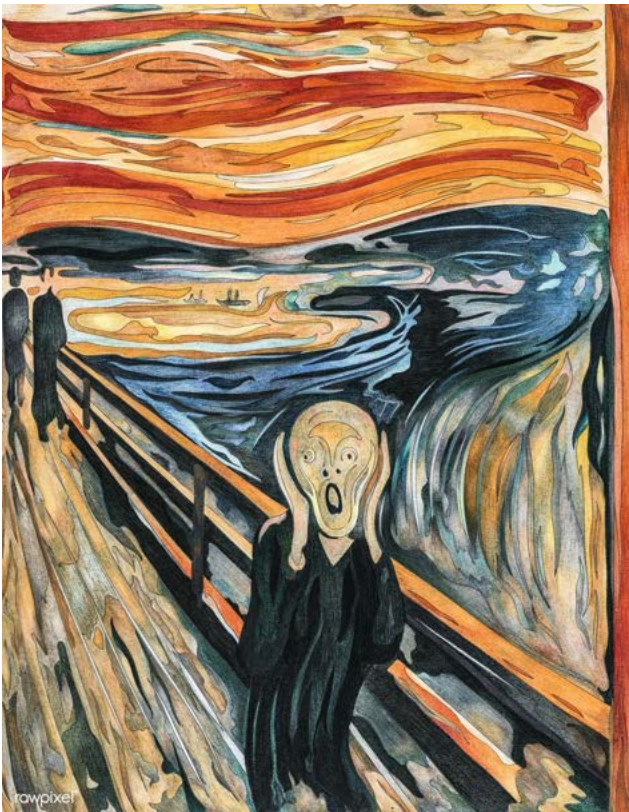
A wonderful sentiment, but I wonder whether that is your experience? It is mine, but perhaps not as Woodley understands it. I ache when I walk into a shop in the middle of November and the Christmas trees are out and Jingle Bells is playing. I ache when I hear the words "silly season" and "Christmas lists"; or when negotiations

begin around whose turn it is to host Christmas lunch. My back aches when I carry all the advertising out to be recycled. When I am standing in a store in a clerical collar and a retailer asks what I'm doing for Christmas, I ache when they are surprised to hear I'll be dropping into church ...



Yearning is a powerful sensation. It's derived from an Old English word — *giernan* — closely associated with 'eager'. And it's hard to capture in words because I firmly believe it's something that you feel.

So what do you associate with yearning? What words come to mind when you think of yearning?



Edvard Munch, *Scream*

But the real ache should be the one that remembers the incarnation and anticipates Christ's return.

That's where the "joyful anguish" comes into play.

The challenge that Christ sets for us at Advent is to slow down and ache, to be joyful and expectant, to yearn.

"O God, you are my God, I seek you,  
my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and  
weary land where there is no water."  
*(Psalm 63)*

## REFLECTION

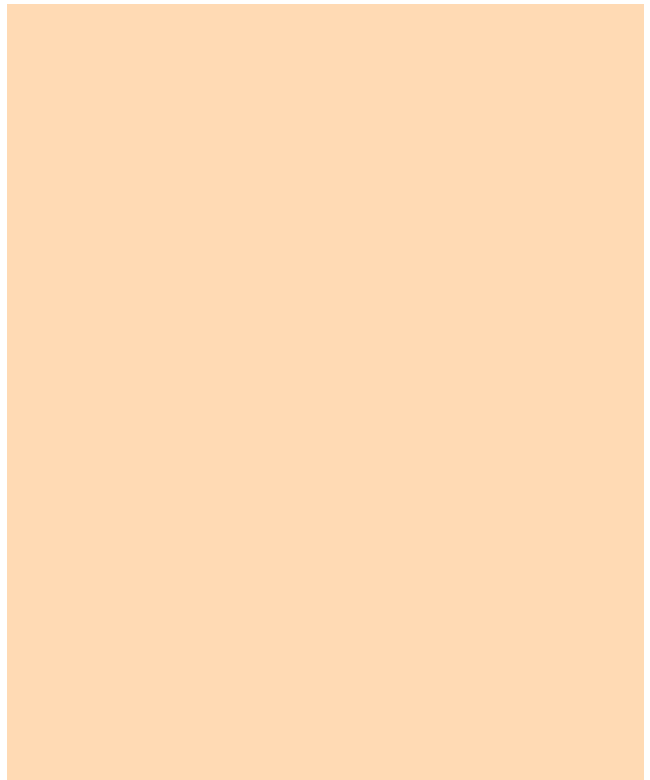
- "Advent trains us to ache again" – what does that mean for you?
- "Joyful anguish"?
- What do you yearn for?
- What do you expect from Advent?
- What does Advent expect from you?





