



## **Reflections for Advent 2016**

by Anne Le Bas

St Peter and St Paul, Seal

# One Word

Less is more, so they say, and that's especially true in Advent.

At a time of year when the world can feel very noisy and demanding, we can easily feel overwhelmed. Yet, what God did at Christmas was essentially very simple. One baby, born to one family, in one specific place, at one specific time.

That's why this year our daily meditations will focus on just one word a day, one Advent word that will help us prepare to celebrate the birth of the Word made flesh, Jesus. There will be a few questions each day to prompt your thoughts or discussions.

You can ponder these Advent words on your own, or talk about them with others. There's an accompanying colouring sheet for you to fill if you'd like to as well, perhaps writing the word in each day's space, or representing it in some other way, It's up to you.

The series starts on December 1, though Advent really begins on the Sunday before, and runs through to Christmas Eve. It doesn't matter, though, if you get behind. Take as long as you need over each word.

Anne Le Bas  
Advent 2016

Advent God,  
we journey with you,  
to Bethlehem's stable  
and a new-born King,  
ears attuned  
to the song of angels,  
eyes alert  
for Bethlehem's star.  
Forgive us  
if on our journey  
if we are distracted  
by the tempting offers  
of this world.  
Keep our hearts aflame  
with the hope  
of Christmas,  
and the promise  
of a Saviour. Amen

John Birch [www.faithandworship.com](http://www.faithandworship.com)

Dec 1

# Expect

*Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.  
Luke 2.5:*

- When did you last expect something? Was it a good or a bad feeling? Did what you expect happen?
- Have you ever expected a child (your own or that of a partner or someone close to you)? What did it feel like? What did you know, or not know about the child to be born? What did you expect them to be like and how did you think they would change your life?
- What do you think Mary and Joseph expected from Jesus?
- What are you expecting from today and tomorrow?

Dec 2

# Silence

*When Zechariah came out, he could not speak to the people, and they realised that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak.*

*Luke 1.22*

- Zechariah was rendered silent because an angel had told him his wife, Elizabeth, was expecting a child – John the Baptist - long after it should have been possible for this childless couple. Have you ever been so stunned you couldn't speak?
- How do you feel about silence? Do you seek it out or avoid it?
- What might it be like not to be able to communicate?
- Zechariah could listen during this time, but not speak. What might be good about this? Do you speak too much and listen too little?

Dec 3

# Hope

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*

*Jeremiah 29.11:*

- The birth of Jesus brought hope to people who were in despair, living under the often harsh rule of Rome. Think about the world now. Who might be feeling like this today?
- What do you think is hopeful about the Christmas story? Why is it a story of hope?
- Are you a hopeful person?
- What plans do you think God might have for your life?

Dec 4

# Child

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them. Isaiah 11.6*

- Children were symbols of vulnerability and powerlessness in the times of the Bible, because that was the reality of their lives. What words or phrases do you associate with the word “child”?
- If you could describe your childhood in three words, what would they be?
- *“A little child shall lead them”*. Jesus didn’t come as a mighty warrior, but as a little child. What difference should that make to Christian faith?
- What lead might the children in our lives and our world be trying to give us today? How can we listen to them better?

Dec 5

# Danger

*Now after the Magi had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.'*  
*Matthew 2.13*

- Jesus was born into danger. In Matthew's Gospel, he is at risk from King Herod; in Luke's Gospel he is born homeless, as a result of the decision of the far-off Roman Emperor who orders a census which necessitates a long journey away from home. What dangers do you think he and his family faced?
- What dangers do you think the world today faces? Which do you think is our greatest danger?
- Are you good in a crisis? What lessons has your life taught you to help you cope with danger?



Dec 6

# Peace

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'*  
Luke 2.13-14

- How would you define peace? What does it mean to you?
- When in your life have you felt most deeply at peace? When have you felt furthest from it?
- The peace the angels promised to the shepherds wasn't an absence of trouble; there was plenty of that in the lives of Jesus and his followers, including his painful death on the cross. It was the knowledge that they were securely held in the love of God, whatever happened. How secure do you feel in God's love?

Dec 7

# Fear

*Then an angel of the Lord stood before the shepherds and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said, "do not be afraid, for see- I am bringing you good news of great joy.*

*Luke 2.9-10.*

*[When King Herod heard that the Wise Men had arrived] he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him. Matthew 2.3*

- When were you last afraid, and why?
- What helps you to deal with your fears?
- Have you ever been afraid of something it turned out you didn't need to fear?
- Fear can be a warning, and a necessary challenge (as it is to King Herod). Can you think of a time when it has been good that you were afraid, or when you should have been, but weren't?

Dec 8

# Manger

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger... Luke 2.7*

- Where do you sleep best? Have you ever fallen asleep in an unlikely place?
- Where did you sleep as a child, and what was your sleep like?
- What would it be like to sleep in a manger, or to put your child to sleep in a manger?
- What do you think the animals, and those who looked after the animals, thought of this?

Dec 9

# Born

*...to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

*Luke 2.11*

- Have you given birth or been present at, or shortly after a birth. What was it like to greet a new-born child? What did you think and feel?
- What stories do you know about your own birth – maybe there are some photos? What do you know about how others felt about your birth?
- If you could say one thing to a new-born child today, what would it be?
- John's Gospel says "*what has come into being in Christ, is life, and the life is the light of all people*" *John 1.4*. What do you think this means? What came into being through your birth?

Dec 10

# Journey

*All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem...to be registered with Mary.  
Luke 2.3-4*

- There are many journeys in the nativity story. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, her cousin, when she hears she is pregnant. She and Joseph travel to Bethlehem. The wise men come from the east, following the star. Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee to Egypt to escape Herod. How might it have felt to make these journeys?
- Do you like travelling, or do you prefer to stay at home? Why?
- Have you ever had to make a journey you didn't want to make? Why was that, and what happened?

Dec 11

# Room

*..there was no room for them at the inn.*

*Luke 2.7*

- Biblical commentators argue about why there was “no room”, and what exactly the “inn” was – a guest room in a relative’s house? a public lodging place? – but the outcome is the same. There was no room for Mary, Joseph and their new-born son. Why do you think this detail in Luke’s story is important?
- Have you ever felt squeezed out or excluded? What did it feel like and what did you do?
- Where do you feel you really “belong” – the place where when you go there, you know there will always be room for you?
- Who might we treat as if there is “no room” for them, in our families, workplaces, communities and world? What might that feel like?

Dec 12

# Chosen

*Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant." Luke 1.46-48*

- Mary was astonished to have been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. Have you ever been surprised to be chosen for a special role?
- Have you ever wanted to be chosen, but not been?
- Have you ever had to do the choosing – making a job appointment, choosing a life partner etc.? How did you make the choice and how did it feel? What were you looking for, and how did you know you'd found it?
- Mary says that God has "looked with favour on her lowliness". Are the qualifications we look for always the right ones? Do we overlook people who don't push themselves forward?

Dec 13

# King

*The wise men asked Herod, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?"*

*Matthew 2.2*

- The wise men's question to King Herod sent him into a panic, which turned to murderous rage. Have you ever felt threatened by someone you thought had their eye on "your" job or position? What did you do?
- What images does the word "king" create in your mind?
- Who has authority over you in your daily life? How do you feel about their "rule" over you?
- What does it mean to you to call Jesus "king"? How is his rule seen in your life?



Dec 14

# Joy

*The angel said to the shepherds, "I am bringing you good news of great joy." Luke 2.10*

- The angels announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds as "good news of great joy". Why do you think the shepherds might have found joy in this news?
- When have you had joyful news in your life?
- Jesus' birth, in the midst of fear and danger, led to a life of hardship and eventual crucifixion. How could this be called "joy"? Is there a difference between joy and happiness?
- How joyful do you feel today? How might you find joy in your life today, and bring joy to someone else?

Dec 15

# Message

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth.*

*Luke 1.26*

- The nativity story is full of messengers, the literal meaning of the word translated as “angel” in the Bible (angellos). What would it feel like to be entrusted with the messages the angels bring?
- Have you ever had to be a “messenger” taking news, good or bad, on someone else’s behalf? What happened and what did it feel like?
- What is the message of Christmas for you? Is there more than one message? Has that message changed for you over time?

