BBC Advent Calendar Day 14

Previous day

A Reflection for Today: *Angels*

Christmas is ... the **angel** saying,**"...to all people."** And that means everybody... everywhere... and that includes you.
(provided by Kate, from 'The Wonder of Christmas' by Derric Johnston)

Today I went for a walk and heard a glorious chorus of sound – the hedgerow was alive with small birds, maybe twenty or so, singing their hearts out, enjoying the winter sunshine. It cheered my heart and brought a smile to my face. At Christmas, we read of the **band of angels** praising God and sharing the good news. A **sole angel** would have had an impact, but a whole band could not be ignored! At this season, at the end of what has been a dark year for many, let us boldly share good news with those around us and let God's message be heard loud and clear. *(Debbie)*

A Prayer for Today

Jesus, help us get ready for your birth. Help us see past the shiny decorations in the shops and to remember that it's your coming we seek

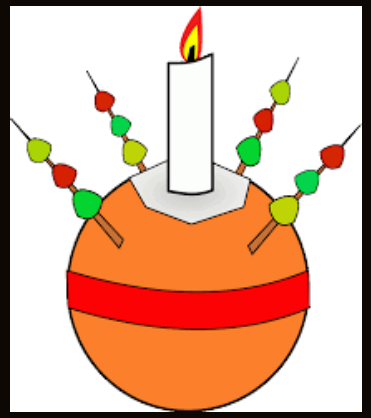
BBC Advent Calendar Day 13

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Light*

The Gospel in a Christingle

The **Christingle** has its origins in a Moravian children's service held in a castle in Germany on Christmas Eve in 1747. Nowadays, churches all over the world make Christingles to remind them that Christ is the **light** who came into the world at Christmas. The Christingle orange represents **the world**. John reminds us that 'Jesus was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (John 1:10-11). The red ribbon of the Christingle represents **the blood of Jesus** which was shed for us so that our sins may be forgiven. 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin' (1 John 1.7).



The fruits and sweets on the four skewers represent **God's gifts** to us, the fruits of the earth and the four seasons. 'As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease' (Genesis 8.22). The lighted candle, pushed into the centre of the orange, represents **Christ, the Light of the world**. 'He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"' (John 8.12).
(Colin)

A Prayer for Today

Lord, thank you for all your promises to us

(Jean W)

BBC Advent Calendar Day 12

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Joy*

Christmas is ... **joy**. Not just because man heard a new song, but because God wrote it and had it sung.

(provided by Kate, from 'The Wonder of Christmas' by Derric Johnston)

Thomas Aquinas said 'Man cannot live without joy…' The greatest miracle of all time has taken place in Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, the **Joy of the World**. Does the beauty of this event not blow your mind? Babies are so delightful and signify the future and our hopes for the continuity of our world. Jesus' birth brought humanity in touch with the marvel of what an awesome God could do to bring hope for the future to all humankind. This should flood our hearts with **Christmas joy**.

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.
(1 Corinthians 2:12)

God came in the human form of a baby to exchange his gift of love and hope with us. So let's ready ourselves with **joy** for this great celebration!

A Prayer for Today

Lord, thank you that you are the Light of the World. At this time of year, when darkness falls early, may every set of Christmas lights make us praise you that you have not left us to stumble in the dark but have come to show us the way home

(Debbie)

BBC Advent Calendar Day 11

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Hope*

What does **home** feel like to you since lock-down? Is it now a place of work or has it become a prison? Once it was a place you came home to at the end of the day, a place where you relaxed, felt loved, wanted and above all a place of peace. It helps us to think of the home that Jesus has promised us, a place that he has gone on ahead of us and has prepared. The disciples had to ask Jesus, "How do we get there?" Jesus replied, "I am the way." We don't need to ask "how do we get there?" Because of the cross, and God's bountiful love and grace, the pathway to the door of heaven leads to an open door where all who believe will enter and abide with the Saviour. When we believe in Jesus we have this **hope** to look forward to. *(Mary)*

"I am the way and the truth and the life" *(John 14:6)*

Hope keeps the heart open to possibility, steady through change, and courageous in challenges, it stands on **faith** and that is the strongest foundation of all *(Elaine)*

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Almighty God, for the good things that have happened this year because of the pandemic. The way we have been able to keep in touch with the help of technology has been amazing. Also, there have been warm smiles from strangers when outside for a walk and kindness and help to others beyond all measure. We thank you for the love and caring that has been shown

(Brenda)

BBC Advent Calendar Day 10

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Obedience*

If we had to sum up the events of the first Christmas in just one word, what would it be? Peace, joy, love, wonder, miracle…? All appropriate words, but my word would be **Obedience**. Christmas is the story of a Father sending a Son, the story of a Son who obeyed his heavenly Father. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:4). Then we have the obedience of Mary. When the angel appeared to her to explain God's plan, Mary could have said, "No way!" But she trusted God and so chose to obey him. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38). Spurgeon said 'Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God; and he that trusts God, obeys God.' Then …an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife…" (Matthew 1:20). Joseph obeyed too, as did the shepherds and the Magi. Can we learn the kind of obedience demonstrated by these people as they played their parts in God's master plan of salvation? *(Tim)*