THOUGHTS

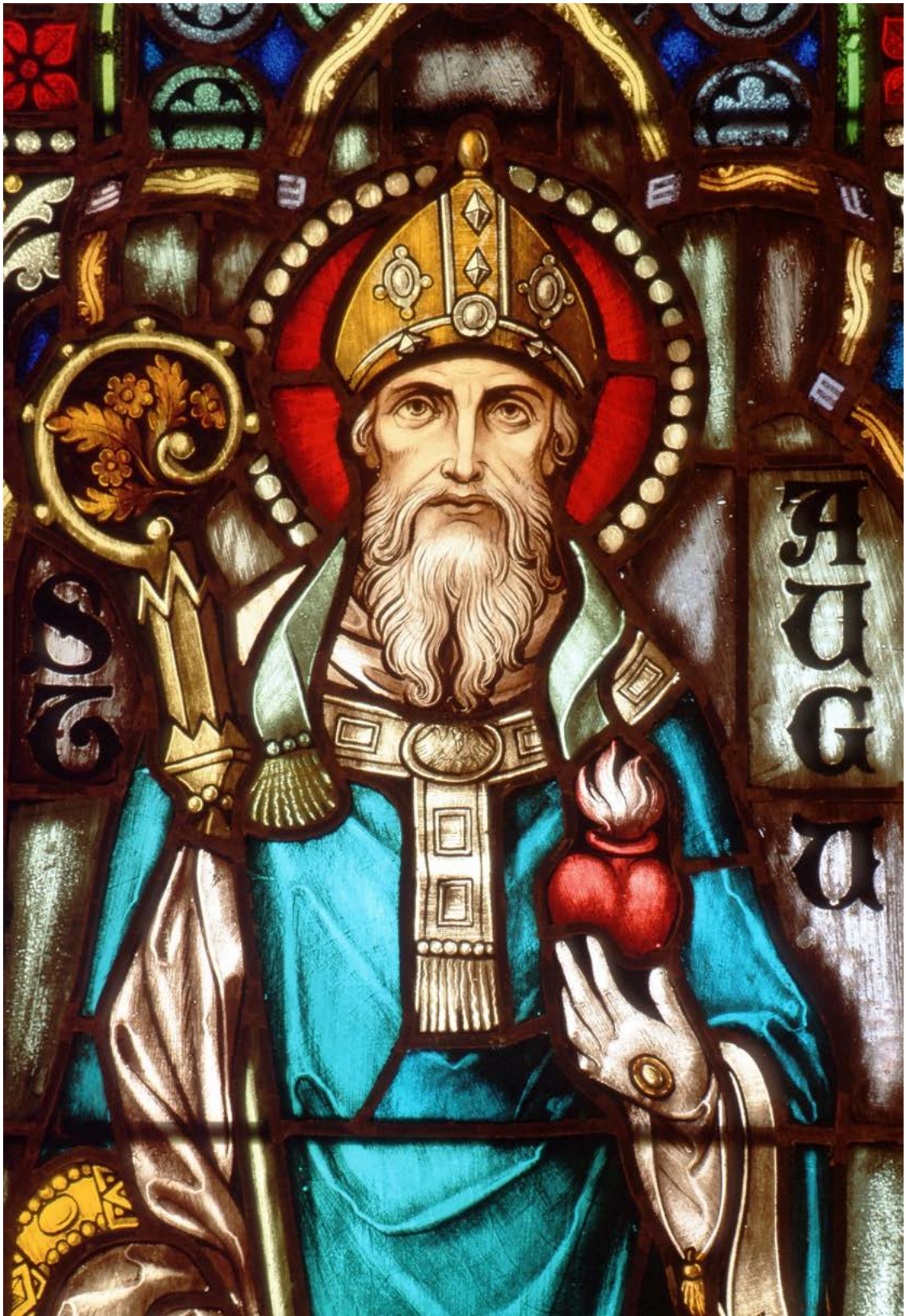
QUESTIONS



SCRIPTURE

- John 16:5-15
- Romans 8:18-25





**EVERLASTING GOD,  
IN WHOM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND  
HAVE OUR BEING:  
YOU HAVE MADE US FOR YOURSELF,  
SO THAT OUR HEARTS ARE RESTLESS  
UNTIL THEY REST IN YOU.**  
Augustine of Hippo (354-430)





# HOPE

## A Living Hope | 1 Peter 1

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Hopefully. Hopefully? Certainly!

Advent is not just about preparation and yearning, but hope. And that's a theme that runs throughout the Bible. It's arguably at the heart of Messianism – the hope that a saviour will come and things will be different. The Prophets are full of the promise of a saviour: a king, a priest, a prophet, a liberator – someone who would change things for the better.

For those of us who believe Jesus is the Messiah that has happened. At Christmas we remember that God is not just some remote and ethereal being—divine but disconnected—we acknowledge that God became fully human and dwelt among us. Not idly but with a purpose.

We have been saved. And the knowledge that we have been saved is a source of hope. All is not lost because we have faith that Jesus died for us. And moreover, Jesus is not just some man, but Jesus is indeed God made man.

God loves us so much that Jesus (Godself) suffered alongside us and gave up his life so that we might have life eternal. We are assured that nothing can separate us from that love.

Nothing.

That's good reason to hope.

That's the hope that looks back 2000 years and breathes a sigh of relief – everything little thing is going to be all right.



But hope is a funny thing, it goes both forward and backward. In our day-to-day language it's almost always future-bound, but we inevitably assess it retrospectively. That tension speaks to a certain uncertainty. Part of the problem is that our word 'hope' originates from an old German word that really means 'wish for'. And I believe that is generally the sense that we tend to appeal to.

So, as a school boy I fervently hoped that swimming sports would be cancelled. If I'm at the movies I hope no one answers their cellphone and decides to have a 10-minute conversation about their relationship difficulties. Or if I have a raffle ticket I hope to win.

But when I use hope like that I may as well start rubbing lamps and looking for genies. When I turn to Christ in faith, my understanding of hope changes. I have to switch from English to Greek and embrace *ἐλπίδα* (*elpida*).



God's hope is an expression of God's order. From the very beginning God has instilled order on creation. In Genesis, God takes the formless void and makes sense of it: light from darkness; up from down; land from water; and so on. God assigns function.

One of the reasons we know Jesus is God is because he demonstrates the same authority over chaos: when the disciples are caught in the storm he stills it; when the waters are raging he walks across them; where there is disease, madness, even death - Jesus overcomes.

When we talk about hope that's the God we need to remember – that's certainly the God that Paul has in mind (Rom 5:1-5):

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."



Take note of what Paul does with hope in the first sentence. Because we are justified by faith we receive grace, therefore we boast with confident expectation that we will share the glory of God. We are not spinning the great wheel of serendipity and praying for something good to happen, we are boasting with confident expectation.

Now consider the second part: “endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.” Suffering, endurance, character, hope. Ultimately then suffering produces hope?

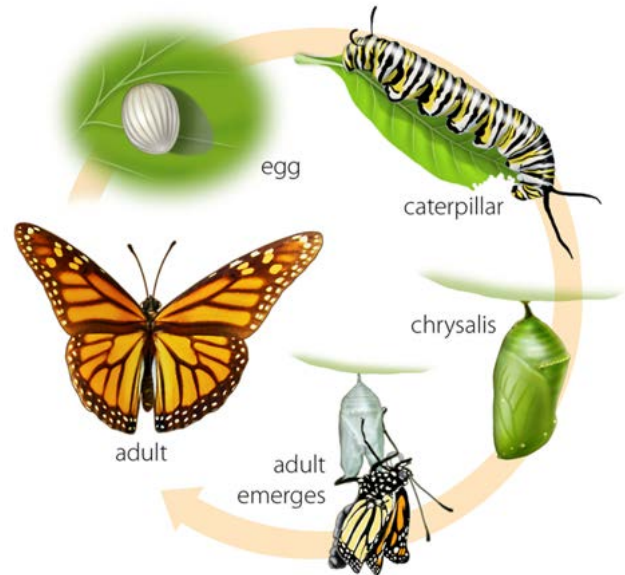
No! At least not quite like that.



