



# Advent 2021

## resources

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Theme: Jesus makes all the difference



The Bible readings are taken from the lectionary and this year have a distinctive prophetic edge. They challenge us to be inspired by the announcement of Jesus coming into our lives and our world, to live in expectancy and to prepare for all that this means.

The readings also show us how the Christ-life is very much about us living into the promises of God, even before they happen. It is about living permanently in a crossover time between the promises given and the promises fulfilled. The series unfolds this way:

**Advent Sunday 1:** 28 November 2021: The Expectancy

**Advent Sunday 2:** 5 December 2021: The Preparation

**Advent Sunday 3:** 12 December 2021: The Life

**Advent Sunday 4:** 19 December 2021: The Wonder

**Christmas Day:** 25 December 2021: The Transcendence

As well as the readings and notes for Bible messages, the resources give suggestions for the call to worship, songs and children's time. Resources are supplied for five full worship experiences. As you will see, they have been thought through carefully, with each aspect of worship in some way linked to the others. For this reason, we encourage you to use the resources as they are supplied and to enter into the theme fully. But you can also pick and choose, and use what you think suits your particular faith community, adding material from other sources as needed.

# First Sunday of Advent

28 November 2021



## Scriptures

**Old Testament** Jeremiah 33:14-16  
**New Testament – Letters** 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13  
**New Testament – Gospel** Luke 21:25-28 and 34-36

## Theme

Jesus Makes All the Difference – The Expectancy

## Call to worship

Things are not always what they seem, or at least there's usually much more to our lives than what we see on the surface. We are called to worship our Lord today, the One who makes all the difference in our lives, the One who shines light in our dark places, the One who came into a harsh world and brought hope and safety, the Promised One who comes to us and calls us to journey with him.

## Songs

**Opening** Come, thou long-expected Jesus (SASB 104/350)  
 Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness (SASB 114/653)

**Midway** Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God among us (SASB 133/859)

**Response** Reprise 'Light of the World' (SASB 114/653) with a focus on Jesus identifying with our darkness and how he shines light in our lives and through our lives. Jesus helps us to see the things that bind us and let go of them. He prepares us for a new day doing life with him at the centre and the Holy Spirit as the empowerer of our lives.

**Sending Out** Shine Jesus Shine (SASB 261/822)

## Children

### Optical Illusion

Use the visuals for Advent Sunday 1 to show that what we see or think at first may not be the whole story. There may be more to the story, or another way of looking at things. Then talk about being in a dark room. It looks dark and we can't see anything. But it only takes a small light and suddenly we can see everything. It's a whole different view.

That's the kind of difference Jesus makes in our lives when we don't settle for how things are. We invite Jesus into our lives and all the details of our lives including our relationships with others. We follow his example of love and his teachings from the Bible about how to live our lives. It makes all the difference!

## Message

You could say that one word sums up the focus of our Bible readings today. Expectancy! We're going to share a few ideas about expectancy in the context of this being the first Sunday of Advent 2021. But first let me ask: What causes you to have expectancy, to live with expectancy?

**Action:** Ask people to share their answers, whether it's about Christmas or something else. Have one or two people with a hand-held microphone ready to move among those who want to share. (5 minutes)

The Macquarie Dictionary says that to have expectancy is to look forward to something, to regard something as likely to happen, to anticipate the occurrence or the coming of something. But when we think of expectancy the way the Bible frames it, we are really talking about 'living with the sure hope that Jesus Christ will transform our lives and our world'.

Some may say, 'How can we put our faith in God for a better world after the global devastation caused by coronavirus?' But surely at the start of Advent 2021, you and I should be saying, 'How can we not?' The message for us today through these Bible readings is that Jesus Christ will make all the difference in our lives and circumstances; they encourage us to live in the expectancy that this will happen.

From today's Old Testament reading comes the prophetic voice of God announcing through Jeremiah, "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfil the gracious promise I made ... I will make a righteous branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved'."

This is a promise from God that, despite the darkness of being overtaken by the Babylonian Empire, God will deliver the people of Judah through the raising up of a leader, a Saviour, who will bring a new day for them and, as we now understand it, for the whole world. This is not a one-off promise, but an ongoing one that generates hope for the future amid dark and troubled times, amid suffering and despair.

The promise was fulfilled with the coming of Jesus into our world two millennia ago and it is just as real for us now as we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic. We can take heart because God is with us. Jesus, the Lord of justice and righteousness, will restore us again and make good our relationship with God and each other. Now is a time to turn again to the Lord and give him our whole hearts and adhere to the new way of living he has shown us.

But what does a life of expectancy during hard times look like? That's a good question and on this first Sunday of Advent 2021, today's gospel reading gives us several answers. These answers are personal, for our families, for us together as a community of faith in Jesus, and for our world.

### **1. In dark times God shows up (Luke 21:25-28)**

While these verses from Luke 21 are set in the context of great calamity on the Earth, I want to highlight that their sentiment is for every calamity, whether personal or shared by many. 'On the Earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity ... People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world,' say verses 25 and 26. But then we have verses 27 and 28, which assure us that 'at that time we will see Jesus coming' and which encourage us 'to stand up and lift up your heads ... your redemption is drawing near.'

In other words, in dark times God shows up in our lives and world but we must be looking for him, we must be living with expectancy. It is natural for us to be downcast and live with despair and a sense of lostness during dark times. But the message of Christmas is that God has come to us. God is Emmanuel! God is with us. And God will come again to heal our lives and bring joy to our hearts despite our natural human tendency to be downcast in hard times. The key is for us to be looking for God.

### **2. Guard your heart (Luke 21:34)**

When we are downcast and living with despair or stress because of what is going on around us, there exists a very real temptation to abandon our morals or faith, even temporarily, and pursue practices that make things worse for us. Luke 21:34 reminds us of this. 'Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.'

'Be careful'. We live with expectancy but we guard our hearts at the same time. How telling it was about the vulnerability of human nature that during coronavirus lockdowns alcohol sales were up, calls to help lines like Beyond Blue and Lifeline were up and, tragically, instances of suicide or attempted suicide and self-harming also increased.

In dark times we need to guard our hearts so that we don't fall into the trap of drifting away from our faith or spiralling downwards into unhelpful places. Jesus is coming to lift us up and create a better world, but let's not miss it! This Christmas, we celebrate Jesus coming as a babe among us. Let's not miss the opportunity for our lives and faith to be refreshed despite the threat of Covid still around us. Let's breathe in Jesus.



### 3. Watch AND pray (Luke 21:36)

So how do we overcome dark times; how do we stand against temptations to give up; how do we live with expectancy and guard our hearts? Some will say it's a matter of self-will and self-determination. That's true to a degree. We say, 'I will not fall victim to the traps around me; I will look up and hold out for a better day; I will reach out and support those around me.'

But there's more. Luke 21 encourages us to both 'watch AND pray'. To live with expectancy and to guard our hearts, we must pray. Prayer brings the added dimension of spiritual life, power and insight entering into all our situations, even those we might regard as calamities. Just like that very first Christmas when Jesus entered our world.

Jesus draws near to us through prayer. We give him our burdens and take on his peace. The Holy Spirit comes turning our weakness into strength, bringing assurance that our lives are in God's hands. We can look up and see that Jesus is with us and that Jesus makes all the difference.

### Response

This first Sunday of Advent 2021 is the perfect opportunity for us to renew our faith in Jesus; for the joy and peace on earth promised that very first Christmas night to be ours afresh; for Jesus to take his place at the centre of our lives; for us to recognise again that Jesus makes all the difference. May it be so!