



OUR HOPE

Advent 2019

A season of preparation in which the Church recalls its hope and expectation in the coming of Christ, past, present and future.

Created by Rev Deacon Jeanne Beale and Mel Perkins



What is our hope?

For our planet?
For our country?
For our church?
For ourselves?

Advent is a time of waiting

A year ago, a friend moved into a new house. Much work needed to be done to renovate the house and the garden. He initially had plans to have it well under way within the first year. Things have moved slower than my friend expected. And he learned this has been a good thing. It's given him time to listen to the rhythm of the seasons in this new place where the weather patterns and growing conditions were very different to what he had been used to; to listen to the wisdom of others regarding what plants would grow best; to observe the local birds and see what they need.

After this time of listening, he has made the difficult decision to cut down several native trees in his garden. Difficult because he's observed the birds love them. Difficult because he finds them beautiful and the light filters through the leaves in a way that he finds delightful. But they are not indigenous to the area and others like them have become pests in local bushland only a short distance from his new house (the birds love the seeds too much and help spread the trees widely!).

There is a real cost for my friend in being a good bushland neighbour financially, aesthetically, and through the loss of the birds he's enjoyed while more appropriate plants recover the space. But as I think of his story, I am reminded of a slogan that was popular over 20 years ago: *"Think globally, act locally"*.

My friend is not involved in putting up wind farms or solar energy farms; he does not speak on the global stage. But the changes he is making in his garden will have an impact on the local native bushland close to his house. He is helping to reduce the pressure on it to survive as committed local people work to rehabilitate it back close to its original form. Every action, however small, each of us takes to be more mindful of our environment, and our choices within it, makes a difference.

So, what does this have to do with Advent? In Advent we are called to a time of waiting and watching. Sometimes, it takes time to hear and know how God is calling us to act. We are called to wait and watch and listen carefully. God, through Christ, seeks the renewing of all creation (Col 1:20), not just the human creatures! God calls us into partnership to work towards that renewal now and into the future.

Perhaps with God, we are called to *"Think cosmically, act locally."*

Written by Mel Perkins





The study

The following is a weekly opportunity for individuals or groups to spend time sitting with the Gospel reading set for each of the four weeks of Advent.

This study is intended to invite the reader to journey with the question of hope as it presents itself in the Gospel readings and to explore questions relevant to:

- our planet
- our country
- our church
- ourselves

You may like to consider issues around: the environment, social justice, personal and communal wellbeing, etc.

This preparation could also be utilised for the coming Sunday's prayers of intercession.

At the end of the information for the four weeks of the study, you will find some creative suggestions of things to do alongside the reading and questions.

Suggested process

- Gather over a cuppa and invite the Holy Spirit to journey with you.
- Read the set reading.
- Sit with the weekly question and jot down any thoughts that arise for you from the reading.
- Re-read the reading for any fresh insights (use the same or a different translation).
- Add to your notes.
- Share your responses in the larger group.
- Conclude your sharing with a time of prayer.

Those who are familiar with the form, will recognise this as a modified Lectio divina.



Week 1

Leading up to 1 December

Read Matthew 24:36-44

We need to put “our house” in order before the Son of Man comes ... again and again.

In partnership with God, what do we need to pay attention to, and fix, now and into the future:

- for our planet?
- for our country?
- for our Church?
- for ourselves?

Week 2

Leading up to 8 December

Read Matthew 3:1-12

We bear fruit.

What God-given talents, gifts or fruit do we have to prepare the way for God:

- in our planet?
- in our country?
- in our Church?
- in ourselves?





Week 3

Leading up to 15 December

Read Matthew 11:2-11

We have good news to share.

What do we want to share about the God Story (what have you seen and heard?):

- with our planet?
- with our country?
- with our Church?
- with ourselves?

Week 4

Leading up to 22 December

Read Matthew 1:18-25

The Holy Spirit calls us away from our fears.

How is the Holy Spirit doing this in relation to:

- our planet?
- our country?
- our Church?
- ourselves?





Be creative

Creative suggestions to explore with your study

Make an Advent wreath

Walk around neighbourhood and find material to make an Advent wreath. Add five candles – four blue/purple for each week of Advent and a white one for Christmas. Light them either at mealtimes or bedtime. Your candles may also stand for our planet, country, Church and ourselves (community, family, individual).

Make a kindness Advent calendar

Cut 24 strips, each measuring 6cm x 30cm. Or, cut eight pieces of A4 paper into three equal strips lengthwise (each 7cm wide). Alternatively, you could use paddle-pop sticks – write on them and decorate. Put in a suitably decorated recycled jar or container.

Write on each strip a kind act. Brainstorm ideas as a family/group. Once all strips have an act of kindness written upon it, staple the first one into a circle. From there, loop the next piece of paper around the last loop and staple it to create a chain.

Each day of Advent tear off one ring and read it together. Or, if you are in a group that meets once a week, tear off seven strips and read them together.

Later, if there's been an opportunity to do the act of kindness/es, discuss with the family/group what it was like.

Make your own wrapping paper

Paint your wrapping paper using blue and purple. Then find from magazines or draw/paint your own stars, candles, angels, camels, crowns, wise men and women (from different cultures). Wrap your gifts in your paper creations.

Read the story of Jesus's birth

Tell it in your own words.

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Make your own nativity set using stones

Select at least six flat stones of various sizes. Illustrate your stones, one each of the following:

- The star.
- The stable.
- Jesus.
- Mary and Joseph (or you could make one each).
- The wise men (or you could make one each).
- The wise men's gifts.

Start your nativity scene with Mary and Joseph and add to it as the story unfolds.

Read some Christmas tales and discuss

Two suggestions by Australian authors are:

- Glenda Millard's *Applesauce and the Christmas Miracle*.
- Andrew McDonough's *Lost Sheep* Christmas books.

Explore ideas for your garden

Make it more bird and insect-friendly. Consider the habitat, water and food. What can you create or start growing by Christmas Day?

Buy practical gifts for others in need

Suggested things to consider include water or wells, education and livestock. For more ideas try the [Everything in Common gift catalogue](#).