There are those who can hit Monopoly's chance card, advance directly to “Go”, and collect \$200. But most of us have to land on every hotel and utility, and no doubt end up in prison where we fail to roll doubles three times in a row and then have to pay \$50, and then we're still  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the board away from GO again.

I hate monopoly. Monopoly causes suffering, suffering leads to endurance, which builds character ... Wait a minute.

Hope, as Paul describes it in this section of Romans, is established in experience. It isn't a vague thing; it's a product. Paul describes a process whereby we move from x to y.



In the same way that a monarch egg does not transform directly into a butterfly, our suffering is not instantly converted into hope. Instead there is a complex and potentially painful metamorphosis that takes place. One that might repeat itself throughout our lives. If someone were to show us the finished product at the start of the process it would be laughably inconceivable. A bit like telling a child that a caterpillar turns into butterfly...

The process of rehabilitation that takes people from grief through suffering to hope is also a metamorphosis.

That kind of hope is earned. I believe it to be altogether different from some vague appeal to serendipity and not like wishful thinking at all. When you have worked through suffering and arrived at hope you are more likely to look into the future with confident expectation.

I want to make an additional refinement to our understanding of hope, just in case you are tempted to confuse it with optimism...



Generally speaking, I am an optimist. As Oscar Wilde says, I see the doughnut, not the hole in the middle. I know that other people see things differently. For some the glass is not only half empty, but someone else drank it.

In our culture, optimism is fairly highly regarded, but it is still something to be a little cautious of.

Jim Collins wrote a book called *Good to Great*. In it he recorded his interview with Admiral Jim Stockton who spent 8 years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. Collins was trying to find out what it took to survive the horrors of the ironically named Hanoi Hilton. When asked who was most likely to die in prison Admiral Stockton replied, "Oh, that's easy, the optimists."

"You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end - which you can never afford to lose - with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

The problem with optimists, he discovered, was that they kept pinning their hopes on some future date: I'll be out by Christmas, I'll be out by Easter, and so on. Eventually they just lost hope and gave up. That's the kind of optimism we must be cautious of. It is much better to engage with the truth of our situation - or as Admiral Stockton puts it: "confront the most brutal facts of your current reality."

Doug Pagitt reflects:

"Christianity has always been the hope of God through Jesus played out in the lives of real people living in real circumstances."

I believe our faith is strongest when we anchor it in reality. Perhaps the easiest way to do this is think about the human experience of Jesus: his birth and death; his celebration of friendship; his experience of grief, loss and disappointment. Our God is not remote, and neither is our hope.



*Risen, 2016*

## REFLECTION

- What are the "brutal facts of your reality?"
- How hopeful do you feel at the end of 2020?
- Where does your hope come from?
- How do you communicate hope to others?





"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light" (*Isaiah 9:2*)

THOUGHTS

QUESTIONS

A large, empty rectangular box with a light orange background, intended for writing thoughts.

A large, empty rectangular box with a light orange background, intended for writing questions.

SCRIPTURE

- Psalm 39
- Psalm 71

# HOPE

One aspect of the Christmas story is its historical context. Mary's response to the Angel was rooted in hope. She was an unmarried, teenager, living in a land occupied by hostile forces.

