



## ADVENT 4B

A complete Sunday service ready to use  
for worship and inspire ideas in your church



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**165 STF – Advent candles tell their story OR**

**176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**60 STF – My soul rejoices in God my Saviour OR**

**186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!**

Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

**Hymn:**

**120 STF – We gladly celebrate and praise OR**

**546 STF – Behold the servant of the Lord!**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**464 STF – God it was who said to Abraham OR**

**178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew Christ would come**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**185 STF – Sing we the King who is coming to reign OR**

**187 STF – The Angel Gabriel from heaven came**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

**Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## Call to worship

Advent God, come amongst us.

God of hope, shine your light upon us,

Flickering, like a candle flame,

Advent God, we put our hope in you.

Advent God, we put our hope in you.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

*[As part of your call to worship, or setting the scene for worship, you may wish to play the Vine Video – Incarnate].*

## Hymn:

165 STF – Advent candles tell their story OR

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness

## Opening Prayers

Most High God,  
who left your throne to come down to us,  
to be one of us...

You look us in the eye  
and understand us.

You have compassion on us and you heal us,  
and you love us to bits.

*[Pause]*

You know our failings...  
but your forgiving love will not let us go.

*[Pause]*

Come once again to us...

Give us the heart of a humble servant.

Lift up the lowly,  
Scatter the proud empires of this world,  
and bring down the arrogant structures of power.

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<sup>1</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Your Son, Jesus, has been conceived.  
Let it be.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

This is an extraordinary Christmas – a Christmas like never before.

Amongst the abnormal, the different, the adjustments, we've had to change the plans we had, the last minute re-arrangements as restrictions change and rules have to be updated – amongst all that is 'not as it should be', we have a chance to be a part of something amazing.

This Christmas, God is with us, Immanuel.

This Christmas, as every Christmas, we celebrate the coming of Jesus, in unexpected and remarkable ways.

This Christmas, as we give thanks for God's amazing gift to us in Jesus, we can also use the power of gifts to help others.

Perhaps you've already bought your Christmas presents, and are wrapping them up, thinking of your loved ones. Perhaps you are still giving some thought to what the perfect gift will be. And perhaps, this year, you have the chance to help people in some of the world's poorest communities with your gift.

Our friends at All We Can – the Methodist international development agency – are inviting us to buy an 'Extraordinary Gift' for someone this Christmas. A gift that will help transform the life of someone, or a whole family, in one of the communities where they are working.

For example, you could buy 'Busy Bees' and, for just £14, help an Ethiopian farmer to set up his own bee-keeping and honey business. It could help someone like Nebyou, who with the support of All We Can's local partner in Ethiopia, is already developing and investing in his new business venture, and it is enabling him to bring in valuable income to help feed his family – as well as delicious honey! This gift could provide a family with the materials needed to build a beehive, along with training in bee-keeping. You'll be making an un-bee-lieveable difference!

Let's do something extraordinary this Christmas!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Phil Craine

<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by All We Can

**Hymn:**

60 STF – My soul rejoices in God my Saviour OR

186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

**Readings:** 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

*NB – references to the Romans reading in the reflection below rely on a translation that goes for “strengthen” (NRSV, NLT, ESV, CEV) over “establish” (NIV, KJV)*

**Hymn:**

120 STF – We gladly celebrate and praise OR

546 STF – Behold the servant of the Lord!

**Reflections on the readings**

In the early 1980s and 90s, as well as classics like *Casualty* and *Noel’s House Party*, prime time TV would bring you the joys of the World’s Strongest Man competition where many of us would be rooting for Geoff Capes to bring the title to Britain. The tests were brutal and could give many of us a hernia just watching them, they were real tests of strength for the world’s strongest. Nowadays, we can test the strength of nearly everything with scientific experiments putting the stress on any material you choose.

And yet the one thing that we can’t test, is the inner strength that we all draw on day by day, and that in itself is one of the most deceptive things. Sometimes the people we see as strongest bear some incredible burdens and are near breaking and sometimes those who look as though they should be at breaking point actually show an inner resolve that would put Geoff Capes to shame.

The readings before us speak of someone whose “strength” would reach way beyond his generation, someone who was called to give of her strength and the strength that we receive when the incarnate Christ walks alongside us. Political strength, physical strength and personal strength.

As we look first at the political strength of a king we see a character who at times has not actually been that strong. David has had his moments of real weakness but his faithfulness to God has battled through and at this point in the story he is well and truly settled in at home and, after sorting out his own comfort, he then turns his mind to the ark of the covenant. In his plans to build the Lord something as wonderful as his own house he finds that the Lord has other ideas, looking way into the future when any temple that may have been built will get destroyed numerous times. For God has plans for a home that will be both as temporary and as permanent as the tent that has sufficed so far.

It would be easy, in a Christmas sermon of incarnation, to speak of that home within us and the world right here in 2020, and at this time in particular, to focus on the need for that Christ incarnate in the darkness that we currently see. Instead though, today we are going to look at that moment, part way between the promise to David

and right now, when the prophesy found fulfilment at the birth of the king that would occupy the throne for all eternity.

In fulfilling Nathan's prophesy, the Gospel reminds us of the line of Jesus reaching back to the kingdom of David, a reminder of the strength of Christ in our lives. For the people of Israel the Messiah was to be their saviour from all the tyranny of the world, with a deep expectation he was to come from the line of David. It is against the powers that the world may throw at us today that the strength of the Messiah reigns.

If we are thinking of David's political strength then we may think big – nations seek to build the biggest and best to prove their power and yet we live in an age where we miniaturise everything, and some tiny things can pack quite a punch. All the power of David's realm rested on a baby, the smallest of humans in the person of Jesus, and not only did this baby contain the strength that Nathan prophesied, he contains the full power of God. Around a thousand years earlier the prophet Nathan spoke over David a promise that would stretch beyond his imagination and way past us into eternity. And yet that was all held in this one moment, the political strength of a king and the immeasurable strength of God in the hands of a baby.