Dec 16

# Emmanuel

*Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call him Emmanuel.*

*Matthew 1.23, quoting Isaiah 7.14*

- Jesus' first followers believed that in Jesus, God was with them in a new and special way. Why do you think they thought that? What did they see of God in him?
- How do you think God is with you now (if you do)?
- Where have you seen God's presence in your life, if you have?
- How might you look for God's presence in your daily life today?

Dec 17

# Bethlehem

*And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.*

*Matthew 2.6, quoting Micah 5.2*

- Bethlehem was a small insignificant village about 5 miles from Jerusalem, the kind of place no one expected anything significant to happen yet it had been the birthplace of King David, which was why prophecies said that the Messiah would be born there. What do you think it would feel like to be a long-term resident of Bethlehem?
- We are often surprised when something newsworthy happens in our own backyard. Why do you think that feel like that?
- It's good to feel proud of and love the place we live in , but that pride and love can easily become destructive, exclusive nationalism. How do we get the balance right?

Dec 18

# Flesh

*The Word became flesh and lived among us.*

*John 1.14*

- It was really important for the early church to proclaim that God had come to them in real flesh and blood, in a completely human person, who ate and drank, suffered and died. Why do you think this matters so much? What difference does it make to Christian faith?
- How do you feel about your own flesh, your body? Have you ever not liked your body?
- What difference should it make to us that God has blessed flesh with his presence?

Dec 19

# Glory

*We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son. John 1.14*

*An angel of the Lord stood before [the shepherds] and the glory of the Lord shone around them. Luke 2.9*

- In Hebrew thought the glory of the Lord – kabod – was visualised as a shining, weighty thing like gold. What is the most glorious thing you have ever seen?
- How do you think people saw God's glory in Jesus?
- Have you ever felt glorious or been treated by others as if you were? What did it feel like?

Dec 20

# Disgrace

*Mary's husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. Matthew 1.19*

- When Mary was found to be pregnant before she and Joseph started living together, she was at great risk. The punishment for adultery was stoning to death. At the very least she would bring lasting shame on herself and her family. How might it have felt to be Joseph, in this position? How might it have felt to be Mary?
- Have you ever felt in disgrace, justly or unjustly? What was it like and how did you deal with it?
- Are there people you regard as a disgrace or of whom you feel ashamed? What can you do about this? Can "grace" be restored to them and to your relationship with them?

Dec 21

# Favoured

*The angel said to Mary, "Greetings favoured one, the Lord is with you." Luke 1.28*

- "Favoured" can also be translated as "graced". ("Hail Mary, full of grace," is the traditional translation of this verse.) Grace is the unearned gift of love, approval and goodwill given by someone with power to someone without it. What do you think Mary might have felt when she heard the angel's words?
- If Mary remembered these words when she watched Jesus die on the cross, what do you think she might have made of them then? Do you think she still felt "favoured"?
- Have you ever felt favoured (or favourite) Was it a good feeling, or did it bring problems with it?
- Do you feel favoured/graced by God? If so, how?



Dec 22

# Light

*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1.5*

*The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. John 1.9*

- Why do you think John described Jesus as being like a light? How did he light up people's lives? Do you feel he is a light to you?
- How do you feel about darkness? Have you ever been frightened of it? If so, why?
- What is the deepest darkness (physical or emotional) you have known?
- What or who has lit up your darkness?

Dec 23

# Gift

*A child has been born for us, a son given to us.*

*Isaiah 9.6*

*God so loved the world that he gave his only son.*

*John 3.16*

- How do you feel about the “gift-giving” element of Christmas? Do you enjoy choosing gifts for people, or is it stressful or fraught with complications for you?
- Are there people you feel you have to give gifts to, even if you don’t like them, or they you?
- Do you find it easy to receive gifts, or do you tend to say “you shouldn’t have”?
- Jesus is described as God’s gift to us – unearned and undeserved. What do you think of this and what is your response to it?

Dec 24

# Love

*God's love was revealed among us in this way; God sent his only son in to the world so that we might live through him. 1 John 4.9*

- God gave us Jesus because he loved us, pure and simple; no strings, no conditions, no hidden agendas. Who has shown you love in your life? What has your response been to that love?
- How did people at the time see God's love revealed in Jesus?
- The writer of the first letter of John says that God's love enabled us to "live through him". What effect does it have on us when we know we are loved?
- God's love is perfect; ours isn't Are there any relationships you need to mend this Christmas?