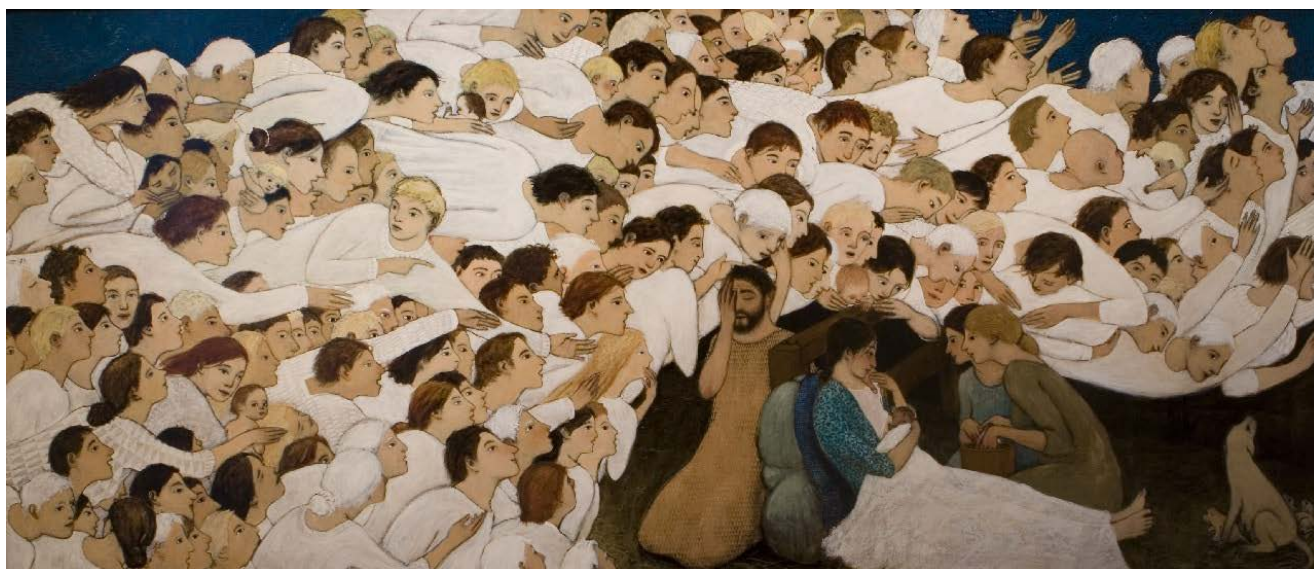
For many in the Holy Land, little has changed. Young women continue to raise children amidst war and conflict.

The image below ("The Scar of Bethlehem" by art-activist Banksy) was unveiled in 2019 in Bethlehem at the *Walled Off Hotel*. This hotel faces the wall that is reproduced below.

How do you respond?







*Nativity – Brian Kershisnik*

# JOY

I love this version of the nativity scene. It literally fills me with joy.

The swarming angels, exhausted Mary, pensive women, and even the distracted dog invite us into the extraordinary. As the angels sweep past this nativity scene their expressions change from anticipation, to wonder, and then into song: their hands and heads are raised with their voices proclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favours" (Lk 2:14).

Joseph kneels overwhelmed, with one hand held to his face and the other draped over Mary's shoulder. She has done it! The Son of God has arrived. It is too much to take in.

Like the overflowing of God's cup, joy is not something that can be contained. That's what ebullience actually is - a bubbling or boiling over of enthusiasm from a deep well of joy. It is a gift.

When did you last experience that deep joy?

What inspired it?

Never lose sight of that joy. Let it be the well from which you draw hope.

And, let it be the source of energy that drives your sharing of the good news with others.

# ORIGINS

Throughout history, Christians have been notoriously good at hijacking existing cultural festivals. For example, Easter leans on both pagan spring festivals and the Jewish Passover. Likewise, December 25 was a Roman celebration of the Unconquered Sun (*Sol Invictus*).

Over the last 100 years we have gradually seen the same process in reverse.

In Roman times *Sol Invictus* was the last of seven consecutive days of celebration. It concluded with an exchange of gifts which were normally little clay representations of deities.



*Consumer Jesus- Banksy*

It seems ironic that many Christmas gifts today represent contemporary deities: pop idols, technology, and fashion.

Nevertheless, in recent years we have seen a gradual change in the secular present-buying culture. Several organisations invite us to 'give a goat', contribute to ethical planting, or something similar.

What could you give (or invite people to give you) that might communicate the joy of Christmas?

Covid-19 has delivered a number of words and phrases that most of us would rather be without: 'unprecedented', 'social distancing', 'new normal', 'essential workers' and even 'toilet paper shortage'.

