

Advent Prayer

When the world is given time to wait
and it doesn't
when God's people are offered space to hope
and they don't
when the nations are given reason to move towards peace
and they won't
In flesh
come to us O God
in human form and human kind
and live among us
and meet us on the way

When the world is given a promise to hear
and it doesn't
when God's people are offered words of transformation
and they don't
when the nations are given the chance of recreation
and they won't
In word
come among us O God
in prophecy and promise
and unstop our ears
and be God's Word revealed

When the world is given a light to live by
and it doesn't
when God's People are offered a message to proclaim
and they don't
when the nations are given a moment to change
and they won't
In justice
come among us O God
in flesh and in pain
and hold the suffering of the world
making all things new

When the world doesn't hear
and God's People do not understand
and the nations turn their back
come to us
be born in us
in forgiveness and grace
heaven's Incarnation
the revelation of truth
among us

So be it
Amen

...rgh
...8th December 2006

...waiting
...advent
...missing chances
...from the Bible, Luke 1:67-79 (Advent 2C)

Breaking Silence

An Advent Affirmation of belief based on Zechariah's silence. Five different readers each carrying a lit candle which they snuff out during the first stanza each time and then relight during the singing following their words. A soloist sings a verse from "Longing for light" each time (Bernadette Farrell) and the congregation sings the chorus.

Voice 1	<p>I have been silenced by my disbelief. I thought, "Where is God? God is silent. God has turned the divine back on us, and we are left in the silence." <i>(Blow out candle)</i></p>
	<p>But in amongst this silence, a son is being born, a promise is being fulfilled, a prophecy is being foretold. In the impossibility of my disbelief, God is doing a new thing. We have not been forgotten.</p>
	<p>And my silence is broken with song. <i>(light candle during singing and take away)</i></p>
	<p><i>Christ be our light Verse 1 solo</i> <i>Chorus everyone</i></p>
Voice 2	<p>I have been silenced by the horror of conflict. I thought, "There is no God here. Pain and suffering, yes, but not God. Only the silence of God, left by the terror of war. <i>(Blow out candle)</i></p>
	<p>But in amongst this pain, a promise is being fulfilled, a prophecy is being foretold. In the impossibility of war, God is speaking of a new thing. We have not been forgotten.</p>
	<p>And my silence will break with peace. <i>(light candle during singing and take away)</i></p>
	<p><i>Christ be our light Verse 2 solo</i> <i>Chorus everyone</i></p>
Voice 3	<p>I have been silenced by the iniquity between those who have food on their table, and those who have to grow it but never taste it. Of a prejudice of power against the hungry nations, and I am speechless at its audacity, and of the God who remains silent amid it all. <i>(Blow out candle)</i></p>
	<p>But in amongst this hungering and thirsting for righteousness, a promise is being fulfilled, a prophecy being foretold. In the impossibility of sharing, God is speaking of a new thing. We have not been forgotten.</p>

And my silence will break with the banquet call.
(light candle during singing and take away)

Christ be our light Verse 3 solo
Chorus everyone

Voice 4 I have been silenced by injustice,
and think, "Where is God found
among the displaced and orphaned
because of conflict, asylum and HIV/AIDS.
God has moved out, and left us silenced."
(Blow out candle)

But in among this a son is being born,
a promise is being fulfilled,
a prophecy is being foretold.
In the impossibility of injustice,
God is doing a new thing.
We have not been forgotten.

And my silence will be broken by justice.
(light candle during singing and take away)

Christ be our light Verse 4 solo
Chorus everyone

Voice 5 I have been silenced by incarnation.
(Blow out candle)

But this God has broken silence,
not with empty words,
but by the living word:
in the body of Christ whose voice calls in protest,
in the journey of God's People that is made towards peace ,
in the choice taken by followers for trade that is fair,
in the life of the church that is lived in justice,
in the question of every disciple that asks for the widow & orphan.

In my silence God speaks,
a prophecy being foretold,
a child is being born,
for in the impossibility of incarnation,
God is doing a new thing.
We have not been forgotten.

And my silence is broken by promise.
(light candle during singing and take away)

Christ be our light Verse 5 solo
Chorus everyone

...rgh
...8th December 2006

...silence
...promise
...Incarnating the Word
...from the Bible, Luke 1:67-79 (Advent 2C)

How does it happen?

Read by two voices with “Hark the Glad sound” or some other traditional advent hymn played in the background, to be sung immediately following. The italic stanza connects the weeks throughout advent as a larger, brighter star is added each week to our banners, moving closer to the chancel.

*The star slips through the sky still,
larger,
closer,
brighter.
And from “what” comes the “how”...*

How does it happen...
that an unknown girl
becomes the handmaid of God?

How does it happen
that the news of a birth
becomes a song of liberation

How does it happen...
that the ancient promise
becomes a kick in the womb?

How does it happen...
that the proclamation of prophets
becomes the bawl of a baby?

How does it happen...
that the one of all power
becomes vulnerable in life

How does it happen...
that the bondage of nations
becomes the Advent of God?

...rgh
...13th December 2006

...Incarnation
...Change
...Fulfillment
...from the Bible, Luke 1:39-55 (Advent 3C)

The Annunciation

Gabriel sits down on a stool beside Mary. Neither knows who each other is. Mary is dressed traditionally, Gabriel in anorak and jeans.

- Gabriel Is this seat free?
I'd love a wee rest.
- Mary Help yourself.
- Gabriel *(talking to himself and taking out a map)*
Thanks.
Now let me see, where should I start?
I knew this was never going to be easy,
So few instructions.
It'll be fine, they said.
But they aren't the ones having to get the post through.
- Mary Can I help you?
- Gabriel If only you could.
I'm trying to find someone.
- Mary Anyone in particular?
- Gabriel Well, yes, in actual fact.
Someone very particular.
I'm here to spring a surprise,
though I'm not sure how she'll take it.
- Mary Like a singing birthday telegramme?
- Gabriel Well no, not a bit like that at all.
- Mary Oh.
And you don't know where they stay.
- Gabriel Oh yes, I know where she stays exactly,
but she isn't in at the moment.
A fine time to be out.
The neighbours told me she was down here in the market somewhere.
- Mary It is kind of busy to look for her here.
What does she look like?
- Gabriel Well, that's a bit of a problem because I don't know.
This is such a haphazard way of delivering messages.
"Go down to Narazeth," they said,
"and there you will find..."
Well, all I've found is an empty house,
a busy market place,
and me running out of time.
- Mary Would you like me to deliver the message for you.
I'm sure I'll remember.
- Gabriel If you heard it, I'll be sure you'll never forget. You see between you and me I've
got a message for a young girl that she's going to have a baby.
- Mary How Lovely!
She'll be so excited.

You'd better hurry and find her.
Isn't she expecting to hear from you?

Gabriel Well, no, not exactly.
She's not expecting anything, not me, not a message, and certainly not a baby.
She knows nothing about it.

Mary Nothing?

Gabriel Nothing.
As I said, it's a bit of a surprise.

Mary That's a bit of an understatement.
Typical man.

Gabriel It does make it a little awkward certainly,
but I'm sure she'll come round.

Mary Really?

Gabriel Well, wouldn't you?

Mary No, I don't think I would.
You don't just apply for a baby and expect it here by post the next week.
It's a big thing, you ought to be ready for the child,
live with a little hope because of it,
recognise the good things it will bring,
believe the world can change through this baby.

Gabriel I never thought of it like that.

Mary Why am I not surprised!

Gabriel But you see this pregnancy is a bit different, it's not quite above board.

Mary Oh do tell me more! This is getting interesting.

Gabriel Well, and mind you keep this to yourself, this baby is heaven's own.
It's full of promise and hope.
It's going to be a sign that things will change.

Mary Can't every birth be like that?

Gabriel True, but this is God-breathed.
This is miraculous,
This is beyond this world.

Mary U-huh, like every birth.

Gabriel You're not getting my drift.
There's no father but God.
There's no man involved.

Mary If only!

Gabriel No, really.
This life comes from heaven.
It's salvation in the flesh.
It's God doing something in the world,
transforming it,
turning all the prophecies about redemption into reality.

Mary		Are you sure you are in the right place?
Gabriel		Absolutely. Anyway, I really must be going, I've got to find Mary and give her the news. I'm sorry, I never introduced myself, I'm the angel Gabriel, and you are...
Mary		Mary!?

...rgh
...8th December 2006

...Annunciation
...Nativity
...Messengers
...from the Bible, Luke's Nativity

The Conversation

Mary and Joseph are sitting facing each other.

Joseph	But Mary?!
Mary	But what?
Joseph	But how?
Mary	But it just is!
Joseph	But it can't be!
Mary	But it is!
Joseph	But it can't be!!
Mary	But it is!!
Joseph	But no!
Mary	But yes!
Joseph	But how?
Mary	But I don't know?!
Joseph	But you must?
Mary	But I don't!
Joseph	But an angel!?
Mary	But an angel!
Joseph	But how?
Mary	But don't go there!
Joseph	But not me? (<i>disappointingly</i>)
Mary	But not you (<i>sympathetically</i>)
Joseph	But are you sure?
Mary	Joseph!!!
Joseph	But what will we do?
Mary	But what can we do?
Joseph	But we should get married!
Mary	But when?
Joseph	But soon?
Mary	But who?
Joseph	But where?
Mary	Now?
Joseph	No buts there!
Mary	But are you sure?
Joseph	But is there a choice?
Mary	But what will people say?
Joseph	But do we care!
Mary	But I'm scared?
Joseph	But don't be?
Mary	But why not?

Joseph | But God seems in charge!
Mary | But do you believe me? (*surprised*)
Joseph | But why not?
Mary | But really?
Joseph | But really!
Mary | But Joseph. (*relieved*)
Joseph | But Mary.
Mary | But what will we do?
Joseph | No more buts, just trust.
Mary | Just trust?
Joseph | Just that!
Mary | Just that?
Joseph | Just that!
Mary | Just a bit worried.
Joseph | Just a bit! (*both begin to wander off*)
Mary | Just hope things are okay?
Joseph | Just come on!
Mary | Just now?
Joseph | Just now!

...rgh
...10th December 2006

...Discussion
...Wonder
...Trust
...from the Bible, Matthew's Nativity

The Message

A mime artists follows through their interpretation of the suggested actions in response to various well-known pieces of music being played live if possible.

Music: While humble shepherds

Shepherd making self comfortable.
Yawns
Slumps shoulders

Looks at nails and back of hand
Looks around

Rest head in hands
Begins to fall asleep
Nodding off

Music: Rumble

Shepherd jars self awake
Looks around

Music: While humble shepherds

Shepherd begins to fall asleep
Nods off

Music: Rumble

Shepherd staggers with fright
Looks under hay stack
Behind hay stack
Out to congregation as if saying, "Did you make that noise?"

Music: While humble shepherds

Shepherd makes self comfortable
Settles down

Music: Hallelujah Chorus

Shepherd bounces off hay stack
End up on bottom of the ground

Looks out to congregation
Face in shock
Scared, with hands out front
Cowers down on knees

Music: Hark the herald

Looks up
Face relaxes

Points to self as if, "Me?"
Then shakes hands and heads saying "No, do you expect me to believe that?"

Continues the dialogue between “Me” and “No, I can’t believe that”

Look at watch as if going on too long
Look disbelievingly at it
Listen to it
Shake it

Music: Hallelujah Chorus

Cowers again in fright
Cover eyes because of the light

Strain to see better
Begin counting the angels that have just arrived
Give up

Music: O Little Town

Point incredulously off stage as if saying, “Bethlehem? No way?”
Then “Me? Surely not?”

Music: In the bleak

Shiver with arms round you as if making an excuse
Yawn as if another excuse
Limp as if yet another excuse

Music: Away in a manger

Reluctantly accept you’ve to go by miming “Shucks”
Put on a cloak
Pick up staff
Cuddly toy
Nappies
And walk down aisle

...rgh
...12th December 2006

...Shepherds
...Nativity
...Debate
...from the Bible, Luke’s Nativity

The Conscience

One character plays this monologue but their conscience make up the other two characters known at “the three wise men”. Even though the story never mentions number, kingship or anything else about the scholars, this plays with that tradition to illustrate making your mind up about choosing to follow.

<i>Facing centre</i>	Well, I could follow that star, Or I could stay at home.
<i>Facing left</i>	On the one hand, if I followed the star I would be a while away from home. I'd have to leave things behind for quite a while.
<i>Facing right</i>	On the other hand, of course, It's the chance of a lifetime. Imagining finding a new star. It's not something you ignore. You have to follow that do you not?
<i>Facing centre</i>	It's a big decision I'll need to weigh up. If only both sides of my conscience knew the wise thing to do. If only I knew the wise things to do. That would make three wise men. We'd get nowhere making a decision.
<i>Facing centre</i>	And what would I take? What do you take on a journey like this? I'm not sure what it is all about.
<i>Facing left</i>	On the one hand I should be practical. I need to think of what I'd need for the journey: Food and shelter, Money and clothes, Camels and tents.
<i>Facing right</i>	On the other hand It would be pointless going on a journey Only to arrive with the wrong things. I should be thinking about gifts. Who knows what's at the journey's end But what I take should be worthy of the destination.
<i>Facing centre</i>	Big decisions. I'll write a list. This is like three people trying to make one decision. I'll never get organised.
<i>Facing centre</i>	And if I were to take some gift, What should it be?
<i>Facing left</i>	On the one hand gold would be fabulous. Such a rich gift. Fit for a king. And who knows, if a new star appears in the sky, It must be about something royal.
<i>Facing right</i>	On the other hand, Myrrh may be a good choice. Very expensive. And good for anointing It's something you could use, unlike gold that just sits there

<i>Facing centre</i>	But then, Maybe frankincense would be better. Oh, I don't know! One part of me says this, And another part of me says this, Maybe I should just take all three.
<i>Facing centre</i>	And how will I find my way? It's all very well setting off on a journey, But what direction should I go in?
<i>Facing left</i>	One voice in my head is saying, "Just go with the flow, Follow the star. Journey in the evening and at night. Make it an adventure. Trust the sign."
<i>Facing right</i>	And another voice is saying, "Ask when you get there. If it is a king you've to find, Seek out another king Who will know."
<i>Facing centre</i>	And then maybe I should be prepared to do both: Journey and seek out, Follow the star and ask directions when I need to. This is like having a three way conversation with myself: Three wise men in my own head. It's a bit crowded.
<i>Facing left</i>	"Yes, I should go," says one voice.
<i>Facing right</i>	"No, you should stay" says a second voice.
<i>Facing centre</i>	"Sleep on it," says a third. I'll just take a wee look at that star again. Hey it's moved over the horizon! Better go and check it out. I'll be back before bedtime. But I'll just put these gifts in my pocket just in case...

...rgh
...13th December 2006

...Choices
...Journey
...Taking chances
...from the Bible, Matthew's nativity

The Pondering

Mary sitting with a lit candle on stage and the narrator off stage.

Narrator	And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
Mary	My Spirit soars, and everything inside me clenches as heaven finds a foothold within me binding itself to me, flesh of my flesh, life from my life, and the promise awakens.
Narrator	From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.
Mary	My heart thuds, scared of what is becoming of a mighty God buried within me, flesh of my flesh. How can my small form contain the full on hope of a nation, yet still, in me, the promise awakes.
Narrator	His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
Mary	My lungs fill with the breath of life, for now I breathe not only for myself, but for God too, tucked away within me, flesh of my flesh, cooied away from this world for a short moment, by my skin, as the promise awakens.
Narrator	He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.
Mary	My throat sings a song of justice and liberation, of the rich left out in the cold, and the poor gathered round a feasting table,

as flesh of my flesh
stirs and kicks with life,
and the promise awakens.

Narrator He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers."

Mary My skin shines
as my God within me stretches,
labouring in the name of justice,
labouring in the name of peace.
Flesh of my flesh,
becomes God of very God,
as the promise,
the choice my God has made in me,
awakens and pushes into the world.

...rgh
...13th December 2006

...Magnificat
...Incarnation
...Advent
...from the Bible, Luke's Nativity

Proclama mi alma la grandeze del Señor

Two women read this. The Spanish version spoken in the background continually, repeating if necessary. The other voice breaks in with each stanza in a laboured, heavy sort of presentation. Slow, heavy music is played in the background (aka Jeff Buckley, Hallelujah). Play the music during the introduction too.

This week we heard about the death of Augusto Pinochet of Chile, one of many Latin American D dictators who found the worlds of Mary too pointed, too direct, to frightening, and banned them. But that never stopped the women of Chile, whose husbands had been disappeared, to speak them openly in the squares, directing Mary's words to those in power as they spoke them. You'll hear the Magnificat in Spanish, the language of those mothers and wives with English words spoken alongside not to interpret them, but to give them meaning, to speak for them when these others had been silenced. And to affirm what Mary did, in choosing to become God's handmaid.

Voice 1 <i>Continues reading this throughout</i>	Proclama mi alma la grandeza del Señor, se alegra mi espíritu en Dios mi Salvador, * porque ha mirado la humillación de su esclava. Desde ahora me felicitarán todas las generaciones, * porque el Poderoso ha hecho obras grandes por mi; su Nombre es santo. Su misericordia llega a sus fieles, * de generación en generación. El hace proezas con su brazo; dispersa a los soberbios de corazón. Derriba del trono a los poderosos, y enaltece a los humildes. A los hambrientos los colma de bienes, * y a los ricos despide vacíos. Auxilia a Israel, su siervo, * acordándose de la misericordia, Como lo había prometido a nuestros padres, * en favor de Abrahán y su descendencia para siempre.
Voice 2	My soul glorifies God. Hear, O my sisters, who labour under the weight of womanhood, my brothers who cling on to decency scraped out from the fragile earth.
Voice 2	My soul glorifies God. Hear, O my sisters, whose husbands have been disappeared and whose sons have no language for the fear they are left with.
Voice 2	My soul glorifies God. Hear all you who are weighed with broken hallelujahs, whose world is trapped in a deception of abuse and prejudice.
Voice 2	My soul glorifies God. Hear all you caught up with your enemy, who have struggled with the reason for war too long, and found it absurd.
Voice 2	My soul glorifies God. God has at last chosen a handmaid in me, and has a craving to birth hope within me, ravenous to elevate freedom, set free liberation, and pronounce justice for the poor, thirsty to bring from my womb life to all our longings. God as appointed the time and the place,

the woman and the womb.
Hear O my sisters.
Hear O my brothers.

And tell yourselves,
tell the world,
tell God,

I say,

yes!

...rgh
...14th December 2006

...Magnificat
...Justice
...Disappeared
...Choice
...from the Bible, Luke 1:39-55 (Advent 4C)

Benediction

Light came into the world and said,
“I will crush your darkness.”
Justice came into the world and said,
“I will proclaim your freedom.”
Peace came into the world and said,
“I will turn your conflict.”
The Word came into the world and said,
“I will call your name.”
Love came into the world and said,
“I will share your life, always.”

...rgh
...22nd December 2006

...Incarnation
...Arrival
...Sending
...from the Bible, John 1:1-18 (Christmas Eve C)

Christ is born

For that moment when Christmas Eve turns into Christmas Day

No so much in the glory of kings
but the fear of motherhood,

Not so much in the announcement of court circulars
but on the breath of angels,

Not so much in the pages of Scripture
but in the streets of Clydebank,

Not so much in the doctrines of the church
but into the lives of the poor,

Not so much in a silent night
but in the strife of Palestine,

Not so much in the quiet of a stable
but into the terror of the world,

Christ is born.
God has become one of us.
The Prince of Peace is here.

...rgh
...23rd December 2006

...Incarnation
...Christmas Day
...Upside Down God
...from the Bible, John 1:1-18 (Christmas Day C)

A time for everything

Images from the past year are projected as people gather for this gathering rite.

- Voice 1 And so as the year plays out
 across the world
 God's People
 in their infinite variety and wonder
 have journeyed on
 amid highs and lows.
- Voice 2 There is a time for brokenness and a time for wholeness;
 a time to be and a time not to be.
- Voice 1 As the days fade
 and time shifts,
 God's People have seen wonder and tragedy.
 The texture of life
 has been both it's beauty
 and bitterness.
- Voice 2 There is a time for "Alleluia!" and a time for "How Long?";
 A time to be lost for words and a time to find them.
- Voice 1 And as the year turns to a grey dusk
 the planet has turned,
 it's evolution ever onward
 with a nature that grips God's People
 in both mystery and in protest.
- Voice 2 There is a time to be shaped by wonder and a time to shape a question;
 A time to seek out and a time to leave alone.
- Voice 1 And at the tail end of the year's time
 when for us the darkness is long
 it is then the promise breaks through;
 when our story is told,
 and we wonder what can be left for us
 Incarnation changes everything.
- Voice 2 There is a time of endings and a time of rebirth;
 a time for promise and a time for it's fulfillment.
- Voice 1 In the last echo of the year,
 the ancient prophecy is fulfilled:
 a Saviour is born to us;
 a child shall lead us.
- As we journey through the cusp of the year
 let us worship the God who calls us on.

...rgh
...28th December 2006

...New Year
...Time
...History
...from the Bible, Luke 2:41-52 (Christmas 1C)

New Year Blessing

The year swings round:
from the old,
always comes the new;
from the darkness,
always comes the light;
from each death,
always comes new life;
God is in all things,
transforming all things.
Let us go into the world
and celebrate this renewing,
recreating,
resurrecting God.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
The Love of God
and the Commonwealth of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all
Evermore.

Amen
And again, Amen

...rgh
...29th December 2006

...New Year
...Renewal
...Celebration

...from the Bible, Luke 2:41-52 (Christmas 1C)