A quote from C T Studd which really impacted me. Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last. *(Shirley)*

A Prayer for Today

Lord, please remember those who are on their own, nudge us to be generous with our time to keep in contact and to help break up their day

(Jean W)

BBC Advent Calendar Day 9

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Mary*

Many little girls would like to be **Mary** in a Nativity play and hold 'Baby Jesus', but the **real Mary**, the mother of Jesus, was cast in the first 'nativity play' – God's masterpiece production. She always strikes me as being a quiet, calm, humble and loving person. When the events in the Bible took place, **Mary** would probably only have been a teenager, but she had already pleased God and then showed submission and obedience when the angel Gabriel revealed God's plan to her. God then made sure she was not persecuted for being pregnant before marriage by reassuring Joseph in a dream, so that he felt he could marry her. What joy she expressed in the words of the 'Magnificat', but how must she have felt going to Bethlehem, obviously very pregnant? She, of course, put her trust in God, who (with the help of Joseph) got her there safely. Then God provided shelter, seemingly the birth went well and she held her baby in her arms. Later, along came the excited shepherds telling of an amazing visit from angels. But, as most mothers would, 'Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke 2:19) , not knowing what the future held for her son, but surely thinking it must be something special! *(Brenda)*

A Prayer for Today

All-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. May we too place our lives at your disposal and open our hearts to receive and obey the Holy Spirit's promptings

BBC Advent Calendar Day 8

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Carols*

From my early days as a Christian, I have always enjoyed singing **carols**, even though I cannot claim to have the 'voice of an angel'. To me there is little better in Christian worship than to be in a cathedral, church or chapel at Christmastide and join in the rapturous singing of carols in exultation of the Lord God and the birth of the Christ-child. Wassailing around Blackburn has also given me many hours of sublime joy down the years. ***See Amid the Winter's Snow*** is probably my favourite carol. Indeed, hymn-singing in general is awesome and arresting. The Bible testifies to this truth in so many ways: from the Book of Psalms, with its canticle-message, enthusing the reader to 'sing to the LORD a new song!' (96:1), to the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus*, the *Gloria* and the *Nunc Dimittis* of Luke's Gospel, to the Apostle Paul's rallying cry to the Church at Colossae 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord' (3:16), and, finally, to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, with its vision of heaven and innumerable hosts of angels singing the celestial equivalent of Handel's ***Hallelujah Chorus*** in praise of the Lamb (5:8-14, 19:6). If proof is needed that COVID-19 is of the devil, then its destruction of congregational hymn-singing and carolling is surely it! But please find some safe way this Christmas of singing **carols**, whether ancient or modern, in praise of Immanuel, even if it is only singing along to a CD. You owe it to yourself and to the Lord! *(Colin)*

A Prayer for Today

Lord, your word tells us that when one part suffers we all suffer. We pray now for our brothers and sisters across the world who are being persecuted for their faith and we pray for all persecuted people, that your love would be with them.

BBC Advent Calendar Day 7

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Love*

Christmas is cancelled! Yes, all about us is so different this year, but we invite you to join us in celebrating that which remains the same. Christmas is all about the **love** that God has for us in sending Jesus to us as a baby. When all around us is changing we can celebrate a real event in history which cannot be cancelled. When all around us is changing, we can celebrate a **constant and consistent God** who can never change *(Mary)*

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day and forever
(Hebrews 13 verse 8)

You can never truly enjoy Christmas until you can look up into the Father's face and tell him you have received his Christmas **love gift** – his Son

A Prayer for Today

We give thanks to you, Heavenly Father, for the yearly unfolding of the seasons and the beauty around us. Thank you for the freshness of spring, the beauty of summer gardens, the colours of autumn trees and the renewal throughout the winter. For all these things and much more, we give you praise. ***(Brenda)***

BBC Advent Calendar Day 6

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Immanuel*

At Christmas, I love to reflect on one of Jesus' many names: **Immanuel**, which means **'God with us'**. The hope, joy and wonder of the Christmas story rests on the fact that Jesus came to be with us, on Earth. Jesus, the creator and rightful ruler of the universe, was born as a weak, human baby. He came so that he could experience our sufferings and walk with us in them, eventually walking right up to the cross to put an end to them once and for all. In a year like 2020, what greater comfort can there be than to remember that we have a God who is with us in our struggles, and who loves us so much that he stepped into our world, that one day, we might never struggle again? *(Esther)*

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel
(Isaiah 7 verse 14)

A Prayer for Today

Lord, please bless and keep safe all those I know and love. Lord, keep all the NHS workers safe, strong and resilient in these difficult times

(Jean W)

BBC Advent Calendar Day 5

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Peace*

An Advent thought for today: Water falls and is blown into an opaque sheathe across the window in my living room. This happens when the wind comes from the east. Then the intersection of clear glass and clear water combine to make a curdled veil. **Why?** What does water not like about being disturbed? If you hold it perfectly still, it is perfectly clear. But if you throw it, or stir it, or pour it, it becomes a disturbed and opaque. **Am I like water?** Do I need the stillness to see? Do I become a destructive force when there is too much of me, when I am frozen, when I am tossed about? They say, after all, that humans are over 65% water. Maybe I should study my properties more closely this Advent, in order that others and I can see more clearly the coming saviour in my life. *(Paul C)*

Do our lives reflect the peace of God to others?

A Prayer for Today

We remember before you, Lord, the many who are struggling at this time in so many ways. There is physical and mental illness, bereavement, long waits for appointments, job loss, little money, abuse, fear and so much more. We pray for improvement in the world situation as the vaccines come on board and for comfort and help for all those in distress

(Brenda)

BBC Advent Calendar Day 4

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Shepherds*

Shepherds are mentioned many times in the Bible. We read of Abraham, Moses and David all being shepherds, and Jesus is often referred to as **'The Good Shepherd'**. At the time of Jesus, during the warmer part of year, shepherds would be outdoors all the time. Each morning they would call, and the flock of sheep and goats would follow them to pasture ground where the animals could graze. The shepherds would find a pool of water or a well for them to have a drink. In the evening they would count the animals and check their health. At night the shepherds would guard the sheep and goats in open folds, or shelter the flock in a cave where they could protect them from jackals and hyenas. A howl of a hyena could panic a flock and the calm reassuring voice of a shepherd would still them. Shepherds would have worn sheepskin over their tunics. Sandals protected their feet from sharp rocks and thorns, and they wrapped their heads in a woven woollen cloth. Among the things they carried was a sling, which was used to lob stones near the straying sheep or goats to frighten them back to the flock, or to drive off prowling wild animals. *(Brenda)*

How does what the shepherds did remind us of Jesus, the Good Shepherd?

A Prayer for Today

Thank you for the privilege of working as a midwife on Christmas Eve at a maternity unit, when carol singers sang 'Away in a Manger' and the labour ward door was opened just as a baby had been born and was crying!

(Jean W)

BBC Advent Calendar Day 3

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Star*

Christmas is ... **light**. More than the light from a new star. It's the light of God's eternal love shining through the midnight of man's despair.
(provided by Kate, from 'The Wonder of Christmas' by Derric Johnston)

Come, O prince of peace,
Calm our fears, heal our wounds, fulfil our longings.
And in the child of Bethlehem
Break down the walls that divide and hurt us.
May your **star of hope** shine bright and clear
for all who look for light this Christmas.

Wise men followed a **star** to Bethlehem to worship the Son of God. Let's have the same aim this Christmas.

A Prayer for Today

Come Lord Jesus, and let your light shine through us - so that, through our actions, we may be salt for the earth and a light in people's sight. May we reach out with your message of hope, especially those in need

BBC Advent Calendar Day 2

Previous day Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Gifts*

A true Christmas story. I was sitting on a bench seat in Tesco, right next to the food-bank collection point. At the far end of the store I saw an old lady, stooped with age, her hair bedraggled and unkempt, her clothes shabby. Her shoes were thin and looked more like bedroom slippers. She carried an old fashioned bag in one hand. She shuffled towards me and stopped a passing shop assistant and enquired, "Is that the food-bank?" "Yes," was the reply. She shuffled there and I wondered what foodstuffs she would take. But she slowly lifted her bag and emptied everything she had in. Without a moment's hesitation she shuffled out of the shop and was gone from sight. That old lady had come in to buy food, not for herself but for someone that was worse off than her. Yes, I will have a lovely time with my family this Christmas with lots of food to eat, but there is one person that I know who will have a richer Christmas and a place at a heavenly banquet. Jesus said about the widow's mite that she had given more than all the others as they had given out of their surplus, but she had given everything she had. Have a happy and blessed Christmas. *(Bill)*

A Prayer for Today

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of your son, the most precious gift, a reminder of your love for every one of us. May this warm our hearts, even in the darkest days of the year.

(Debbie)

BBC Advent Calendar Day 1

Next day

A Reflection for Today: *Prophecy*

One of the amazing things about the birth of Jesus is the way it fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the **Messiah** – the one who is to come. If you have ever sung Handel's *Messiah*, some of these words will be very familiar to you, and they are often read at Carol Services. A well-known passage is found in **Micah 5:8** where it tells us that the Messiah would be born in **Bethlehem** and that he came from God and existed even before he was physically born. Later, in the New Testament, the early part of John agrees with this. **Isaiah 7:14** tells of birth to a **virgin** which emphasises Jesus' sinlessness and divine origin. It also explains that he is God with us and among us and that he will show us what God the Father is like. **Isaiah 9:6-7** tells us that the child is **born for us** and will give spiritual peace now, but physical peace and his reign will be in the future, and he is described as Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. *(Brenda)*

A Prayer for Today

Lord, help us to be mindful of all those who are suffering for whatever reason and allow them to feel your love and peace over them.

(Jean W)