But not 'joy'.

For much of the world, this year has been concerned with trials and challenges. Nevertheless, from St James' perspective joy and challenge are intimately linked.

"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy."  
(James 1:2)

Let me acknowledge that you may have stopped reading for a while. I don't blame you, I just went for a walk myself. My enduring reflection is that troubles and trials are fine if they *actually* manifest joy. Otherwise it feels like striking a whole box of matches without a single one lighting, which is well on the way to burnout...

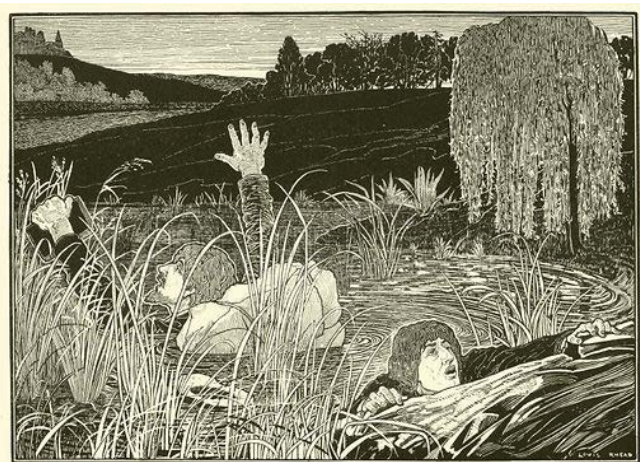


At the same time, I have to accept the fact that 'joy' is closely linked with attitude and context. Some people I encounter simply say 'no' to any "opportunity for great joy". Sometimes I do too. Others revel in challenge.



A friend of mine loves cross-fit. Recently he attended a masters event which included carrying massive weights up and down hills, hurdles, and walls; and then underwater. As he recounted the effort required to complete the task it was clear he was still in considerable physical pain. And yet, he was full of joy. Because he could do it?

No! No one could do the last part. The event organisers called it off because they thought someone might die!

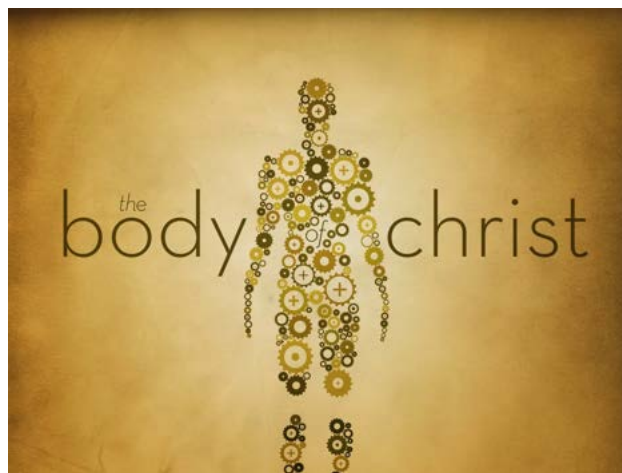


*The Slough of Despond*, (inspired by "Pilgrim's Progress"), Louis John Rhead, c. 1890

He experienced joy because he was part of something greater than himself and it made him feel alive. The joy of being in a team and sharing trials was exhilarating. It was not about success or even completion, but community.

As Christians we have the same opportunity to experience joy in community. The challenge we face to grow God's church and proclaim the good news of God incarnate, can feel like cross-fit. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is demanding - this is part of our identity, but so is community.

The image of the church as the body of Christ is invaluable here.



*Body of Christ*, Travis Agnew, 2008

A body is comprised of various parts with assorted functions. When these parts function in concert we achieve synergy. Synergy is a beautiful thing. In terms of numbers you could think of it as  $1 + 1 = 3$ . From a musical perspective you might imagine two contrasting orchestras: the first is tragically out of tune as well as time and conductor-less, while the second is perfectly calibrated.

