



## 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 Three: Good News for the Poor

### Bible readings

[Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11](#)

“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,

because the Lord has anointed me;

he has sent me to bring good news to the poor,”

Isaiah 61: 1 (NRSV)

[John 1: 6-8, 19-28](#)

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” John 1: 6-8 (NRSV)

### Reflection

In the UK the word “poor” has become associated with personal failure and shame. It is a label given to others, and one that British people rarely give to themselves.

At the same time poverty has increased. More than 4 million children will celebrate Christmas while living in an impoverished family; 300,000 of these children will be in families unable to afford basic food and shelter and facing the most degrading form of poverty destitution.<sup>1</sup>

Today’s poverty is different from the recent past: it visits working families more often than those out of work, and visits the young more

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<sup>1</sup> 1.25 million people are destitute in the UK

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/destitute-uk>

often than the old. The struggle, the shame and the fear that poverty has always brought remains the same today.

1. Who are today's "poor"? Is it you, is it the people you worship or work alongside?
2. How can we make sure those who experience the hardships of today's poverty can hear that they are valued and welcomed and that Jesus's Good News is for them?
3. What might Good News for the poor look like today?

## **Story – Good News for the Poor**

Universal Credit (UC) is the new benefit which provides support to low income families. The slow roll out of Universal Credit has been beset with problems. Some problems are because systems are not working properly. Many, however, are because the core design does not take into account the realities of the lives of families who experience poverty.

The most obvious design flaw was a six week delay between applying for Universal Credit and receiving support. From next year this will be changed to a five week wait and the option to take out a large loan. A troubling improvement.

JPIT has asked for changes to Universal Credit and Churches throughout the country have supported low income, very often working families, struggling as they try to cope with the new system.

We recently met Joy (not her real name), who was transferred to Universal Credit, and experienced the difficult initial waiting period for the first payment. As a result she had to feed her two children by

visiting foodbanks. After receiving Universal Credit for several months, Joy described having all payments stopped, unexpectedly and inexplicably, for three months. Joy describes this as a time of great practical and emotional strain, leading to a period of depression.

Joy looks and acts like others who visit that church, but she experiences real poverty. How can we ensure “Good news for the Poor” reaches people like Joy and her family?

What would good news look like for Joy and others who need support from Universal Credit?

## Prayer

This is a hymn written by Andrew Pratt in light of the deeply worrying roll-out of Universal Credit. It can be used as a prayer or sung to the tune of Streets of Laredo:

*When clothing or shelter are absent or wanting, as life becomes difficult,  
living is raw, the need of a benefit, now becomes urgent, yet often delayed  
and the poor remain poor.*

*Then how do we see this, as something we beg for?  
A love gift assuaging the lack that we feel?  
A present disguising our guilt and collusion, as choices are made, and  
divisions are real?*

*But how can we live with such sharp separation, our frail understanding of  
how others live?  
And what is our charity, depth of our loving, a sign of our sacrifice, what we  
can give?*

*For only when margins can meet at the centre, when people in honesty walk hand in hand, when clichés like fairness and being together, have met with extinction, will love fill this land.*

© Andrew Pratt 28/9/2017. Tune: STREETS OF LAREDO

## **Action**

Bring good news to the poor this Christmas. Write a Christmas card to David Gauke MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, calling for the roll-out of Universal Credit to be paused until it can improve the lives of families experiencing poverty.

You may also wish to make a donation to your local foodbank this Christmas, to support those for who are waiting for their Universal Credit payment to come in.



*this resource was produced by*

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