



#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 Four: The Lowly Shall be Lifted Up

Bible readings

[Luke 1:26-38](#)

“The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.’”

Luke 1: 30-31 (NRSV)

[Luke 1: 46-56](#)

“He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.”

Luke 1: 51-53 (NRSV)

Reflection

1. God chose Mary, a young unmarried woman, to be the mother of Jesus? What is the significance of this?
2. Mary represented the humble and lowly of her time. Where might we find the Marys of today?
3. Mary exalts God for the way he subverted the roles of the powerful and the lowly, the rich and the hungry. How might those roles be subverted in our society today?
4. We are called to build God’s kingdom on earth. How might we lift up the humble and fill the hungry with good things?

Story - Humble Servants

As a young unmarried woman Mary would not have been considered powerful or important. However, in bearing Jesus she was given a task of utmost importance.

It is vital for us to recognise that great changes can come from the most unexpected places and people, and be carried out in unorthodox ways. One example of a humble, unexalted change-maker is Leymah Gbowee.

Leymah Gbowee was inspired in 2002 by a dream in which God told her to 'Gather the women and pray for peace' to set up the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. She began by going to mosques, markets and churches. At each of those locations they handed out leaflets calling on women to pray for peace.

As the movement gathered pace Gbowee led thousands of Christian and Muslim women to gather in Monrovia to pray for peace, and eventually to hold daily prayers and non-violent sit-ins. In June 2003 during the peace-talk process between the warring Liberian factions, Gbowee and a couple of hundred women surrounded the hotel in which negotiations were held. They told the lead negotiator that they would interlock their arms and prevent the leaders leaving until a deal had been reached. It is reported that this action focussed the minds of the parties within the negotiating hall, forcing them into a sombre mood.

In 2011 Leymah Gbowee received the Nobel Peace Prize alongside Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Tawakkul Karman "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work."

On receiving her prize, Gbowee said of the movement:

“We walked when we had no transportation, we fasted when water was unaffordable, we held hands in the face of danger, we spoke truth to power when everyone else was being diplomatic, we stood under the rain and the sun with our children to tell the world the stories of the other side of the conflict. Our education backgrounds, travel experiences, faiths, and social classes did not matter. We had a common agenda: **Peace for Liberia Now.**”

“This is the day the Lord has made and I and my sisters globally will rejoice and be glad in it.”

Prayer

God, you work in mysterious ways, in the most unexpected and humble places.

You chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus Christ, a young unmarried woman, without power or status.

We thank you for the humble, unexpected people who continue to build your kingdom.

We pray for their actions, that they might have strength and courage.

We pray that the rich, the proud, and the powerful will listen to their voices.

And we pray that we may also be your humble servants, learning to build your kingdom.

Amen.

Action

Think about how you might carry out God's work in a humble and unexalted manner.

What gift might you bring? Why not perform an act of service this Christmas? Serve at a Christmas lunch, donate some food to your local food bank or visit a lonely or isolated person.

This Christmas, pray for those who are building God's kingdom in whatever small way that might be. You may wish to acknowledge the humble and unexalted servants of God in your community, by writing them a Christmas card, giving them a small gift or simply saying thank you.



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