If you are a classical music fan you might know the 1992 performance of Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D (Itzhak Perlman with Daniel Barenboim, and the Berliner Philharmoniker). I believe it is sublime - just short of perfection - and the joy on Perlman's face is infectious (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cokCgWPRZPg>)



*Itzhak Perlman*

Perlman was born to Polish-Jewish immigrants to the British Mandate of Palestine at the end of World War II. He contracted polio at 4 years of age and has spent his life on crutches. He understands troubles of many kinds. He has also realised his vocation - his unique contribution to the community. For Perlman it is (in part) as first violinist in an orchestra. For Christians, it is as children of God in the body of Christ.

When we operate as the body of Christ we are capable of so much more than we might achieve as individuals. Like draught horses pulling together, the load is lightened and we can en-joy the collaboration.

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light."

*(Matthew 11:27)*



Therefore, the challenging work that we are called to do is a source of joy *and* it is not an individual effort.

The body of Christ needs you!



*Buddy Christ, Kevin Smith, 1999*

Christmas is a gift. It gives us permission to talk about the joy of the Nativity. The challenges are great - much of our society has no understanding of the significance of the birth of Jesus. That means you may be the first person to share the wonder of the Christ child with someone. What a privilege!

Each of us is called to be an evangelist so each of us needs to discover who we are in that role. May you draw strength and wisdom from your community of faith as you proclaim joy to the world.

## REFLECTION

- How do you respond to the word 'evangelist'?
- Who shared the Gospel with you and what made it so significant?
- What practical support do you need to be an evangelist?
- What might it mean to be an evangelist in community?
- How could you communicate the hope, love, peace and joy that Advent anticipates?





*Detail from Erland Sibuea, Nativity, 2008*

## THOUGHTS

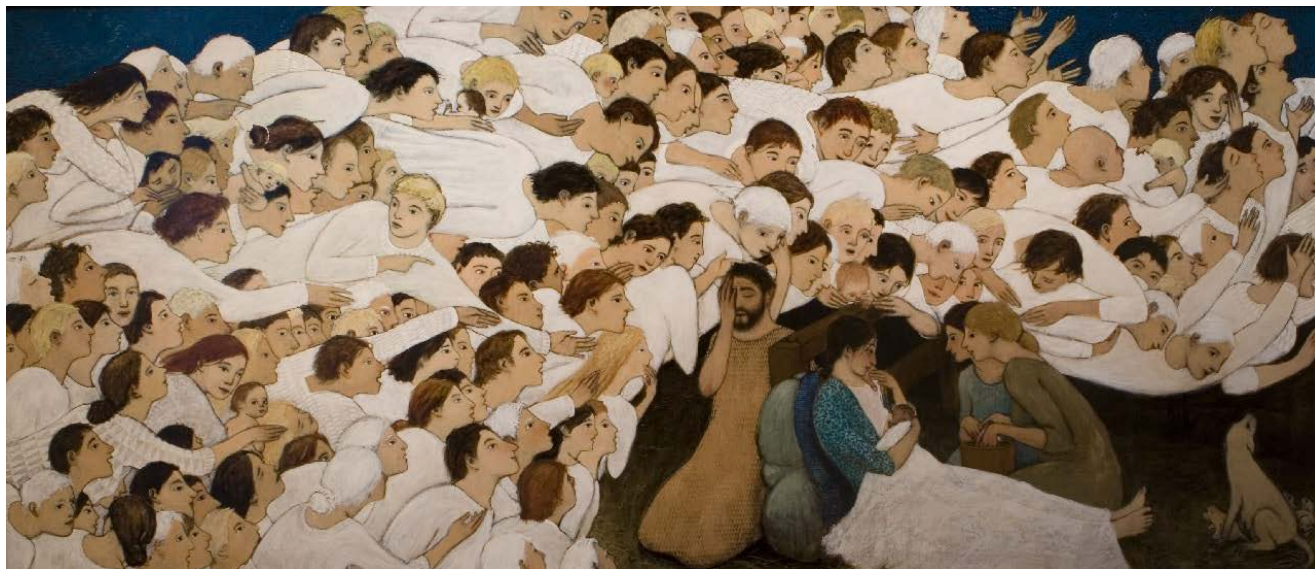
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## QUESTIONS

A large, empty rectangular area with a light orange background, intended for writing questions.

