

Here's a text if you've only a minute ...

Drop down dew from above, you heavens, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let earth be opened and bring forth a Saviour.

Entrance Antiphon

They shall receive blessings from the Lord, and reward from the God who saves them.

Psalm

Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us.'

First Reading

Let us pray, as Advent draws to a close, that Christ will truly come into our hearts.

Lord, fill our hearts with your love, and as you revealed to us by an angel the coming of your Son as man, so lead us through his suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection.

Old Opening Prayer

This week's texts if you want to reflect further:
Isaiah 7: 10–14; Psalm 23 (24); Romans 1: 1–7; Matthew 1: 18–24



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ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM



Fourth Sunday of Advent
Year A, 18th December 2022

Let the Lord enter!
He is the King of glory

Arriving at the climax of Advent, today's readings show God asking for our love and our trust. They also demonstrate God's faithfulness to us, sending Jesus to save us.

Isaiah is sent to comfort King Ahaz (**First Reading**), who has turned away from God. Isaiah sees through the false humility of Ahaz, but still gives him a sign: a maiden will give birth to a son, Emmanuel – 'God-is-with-us'.

This same prophesy is echoed in the **Gospel**. Joseph also faces a difficult situation, but God speaks through an angel in Joseph's dreams, reassuring him that his son is a gift of the Holy Spirit destined to be the Saviour. Joseph follows the angel's command, placing his whole trust in God.

For us, Jesus is the King of Glory in today's **Psalm**. The earth and all within it belong to the Lord, and all who follow his ways shall receive a blessing.

St Paul emphasises both the human and divine aspect of Jesus, who is both a descendant of David and the Son of God. It is Jesus alone who can bring us grace and peace. (**Second Reading**)

As we wait in expectant hope for the Lord's coming, let's pray for the grace that, like Joseph, we might listen with the ear of faith, and respond obediently to the Lord's call. We also pray especially for peace throughout the world. Just as we welcome Jesus into our own hearts, we ask the Lord to help us embrace and welcome all those whom we encounter.



Opening Prayer

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.

First Reading Isaiah 7: 10–14

The Lord spoke to Ahaz and said, ‘Ask the Lord your God for a sign for yourself coming either from the depths of Sheol or from the heights above.’ ‘No,’ Ahaz answered, ‘I will not put the Lord to the test.’

Then Isaiah said:

‘Listen now, House of David:
are you not satisfied with trying the patience of humankind
without trying the patience of my God, too?’

The Lord himself, therefore,
will give you a sign.

It is this: the maiden is with child
and will soon give birth to a son
whom she will call Emmanuel,
a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’.

With Christmas so near, I may be caught up getting things ready. Perhaps I’m looking forward to being with family and friends. Or perhaps I struggle with loneliness, or a sense of emptiness as I remember a loved one.

Whatever time I have to spare, I settle gently into prayer. I try to let any chatter occupying my mind slow down. I place any concerns into the Lord’s gentle, caring hands, aware that I am in his loving presence.

I invite God’s Spirit to guide my prayer, opening my heart and mind to whatever it is the Lord may want to show me.

When ready, I slowly read and re-read the Scripture passage, pausing at any word or phrase that resonates for me.

Perhaps I ponder King Ahaz and his reluctance to ask God for a sign. What might lie behind that? Perhaps fear ... self-reliance ...?

I reflect on times when I may have asked God for a sign myself. What signs has God given me? How did I recognise them? Are they things I’d hoped for ... or been surprised by?

I talk to the Lord about anything arising out of my prayer, confident that he is listening, the One who is ‘God-with-us’.

When I feel ready, I slowly and gently draw this time to a close with a prayer of my choice.

Gospel Matthew 1: 18–24

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.’ Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son
And they will call him Emmanuel,
a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’.

When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

I spend a few moments becoming still, asking for the help of the Holy Spirit to guide my prayer. In time, I read the passage through, mulling over any word or image that particularly catches my attention.

Maybe I find myself thinking of Joseph in this difficult situation. How might he be feeling? Sad ... afraid ... angry ... humiliated ... helpless ...?

Perhaps I picture him praying to God for guidance; searching for comfort. What might I do in his shoes? Where do I place my trust when I feel caught up in my own struggles? Do I rely on my own self-knowledge?

Or am I willing to accept things beyond my own understanding?

Joseph listens carefully to God. Might there be something distracting me from God’s call?

In my own words and from my heart, I share my feelings with the Lord. Perhaps there is a grace I wish to ask for.

I may think of the messengers in my own life, those ‘angels’ who have guided and helped me. I give thanks for them.

I may like to end with the Old Opening Prayer (overleaf), perhaps praying it in the first person: ‘Lord, fill *my* heart with your love ...’.