

## Readings, Reflections and Prayers for the Advent Season 2021

(Thursday afternoons at 3 pm on Zoom, on 2, 9, 16 and 23 December)

Selection by Sylvia Pick, read by Philipa and Sylvia

### Readings for the Third Week in Advent

#### Waiting

**Desiderius Erasmus, *from 2000 Years of Prayer, compiled by Michael Counsell***

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life,  
grant that we may never stray from you who are the Way,  
nor distrust you who are the Truth,  
nor rest in anything other than you, who are the Life.  
Teach us by your Holy Spirit what to believe, what to do, and wherein to take our rest.  
For your name's sake we ask it, O Jesu Christ our Lord. Amen

**Ted Schmidt, *Liberty for Captives***

We wait for something, someone  
to light our twentieth century night of death,  
to redeem the seventy eight million who died  
to keep the world a safer place for democracy  
(and profit and control)

We wait for the birth of the one  
who will stay the final anointing of cinder and ash,  
who will make it all new,  
transform our lives,  
heal our necrophilia.

We can no longer abide the official optimism  
of those who invoke the bigger pie.  
There are no tears here, nothing of solidarity or hope,  
no understanding of the view from the edge.  
There is no realisation that the Kingdom-bringer  
waits in the virgin womb, ripe  
to burst forth with liberty for the captives.

It is rumoured that thrones will upended  
and every Caesar stands on a banana skin.  
I Christos, the Holy One of God, will never  
bless the silos, wear the military tunic,  
or sanctify the Empire.

He will offer a new heaven and a new earth  
and to toast his Christmas arrival,  
you must also dance at his Friday coronation.

Emmanuel, come warm our global stable  
with Spirit fire.

**BCP Psalm 137, vv 1 -4**

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept:  
when we remembered thee, O Sion.  
As for our harps, we hanged them up:  
upon the trees that are therein.  
For they that led us away captive required of us then a song,  
and melody in our heaviness:  
Sing us one of the songs of Sion.  
How shall we sing the Lord's song:  
in a strange land?



Hale Aspacio Woodruff (1900-1980)

**Madeleine L'Engle, *First Coming***

He did not wait till the world was ready,  
till men and nations were at peace.  
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,  
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.  
He came when the need was deep and great.  
He dined with sinners in all their grime,  
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.  
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.  
To a world like ours, of anguished shame  
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,  
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.  
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh  
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane  
to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,  
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

### **Oscar Romero (1917-1980)**

Advent should admonish us to discover  
in each brother or sister that we greet,  
in each friend whose hand we shake,  
in each beggar who asks for bread,  
in each worker who wants the right to join a union,  
in each peasant who looks for work in the coffee groves,  
the face of Christ.

Then it would not be possible to rob them,  
to cheat them,  
to deny them their rights.

They are Christ,  
and whatever is done to them  
Christ will take as done to him.  
This is what Advent is:  
Christ living among us.



Antonio Berni

**Waldo Williams, *In the Days of Caesar, Trans from the Welsh by Rowan Williams***

In the days of Caesar, when his subjects went to be reckoned,  
there was a poem made, too dark for him (naive with power) to read.  
It was a bunch of shepherds who discovered  
in Bethlehem of Judah, the great music beyond reason and reckoning:  
shepherds, the sort of folk who leave the ninety-nine behind  
so as to bring the stray back home, they heard it clear,  
the subtle assonances of the day, dawning towards cock-crow,  
the birthday of the Lamb of God, shepherd of mortals.

Well, little people, and my little nation, can you see  
the secret buried in you, that no caesar ever captures in his lists?  
Will not the shepherds come to fetch us in our desert,  
gathering us in to give us birth again, weaving us into one  
in a song heard in the sky over Bethlehem?  
He seeks us out as wordhoard to his workmanship, the laureate of heaven.

**from *Time is Man's Angel*, Ronald Blythe, *The Circling Year***

Religion places time and timelessness together - places them in parallel. Not that they can stay together for very long. Our time runs out, our timelessness runs nowhere, for that is its property. It just is. When God became man in order to enter what he had created, being now human, he experienced time. The Incarnation was God's experience of being born, growing up, becoming native to a particular country, being loved by a particular family, becoming a teacher and a spiritual healer who challenged local laws and customs and having to endure local justice. All this within the bounds of time. The Gospels are most careful to state when and where Jesus was born in time. 'Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King...' 'And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed, and this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria...' The historical Jesus, as the biographers call him, is set fairly and squarely within his times, just as each of us is, courtesy of birth certificates, bank accounts, national health cards and passports. Not to mention the Baptism register. Here we are, on the earth, fully documented and date-stamped all over. Not to have a spare minute, let alone a spare hour, is a cause of bragging in our village. Congratulate me, the incessantly busy are asking when they tell us, 'I never have a minute to myself', 'I don't have time to turn round,' I just managed to get everything done in time'...

...We have nailed mortal time down to the split second, to the carbon-tested age of a tree-stump put down as a marker in what is now Norfolk which was growing when Abraham pitched his tent at Bethel, and to an exactitude which previous generations would have found a burden For them it was daybreak or noon or evening or night...it was the feast of St Peter...or Christmas ...or maybe one's own birthday...and so life went

on, sans minutes and hours for the most part...then a great gold clock was fixed to the parish church and its hands told every hand when to start and when to stop, and Time rules the roost...

### **Thomas Merton (1915-1968)**

The times are difficult.

They call for courage and faith.

Faith is in the end a lonely virtue.

Lonely especially where a deep and authentic community of love is not an accomplished fact,

but a job to be begun over and over,

as in all Christian communities in general.

Love is not something we get from Mother Church as a child gets milk from a breast;

it also has to be given.

We don't get love if we don't give any...

Christmas is not then just a sweet regression to breast feeding and infancy.

It is a serious and sometimes difficult feast.

Difficult especially if for psychological reasons we fail to grasp the indestructible kernel of hope that is in it.

If we are just looking for a little consolation we may be disappointed.

Let us pray for one another,

love one another in truth,

in the sobriety of earnest Christian hope,

for hope, says Paul,

does not deceive.

### **T.S. Eliot *East Coker***

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you

Which shall be the darkness of God...

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope

For hope would be hope for the the wrong thing; wait without love

For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith

But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

Wait without thought, for you are not yet ready for thought:

So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning,

the wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,

The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy

Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony of death and birth,





Alan Payne, *Darkness (after Rilke)*

Darkness,  
your grand circle engulfs  
all the small bright circles  
of the world. None can withstand you:  
meteors trailing their lights  
through space, this slim  
candle on a shelf.  
All selves  
belong to you, began  
in you. You place  
a hand on my shoulder, shift  
hand to wrist, feel my pulse, your gentleness moves  
me to belief: in  
darkness.

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the whole armour of light, now in the time of mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen