



Advent and Christmas

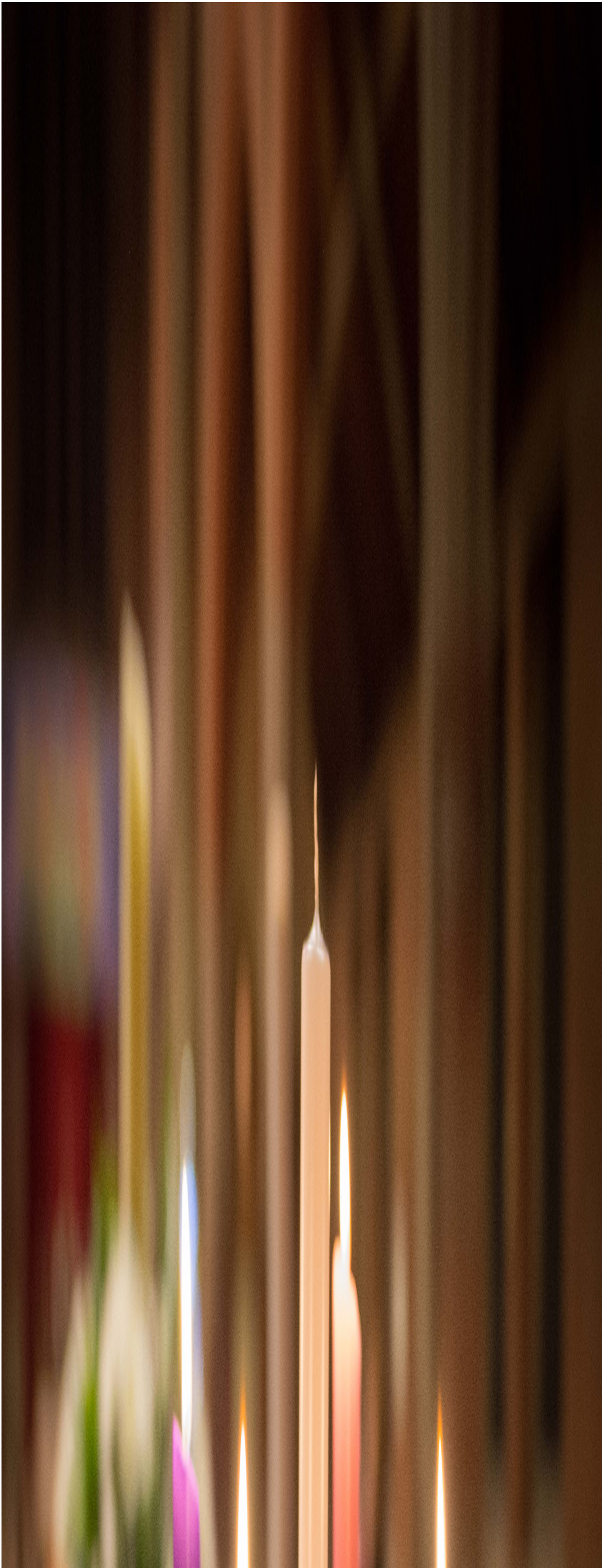
A time for waiting and a moment of great celebration

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Advent marks the beginning of the church year. It is a time for reflection in darkness, for renewal of hope and for a movement towards a beginning.

The season of Advent, as it first emerged in the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries, lasted, like Lent, for 40 days. Later tradition developed the Advent we know today, of four Sundays before Christmas Day.

It is a season of expectation and preparation as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming of Christ. Church decorations are simple and sparse, and purple is the traditional colour used. Advent falls at the darkest time of the year, and the natural symbols of darkness and light are powerfully at work throughout Advent and Christmas.



Lord Jesus, Light of light,

you have come among us.

Help us who live by your light

to shine as lights in your world.

Glory to God in the highest.

Amen.

The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is usually a circle of greenery with five candles rising from it. There are four candles on the outside that are purple (sometimes one is pink) and the candle in the middle is white. The candles are lit in the same order each week so that by the fourth week, the candles have burnt down by different amounts. (The pink candle can be lit on the third Sunday, known as Gaudete or 'Rose Sunday'.)

The custom of Christingles comes from the Moravian church and since the latter part of the twentieth century has become a part of how many churches mark the season (though Christingle services make take place before or after Christmas).

Its success stems from [The Children's Society](#) who encourage and resource churches and schools around the country to hold Christingle services.

What the Christingle Means

- The lit candle represents Jesus being light in the world
- The orange represents the world
- The red ribbon represents the blood of Christ
- The sweets represent all of God's creations







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We celebrate the mystery of God coming to live among humanity as one of us in the person of Jesus, son of Mary, the saviour promised by the prophets of the Old Testament.

This great feast that marks the anniversary of Jesus' birth has inspired the many joyful customs and traditions that we use to mark Christmas.

Many of these - carols, cribs, decorations, and special foods - are shared with and enjoyed by millions of people across the world. But there is more than tinsel, trees and reindeer. There is amazement, wonder and joy here.

The gospel accounts of the first Christmas provide so many ways for us to enter into the mystery of God becoming human. There are hosts of angels filling the night sky with singing; a group of astounded shepherds on a hillside who find their lives and expectations turn upside down; there is a shining star and the birth of a child, which, like many other births before and since, bring hope and possibility.

And the readings for Christmas day - including the prologue to John's gospel - invite us to look beyond the joy of Jesus' birth to the significance of his life, and the saving power of his future death and resurrection.

The season of Christmas lasts for twelve days, culminating in another feast - that of the Epiphany on 6th January, when we recall how Jesus was first revealed to the wider world in the visit of the Magi (or Wise Men).

Matthew: Chapter 1, verses 18-23

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' 22 All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, '**God is with us.**'

Midnight Mass

(Also known as Midnight Eucharist or Midnight Communion)

This is a special service held late on Christmas Eve, and as such is the first communion service of the Christmas season. By having a service at this time we are sharing in the anticipation of the joy of Christmas and celebrating its message of good news by stepping outside our usual tradition of daytime services. The service normally contains carols, a short talk, and the sharing of bread and wine in an act of Holy Communion. Many Christian churches, though not all, hold a service at this time on Christmas Eve. A service of Holy Communion may also be held earlier in the evening, any time after sundown.

At the centre of it is someone who is joy and love, whatever situation you're in, which is Jesus. When we meet Jesus Christ we find love and healing and hope and certainty and an underpinning of our lives that gives us a sense of where we're going and what we're called to be.

Archbishop Justin Welby, 2018

Christmas is a time for enjoying the riches of grace that God lavishes upon us and having fun as a community in the presence of the Lord. It is also important to remember that Christmas can be a very lonely time for some people as not everyone is surrounded by family and friends; some people may be facing Christmas alone without the company of a partner or loved one who has died.

A Christmas prayer

Holy Jesus,
by being born one of us,
and lying humbly in a manger,
you show us how much God loves the world.

Let the light of your love
always shine in our hearts,
until we reach our home in heaven,
and see you on your throne of glory.

Amen.

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