



#PrepareYeTheWay

Introduction: Advent, a time of waiting

Advent is a time of dual anticipation. As we wait for the birth of Christ celebrated at Christmas, we also wait for the second coming of the son of God, for Jesus' return.

In the midst of preparing ourselves for Christmas, as we purchase gifts and fill our homes with festive decorations, it is easy to forget that the living God also asks us to prepare the way for Christ's return. This is a great promise, but also a great challenge.

How might we prepare for Jesus' return?

How would we want Christ to find us?

How might we build the Kingdom of God here on earth today as a sign and a prophecy of the Kingdom to come?

The following prayers and reflections are intended to aid our preparations through Advent. Each week focuses on a different way we might prepare for the coming of Christ, and provides stories, prayers and actions based on the lectionary readings for Advent. You may wish to use them for your own personal study, for group bible studies, or perhaps to guide sermons you may be writing during Advent.

Week One: Welcoming Refugees

Bible readings

[Isaiah 64: 1-9](#)

“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence”

Isaiah 64: 1 (NRSV)

[Mark 13: 24-37](#)

“Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.”

Mark 13: 33 (NRSV)

Reflection

1. Look at the images used in the Old Testament lesson. What do we learn about the nature of God from them?
2. In the Mark reading we are warned to keep alert for the coming of the son of man at any time. What does keeping alert look like for you? And for our Churches?
3. What might keeping alert look like when we think beyond ourselves and to how we treat our neighbour?
4. The community of God knows no boundaries or borders. If those who live on the other side of the world are as much our neighbours as those who live next door to us, how do we discern and act on God's will in the way we welcome them?

Ayana's Story

Ayana (not her real name), came to England from Eritrea in 2008. She has since experienced homelessness and physical abuse, and even had her temporary accommodation withdrawn after the death of her child, who tragically died shortly after being born. We met Ayana last year and she gave us permission to share a little of her story:

"The reason I left Eritrea was because of my religion; I was imprisoned for two weeks there because of my Pentecostal Christian faith. After my parents died, I didn't have anyone else who could support me in Eritrea, and I didn't want to stay there.

In the UK you can practice your religion freely, and they accept you the way you are. I was really hopeful when I first came to the UK, I wanted to become a nurse. I didn't think I would come to the UK and be homeless, and hungry, sleeping on the floors of spare rooms.

I slept outside and in night shelters and bedsits for seven years, my left leg no longer moves because of the cold. At one point, I was five months pregnant and sleeping in the park; it was so cold and I couldn't move my hand. I said to my friend 'I feel like I am dying'.

When I eventually told a charity I was pregnant they said they would find somewhere for me to live. I lived in Government accommodation before and after I had my baby, who died shortly after being born.

After I lost my baby I received a letter from the Home Office telling me I had to leave my accommodation within two weeks; because I was no longer entitled. I didn't have anyone, and didn't have anywhere to go. I was c-sectioned and recovering and no-one came to help me, I was sick and no-one helped.

I just want to be safe; the home office doesn't care – they treat you like everyone else, because they don't know. They don't provide any transport. I've been here for nine years and I've only just started having English lessons. You can't work, you can't learn, I don't know how they expect me to live. They don't even ask you how you are."

As we are preparing for the coming of Christ this Advent, what sort of treatment should we be offering vulnerable people like Ayana?

Prayer

Journeying God

You revealed yourself to us through Christ on the move,

Christ in the manger, Christ fleeing to Egypt,

Christ travelling across the Holy Land to fulfil his ministry.

As we prepare to celebrate this gift of God made flesh,

By wrapping presents, writing cards, decorating trees and
preparing feasts,

Move us to prepare for your second coming

By remembering the people who have been forgotten

By turning to the people who have been ignored

And by inviting the people who have been left uninvited.

May we always find you in the least expected places:

At the borders, in temporary accommodation, in the detention
centre,

And lying in a stable.

Amen.

Action

Send One More Card this Christmas.

On the 16th March 2018 MPs will be debating the Refugee Families Bill. This Bill would change the laws so that refugee families can be reunited. But many MPs won't be in Parliament on that day which would prevent the Bill from being passed. Send a Christmas Card to your MP asking them to put a note in their diary reminding them to attend the debate. You can find the contact details for your MP at <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/>.

And of course don't forget to wish them good will and peace this Christmas!

If you didn't show the film [A Very British Nativity](#) in your church last year, why not show it during your Sunday morning service this advent? Alternatively you could act out your own 'refugee' nativity. You might want this script. [A Very British Nativity Script](#)



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