## SCRIPTURE

- Luke 1:46-55
- Philippians 3:4-7



*Nativity – Brian Kershisnik*

# RESOURCES

## FAMILY

- Advent/Christmas Resources from Strandz:  
<https://www.strandz.org.nz/advent--christmas.html>

## BOOKS

- Craufurd Murray, *Journeying Through Advent*, (Toltech Print)
- John V Kruse, *Advent and Christmas: Wisdom from St Francis of Assisi*, (Ligouri, 2008)

## POETRY

- WB Yeats, *The Second Coming*
- Stephen Cherry, *Barefoot Prayers*
- *The Advent Project*  
<https://theadventusproject.wordpress.com/resources/poetry/>
- *Journey with Jesus*  
<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/poetry/poetry-index?jwjpoetrygenre=1>

## FILM

- Preparation: *Big Night* (1996)
- Hope: *The Pianist* (2002)
- Joy: *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006)
- Modern Nativity: *Children of Men* (2006)

## ART

- *Nativity*, Brian Kershisnik, 2015
- *The Visitation*, James B Janknegt, 2007
- *Fiat*, Patrick Taban and Ernesto Graciano, 2016 (Advent 2)
- *The Art of Advent*, Jane Williams, 2018 - a book dedicated to the art of Advent and Epiphany.

## MUSIC

- *Oh Light : Advent for Weary Souls*, Amena Brown and Michael Gungor
- *You'll Come*, Brooke Fraser
- *The Fall*, Gungor
- *Christmas Song*, Dave Matthews Band



One new thing I learned about Advent

One thing I will do differently next Advent

One person I will share the good news of Advent with

One thing I have learned about myself

One thing that is unresolved for me

One hope for my future

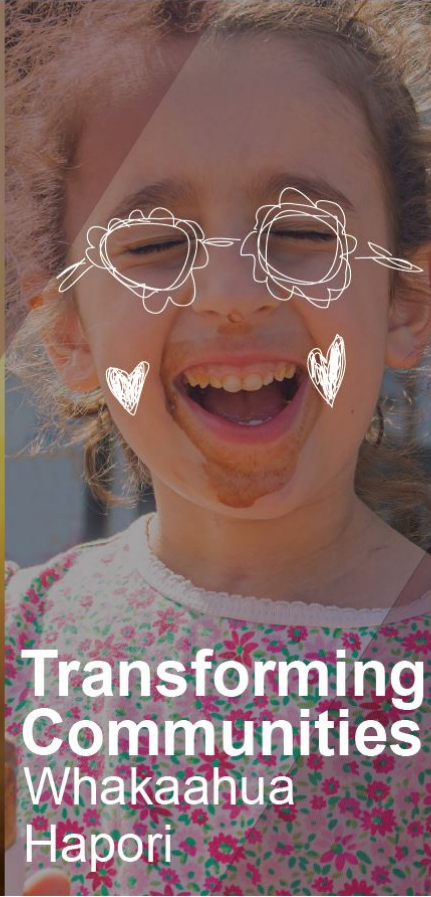
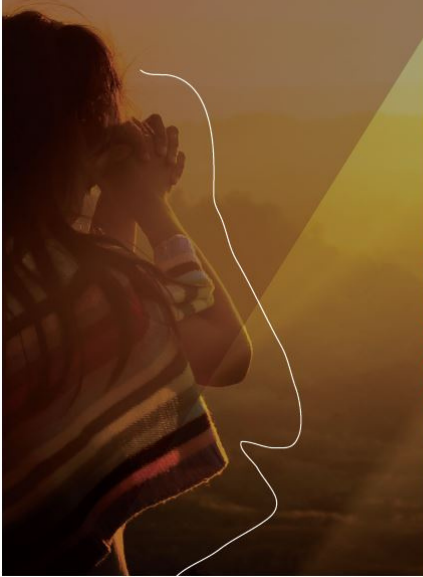
One thing I am preparing for

One thing that gives me joy

**We seek to be**  
*A family in God, who are followers of Christ*

**Marked by  
Gratitude**

Ngākau  
Whakawhetai



**Transforming  
Communities**  
Whakaahua  
Hapori



**Growing  
Disciples**

Tupuranga  
Ākonga



**WAIKATO  
AND  
TARANAKI  
ANGLICANS**