And for a baby, that strength had to come from somewhere. This child holds the might of a kingdom, the power of a God and yet in that moment he is powerless and needs the strength of another, and so enters a mother who would pour all of her physical strength into the heart of God. As the angel descended (with angels carrying their own images of strength) and lit up Mary's life another message was given. The message of motherhood.

Every mother has to draw on depths of inner strength both in pregnancy and through the life of the child. At this snapshot in our story, Mary could not have known the amount that she would be called to give and nor the inner strength she would have needed some years later kneeling at the foot of a cross. In the moment before us, the angel utters words that would illicit joy and anxiety, wonder and fear and motherhood begins.

Even though this child was to be God incarnate, no baby can survive pregnancy without it's mother. All that the child needs for life - blood, nutrients and oxygen, the mother pours her strength into the child, giving selflessly for the sake of the one she carries. So this young woman, having not planned for this moment, not yet had those conversations with the one she loves, finds herself giving of herself so that God may live in her and through her. At this moment, God's strength comes from Mary's strength, incarnation possible only through the reserves of a young woman. We rightly applaud Mary as the mother of the most important child to ever be born, and of course in some corners, she is venerated significantly in her role as the "mother of God". Yet Mary is also just another mother, one woman in a long line of the most extraordinary people who give of themselves to give life. And just like every other mother, she has the right to be proud of who her child would become, and of her role in creating a life that would save so many and change the world. We can

sometimes wonder how much of what the angel said actually went in, with such monumental news, did she actually hear the part about him sitting on the throne of David and the Kingdom without end, did she really fathom who he would be come? The reality was that the political strength of a kingdom required the physical strength of a young woman.

If we wanted to critique that last point then we could argue that God's strength did not come from Mary's own personal reserves, but from the Holy Spirit as promised by the Angel. Yet the reading from Romans reminds us that this is available for all of us – our third point is that the personal strength that God gives us for each day is there for all to receive and not just a one off outpouring on Mary as she received the presence of God.

Through his incarnate presence, Jesus brings the power of God into our lives. Walking with us, we know his strength in the day to day, and so many can testify to the fact that they would not get by without the Spirit lifting them each and every day. The image of a massive surge of power comes to mind, something that is so often destructive to the things that fall in its path compared with the slow steady release of power through a battery. In Christ we find that power surge, destructive to all that is within us that is damaging to us – sin for example and our former ways of life, and then we also find the slow and constant release of power through the Holy Spirit that gives us the strength to face our new life.

Romans is one of Paul's more pastoral letters (as opposed to his "telling off" letters) but does still challenge the readers, building them up in their faith. Right at the end, he chooses his closing words to offer them the strength through Christ for this life of faith that he calls them to. He has just done the final greetings, which is usually a good place to stop, but then he returns to a warning about divisions and stumbling blocks, before guiding them back to Christ, "the one who is able to strengthen you". Sometimes we find ourselves more in need of this strength than at other times. This is going to be a tough Christmas for many, whether it is the challenge of making the best with so little because of furlough and layoffs, whether it is the inability to be with ones we love so dearly, or the ongoing mental health challenges that come with the current situation, this will be tough and we will draw on the personal strength that comes from Christ so much more. Christ is incarnate in the darkest places, walking with us and taking our hand when we need him most, and still ever present in the times when we don't notice him, just as the baby relies on that constant flow from the mother, so we rely on Christ each and every day for strength.

As we enter the final approach to what will be a tough Christmas, we are reminded that we are celebrating the birth of a King with all the political strength of a nation upon his shoulders. We remember that we could not celebrate this incarnate presence without the physical strength of a young woman poured out into the Christ child she bore. And we remember that by this birth, God incarnate in the world, we are given the personal strength that enables us to live each day. So, may we go in

the strength of the Lord.  
Amen.<sup>4</sup>

**Hymn:**

464 STF – God it was who said to Abraham OR

178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew Christ would come

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord of Refuge and Shelter

We pray for those who have found themselves homeless or fleeing from their homes. We pray that you would protect those people and look after them. We pray that we would have compassion towards those who find themselves without a home.

*[Pause]*

Lord you are Unfailing and Endless

We pray that you would be with those who find the thought of the future worrying and fearful. We pray that you would comfort them and help them find joy in the day-to-day. We pray for school children and university students who have been impacted by Covid's uncertainties. Help them to find peace in you.

*[Pause]*

Holy and Mighty Lord

We pray this Christmas-time, that people would come to know you and the goodness and joy that you bring. We pray that like the shepherds were in awe of Baby Jesus, that we too, would be in awe of your kingdom and your holiness.

*[Pause]*

Lord, you are Eternal and Wise

We pray for our government, navigating the troubles of this year with Covid, and any other issues that we are facing. We pray that you would give them discernment and wisdom. We thank you that ultimately you reign, and yours is the kingdom, now and forever.

*[Pause]*

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

**We will now take up the offering.**

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Phil Jackson

<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Alice Young



## **Blessing the offering**

Living God, accept these gifts of money, and also the gifts of our lives. As we celebrate the greatest gift to us, help us to be transformed by your love and give generously of ourselves, that your kingdom may come, your will be done.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

## **Hymn:**

185 STF – Sing we the King who is coming to reign OR

187 STF – The Angel Gabriel from heaven came

## **Blessing**

Enter into this Christmas with a fierce hope in your hearts – this world, this neighbourhood, this church, and each of us, can become a better, more hopeful, more peaceful, more loving place, by the grace of the Christmas God.

Go in peace, and build the kingdom.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker