

First Sunday of Advent

First Sunday of Advent – 1 December 2019

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Ruth Harvey, Director of Place for Hope, for her thoughts on the first Sunday of Advent

to Carol Finlay, on behalf of World Mission Council, for her intercessory prayers to be included on World AIDS day

and to Christian Aid for their material for “Christian Aid Sunday”

Our new online music resource is now live: [here](#) you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4). The search function allows you to bring up a list of songs by keyword, tune, theme, author, composer and metre, covering all of the indexes in the hymnbook. The site features Weekly Worship and thematic/seasonal playlists, alternative settings and background information on the hymns.

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Introduction

The four Sundays in Advent focus in turn on the virtues of hope, love, joy and peace. On this, the first Sunday of Advent we reflect on hope. This may be a hope in the promised Messiah, it may be a hope for the world that peace may prosper, or a hope that God's kingdom may be more fully visible, vivid in our actions. The promise to which our texts point us is a promise not only of a saviour who will come, but of a saviour who will 'come again.' And it is for this 'second coming' that we must prepare ourselves during Advent. What is your hope this Advent?

1 December is also World Aids Day – a day when we remember all those living with HIV or AIDS, those who care for them, and for their families and friends. If you are living with HIV or AIDS, or with a long-term illness, I wonder what it means for you to 'live in hope?' In her book, *Apprenticed to Hope: a sourcebook for difficult times* (Augsburg Books, 2009), Julie Neraas talks about the difference between optimism and hope. As someone who lives with chronic illness, she has learned that while optimism can offer necessary energy boosts at critical moments, it is hope that sustains in the longer run. For within hope there is the possibility also to acknowledge despair. Hope is rooted in the reality of everyday life, with all its joys, and with its pain, uncertainty, horror and hurt. "No understanding of hope is honest unless it deals with the absence of hope and those seasons when nothing comforts or reassures." "Hope is an essence that goes to the core of our common humanity; optimism is an attitude." (page 5/7)

Working with individuals and groups going through painful transitions and encountering conflict in our churches, [Place for Hope](#) draws on the hope of the Gospel. This is a hope inspired by and rooted in the ministry of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, whose arrival we celebrate in Advent. It is also a hope rooted in 1) the permission to lament/grieve; 2) the necessity to wait; and 3) the freedom to celebrate – a three-fold movement captured in essence in the passion and crucifixion of Good Friday, the waiting of the Disciples on Holy Saturday, and the resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday.

As I approached this whole task, scripture was where I began. Wise guides in my life have encouraged me, when preparing public worship, to ensure that it is rooted first in scripture, and only then in the lived reality around me. I suppose this is the 'exegesis/eisegesis' dynamic, where first we try to draw out meaning from within the text and its context, and then we read or interpret meaning back into the text, from our own context. I read each of the lectionary readings at least twice. I gave myself time to read, reflect, pray, read again without trying to take too many notes or come up with a formed plan too quickly. I find

that reading, then planning a strong walk or physical activity during which I can reflect in a different environment is really helpful.

[Isaiah 2:1-5](#)

Timeliness of action

These prophetic words offer reassurance to the people of Israel that their project is not in vain. Previous and succeeding chapters of Isaiah point to the murder, rebellion, injustice, and corruption of the people of Israel (Isaiah 1:21-23). This chapter offers a promise of salvation that if they focus on the shared common goal of peace, if they set their sights on the highest peak visible to all – God’s peace – then great things will come. By focussing on the real needs of the people who are hungry, tired, lacking in energy, losing faith, we can find hope in the promise of goodness beyond despair. This is the hope beyond optimism that Neraas points us to. This is a hope mirrored in the words of Psalm 122.

[Psalm 122](#)

Approach and response

In this Psalm there is a two-fold movement:

1. The people approach Jerusalem and their God (vv1-4)

They are ‘glad’ as they arrive in the city, the place of peace, the Jeru-Shalom. Now they have actually arrived and their ‘feet have been standing’ on this holy soil. Forever they will have a reference point, a story to tell, an actual physical experience to relate. Seeking peace is not just a notional, or a spiritual, but a physical path. They can have confidence in this city, ‘bound firmly together’, and binding all who enter, who seek peace – all the tribes may come together in the unity which we now know is the unity of which Jesus speaks (John 14:21).

The peace, or ‘shalom’ which Jerusalem represents is an all-encompassing wellbeing. It is a common home where all needs are met: 1) a sitting court of law; 2) a market for sale and purchase of goods; 3) a place of social interaction and fun and 4) a place of worship. “This ‘four-square’ exhibition of ‘peace’ had found its source of power in the peace of God.” (The Daily Study Bible: Psalms Volume II, John Gibson (ed)).

2. The people hear and respond (vv5 – 9)

The pilgrims respond to the call to prayer from the priest to ‘pray for the peace of Jerusalem!’ This is a call to join in with the collective work for peace – grounded in our

feet, in our presence, in our actions, and rooted in God's love. This is a physical, communal place for justice and peace to be practised, for 'the sake of my relatives and friends' – for 'the (common) good' of all.

Romans 13:11-14

The shortness of time

Paul wasn't just concerned with the shortness of time – he was conveying an urgency about the second coming – which was 'at hand', expected at any moment by the early church. We may not live today with that urgency, yet Advent points us to an urgent expectancy for the arrival of our saviour – a 'second coming'. And at the same time, human time is short. We are called to live each day as if it were our last. 'You know what time it is' – do we live by human time (kronos) or by God's time (Kairos). Do we live life in a cyclical (repeated patterns) or in a linear (sequential events) way? This theme of shortness of time, and of considering the nature of time, is repeated as we consider the passage from the Gospel of Matthew.

According to Barclay (Daily Study Bible), it was verses 12-14 of this passage that famously converted Augustine, who was prompted to read them in a vision, and ever afterwards 'put on Christ.' He lists six sins from which to turn, each of which had a particular nuance in the time of Paul's writing (for example diluted wine was drunk by all, including children, and throughout the day as it was safer than the water – but drunkenness was not condoned). Paul's response, taken to heart by Augustine, and offered to us as inspiration, is to 'put on' Christ – to clothe ourselves in the attributes of the Prince of Peace.

Matthew 24:36-44

Be prepared

Noah was ready for the cataclysmic events ahead. He built an ark, organised his family/all living beings, saved provisions, prepared his heart, mind and soul for what was to come. By getting ready 'in the cool of the moment' we are more likely to weather the storms that are ahead. We are urged in this passage to do the same. None of us know, or can know when Christ may come again – this is knowledge held only by God – and so we must be ready, awake, alert at all times. These verses remind us to sift out the essential from the important, to live lightly on the earth, and to focus on the hope of salvation rather than on the needs of the ego.

There is a set of reflective material in the [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website that relates to this text, with questions for further reflection, and a responsive prayer.

Sermon ideas

Having read and reflected on scripture, I then began to ask myself critical questions such as: What are these passages saying to me? To what extent are they speaking 'to our condition' today? Who are the wise people around me who are offering insights into these texts? What do biblical scholars and theologians have to say about these texts? I take great inspiration from the writing of William Barclay, for example. I also sought wisdom from my colleagues within Place for Hope, given the focus and theme of this week, and tried to weave these into my own reflections.

In [Place for Hope](#) we accompany individuals and congregations through times of change and transition. We hold out a hope that through gracious conversation, robust exchange, and deep listening we can transform relationships. Our hope is in the life and witness of Jesus Christ as told in the Gospels. Our hope is also rooted in the grit and struggle of daily life, lived with compassion and robust, generous conversation which can transform relationships for the good.

Discerning the right time to speak, to hold back, to take a courageous step, to offer a word of forgiveness or of challenge is crucial. Too quick, and we risk pushing the 'other' away. Too slow and we lose momentum. Judging, or discerning the right time requires thought, prayer and courage.

Below are first some questions that may inspire deeper thoughts on hope and peace in this first Sunday of Advent. These are followed by reflections on 'hope' from Trustees and Practitioners of Place for Hope, which may offer further inspiration.

Questions you might like to consider for the first Sunday of Advent:

- At this time of Advent, as we prepare for the 'coming' of our Lord, what does 'hope' mean to you? What is the difference between hope and optimism?
- The absence of hope can lead to despair. How alert are we in our churches to despair, lack of hope or to anxiety particularly in this time of Advent?
- Are you ready 'in the cool of the moment' for life's challenges? There is a [Quaker testimony to simplicity](#) which urges us to live lightly on the earth, to be prepared to change with ease as necessity dictates, and as the Holy Spirit inspires. Advent for some

is a time of stress, high consumption, and anxiety. How lightly do you sit to possessions, to attachments, to belongings?

- It can be exhausting always to be on ‘high alert.’ What does it mean to ‘live ready’? To live lightly (=simply, = lean)?

Reflections on ‘hope’ from Place for Hope Trustees and Practitioners

“Hope is a conscious and intentional choice; encompassing both darkness and light, it leads to compassionate and courageous action.”

Nancy Adams

“Hope is the sail of your boat that powers you across the sea of life. Faith is the rigging that ties the sail of hope to the boat. Are your ropes frayed? Are your knots tight? Whose hand is on the tiller? Just yours? Or is there room for Christ? Who is crewing your boat with you – your church, your family, your community? How is the weather on this sea of life? Is the sail of hope straining against the storm, or flapping around in a dead calm?”

James Aitken

“‘When all hope is hidden from you, I will hold hope for you.’ This is a powerful witness of care for folk with complex mental ill-health who feel they are beyond hope. Even if I feel powerless to help it is a powerful gift to hold hope for another. The same can be said of situations of conflict. There can be times when we are caught up in it what we feel is beyond hope, but others can hold hope for us, and perhaps that offer a Place for Hope? Holding hope can also be like planting a sequoia seed – we will never see it fully grow but we gift it in hope and faith to the future.”

Fiona Bennett

“Hope is not something you can touch or see or smell or hear, rather it is felt deep in your soul. Its absence is life-draining, its presence is life-giving.”

Elisabeth Spence

“When I think about the world we live in, my faith gets wobbly. But hope is what draws me down into the Mystery of God and in that Mystery, hope reminds me about love and relationship and that’s what holds me steady. The virtue of hope is very significant to me. Since a child, I’ve said this little scripture phrase and it has had great meaning for me: ‘Our hope is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.’ About 10 years ago, I thought I would learn a bit more of that psalm (124) by heart because it meant so much to me and so I looked it up and discovered I have been misquoting the Psalmist all along. Of course I didn’t believe it. So convinced was I that I searched every translation under the sun

and then it came to me that I had memorised the verse as a child taught by my Parish Priest who had never modified his thick Irish accent in any way all the years of his life. I'd heard 'hope' when he said 'help'. I continue to say hope because when I remembered about the Irish priest, I think I also heard God burst out laughing."

Sally McElroy

"Hope is a journey we take, supported by the presence of God, when we navigate through difficult, confusing or uncertain times, believing that there is a destination which is going to leave us in a better place than when we started. At those times of life when we run the risk of being overwhelmed by problems and trouble and worry, hope allows us to hold on to the promise of a blessing of God on us – even when we cannot imagine that any kind of blessing might be possible."

Iain Goring

"When I take on a Place for Hope case, if I didn't have the hope that, with God's help, the situation would improve through our work with the parties involved, I would run in the opposite direction."

Val Ott

"For me, hope is all about my faith in Jesus. Even in the midst of difficulties I know that I have a hope in Him as He is bigger than anything we go through and will be my side as I go through the valleys, likewise He also will be with me at the mountain tops."

Jennie Chinembiri

Prayers

I have been greatly influenced by writers such as Kate McIlhagga and George MacLeod, who was heard to suggest that for each line of prayer, you should dedicate an hour of writing time. We may not always have that luxury, but I do understand the intensity that he was pointing to in the experience of writing prayers. I think of prayers as poems for God, so try to avoid lists of requests or information, and to tap into that part of the human psyche that flows more freely, works with imagery and responds to the lived reality of people around us. I experienced the approach to Intercessory Prayer first-hand as a theological student and was deeply moved by the minister's courage to seek time to mould a prayer while the congregation held silence, and by his ability to honour the intent and the precise wording of prayers offered by the congregation, while couching it in a cohesive whole. A gift that, with some practice, is open to us all.

Approach to God

This can be a short acclamation of our intent and desire to worship God.

This is the time!

This is the time for worship.

This is the time for praise.

This is the time for You, God –
this is Your time.

We are ready.

Let us worship God.

Thanksgiving

Here we express our gratitude to God: for life, for goodness in our communities, in our world, in all of creation – acknowledging our responsibilities and stewardship role.

Lord of Hope

we give You thanks for a new day.

We arise today

to a horizon guiding our eye beyond the everyday;

to a dawn gently lighting up the wonders of Your creation;

to a whispered dew rooting us firmly to this precious earth.

For this and more we thank You.

Lord of Hope

we give You thanks for a new season.

We arise today

to the knowledge that Your Son, our Lord, is coming;

to the hope that through His presence all people will be transformed;

to the promise of salvation for all.

For this and more we thank You.

Lord of Hope

we give You thanks for a new start.

We arise today

turning our backs on the ways of judgement and criticism;

sloughing off narrow-minded assumptions;

reaching out to enemy and friend with generous, compassionate hearts.

For the promise of a new start, a new season, a new day,

for these gifts and for so much more we thank You.

Amen

Confession

In this prayer, in the light of all that is good, we turn to God confessing our faults and seeking forgiveness. The Iona Community 'office,' also shared in worship in Iona Abbey daily at 9am, includes words of confession and forgiveness shared between the leader, and the people. This includes a time of silence. It can be tempting to cut this short (4 seconds is the average 'time of silence')! Try making this at least 40 – 60 seconds long! Or longer!

Leader: Loving God, we turn to You with our hearts full of gratitude,
our eyes focussed on Your kingdom,
and our hands stretched out to our neighbours.
And yet we know we are not always like this.
In our humanity, we stumble, fail, hurt.
Turning to You now we offer our confession, trusting in Your forgiveness.

Let us in silence confess our failings
and acknowledge our part in the pain of the world.

Silence (40-60 seconds is a good amount of time)

Leader: Before God, with the people of God, I confess to turning away from God in the ways I wound my life, the lives of others and the life of the world.

People: May God forgive you, Christ renew you, and the Spirit enable you to grow in love.

Leader: Amen

People: Before God, with the people of God, we confess to turning away from God in the ways we wound our lives, the lives of others, and the life of the world.

Leader: May God forgive you, Christ renew you, and the Spirit enable you to grow in love.

People: Amen

Leader: Move among us, O God; give us life

People: Let Your people rejoice in You.

Leader: Make our hearts clean within us

People: Renew us in mind and in spirit

Leader: Give us again the joy of Your help

People: With Your spirit of freedom sustain us

Leader: Loving healing God,
we rejoice, we are renewed, we are sustained.
We now turn to the world,
strengthened and forgiven to offer
these gifts of renewal to all whom we meet.
With love and gratitude we pray,
in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ,
Amen

(Adapted and used with permission from Iona Abbey Worship Book, 2017, © Iona Community www.ionabooks.com)

Intercession

Our prayers for others are usually offered in response to the preaching and teaching of the word, and to the world around us. You may like to invite worshippers to share concerns for individuals, situations or places of concern to them. It's possible to take some minutes, standing in front of a congregation with a blank sheet of paper, and inviting them to reflect, then to share names or situations for which they would like prayers offered. By noting these concerns, then taking a minute or two to form them into a prayer, our prayers for others can be direct and connected immediately to the real needs of those around us.

To avoid this feeling more like workshop than worship, invite the congregation to reflect in silence before offering their prayers aloud. While framing the prayer, the congregation could be asked to uphold you in prayer. You may like to couch prayer requests in words of hope in the spirit of Advent waiting. One such framework, drawing on words from today's psalm, and offered in a Trinitarian mould, is below.

Let us pray.

“Peace be within you” the Psalmist says,
and so we pray, loving God, for peace in our hearts.
We name before You now for ourselves, and for individuals known to us
who are anxious, ill, alone, afraid or hurting...

“Peace be within you” the Psalmist says,
and so we pray, Prince of peace, for peace in our communities.
In the midst of political strife, social upheaval,
economic stress and neighbourhood arguments.
We name before You now those known to us
in our local communities who are hurting....

“Peace be within you” the Psalmist says,
and so we pray, Spirit of love, for peace in our world.
In the midst of war, angry words, broken homes, we pray for all who live in fear.
We name before You now situations of war or aggression.....

We pray for peace within the governments and institutions of our world
– may all decision-makers know the art of compassionate conversation.
We pray for calmness and wisdom in our world leaders
– may they know the delight of diversity when opinions differ.
We name before You now leaders and
institutions in our world nurturing or needing peace....

God of love, Prince of Peace, Holy Spirit –
we ask all these prayers in Your name,
and for the sake of our world, Your creation.
Amen.

Collect/Blessing

Now go in peace;
may this day unfold as it should;
may you find solace in scripture and spirit;
and may your journey through Advent
be filled with the hope and promise of God
for the sake of the world.
Amen

Prayers for World AIDS Day

World AIDS Day is on 1 December each year. It is an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV, to show support for people living with HIV, and to commemorate those who have died from an AIDS-related illness.

Each year in the UK, over 4,300 people are diagnosed with HIV. Not everybody is equipped with the facts on how to protect themselves and others, while stigma and discrimination remain a life-changing reality for people living with HIV.

1 in 5 people living with HIV say that they have needed help with loneliness and isolation. Nobody should feel or be alone because of HIV. That's why on World AIDS Day, people all around the world will wear a red ribbon to stand in solidarity with people living with HIV, to raise awareness, to help end new transmissions and end stigma.

The Church of Scotland HIV Programme supports partner projects around the world and produces resources for use in congregations. These can be found at https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/world_mission/get_involved/hiv_programme

The Church should be a place where people feel welcomed and included. Particularly on World AIDS Day, we invite you to encourage people to wear a red ribbon and to use one of the prayers below in your worship.

For inclusion in intercessions

Lord Jesus Christ, You constantly included the excluded,
showed compassion to those whom others neglected or shunned,
and offered love to the unloved.

On this World AIDS Day,
help us to extend care and support to those who live with HIV and AIDS.
May we affirm that all people are loved by You, welcomed by You and valued by You.

Bless those who work to treat, support and accompany people living with HIV and AIDS;
those who labour to ensure their needs are not overlooked;
and those who speak out to challenge prejudice and discrimination.

We pray that the day will come when there are no more new infections,
no more lives lost unnecessarily, and no more futures blighted.
Lord of love, Lord of hope, hear our prayer.

For inclusion in intercessions

And so today, on World AIDS Day we pray especially
for all infected or affected by HIV and AIDS,
for children and young people, for adults and old people,
for those who seek to provide spiritual care or healthcare,
for those who allocate resources,
for our Church of Scotland.

Loving God, let hope still be found, let good work be done,
let the healing ministry of Jesus Christ take shape,
let Your kingdom come, let Your will be done,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Alternative Material

This material has been supplied by kind permission of **Spill the Beans** and allows you to explore the readings or theme of the service in creative ways that include everyone gathering for worship.

New material from Spill the Beans is provided in the latest issues available from their [website](#).

Advent – Prophetic Pathways

During Advent and Christmas we will be focusing on the Old Testament passages from the prophets and thinking about the pathways the prophets encourage us to walk through Advent and beyond.

Here are a couple of suggestions for building pathways through your worship space to help people to remember and reflect on the words of the prophets and the connections those words have with their lives at this time.

Pathway Poster(s)

Prepare a large poster sized picture of a pathway. You can either have one poster which you add things to each week or a poster for each of the weeks. These can be hung around your worship space.

Pathways

Pathways can be made for your worship space by laying out stones to mark the edges of pathways or by using rolls of thick paper (or vinyl floor covering) cut into a pathway shape, the full width of the paper at one end and gradually tapering to a narrow path at the other end. These pathways could easily be tidied up or rolled away from one week to the other, could be shaped to fit your worship space and could be moved around to different areas of your worship space. It would be good to take a photo of the pathway each week before you put it away and to display images from previous weeks either on PowerPoint or on a display board. If you have some floor space that is not used for other things, you might want to lay out the pathway after worship and join the pathways together to make a mini labyrinth.

[Isaiah 2:1-5](#) – *Pathway to Peace*

Pathway Poster: add words 'Pathway to Peace' and add images of hands working together, one hand linking with another either by downloading images or by getting people to draw round their hands, cut out shapes and stick the hands to the poster.

Pathways: ask people to draw round their feet and cut out foot/shoe prints and lay them on the pathway. Alternatively, have footprints already printed and cut out of card and ask people to write their name on a footprint and lay the footprint on the pathway. If children are doing the shoe craft activity, they could bring their shoes to place on the pathway.

Bible Notes

[Isaiah 2:1-5](#) – *Advent Longings*

Advent is a time of longing and anticipation, as we travel on the prophetic pathways that lead to the arrival of the child who is God's answer to these very same longings. All the more important then, that time is taken to journey through Advent and to voice these longings in the reality of our world and in our communities of faith.

In this first week of Advent we find ourselves with Isaiah on the pathway to peace. He gives us a wonderful vision of a different world that can be: a world in which all of the nations are drawn to God's holy mountain, so that they may learn the ways of peace. In his vision Isaiah envisages God as teacher, peacemaker, and arbitrator; rather than say a kingly ruler who will dominate and rule with brute force.

The nations are universally drawn to God; they seek instruction in the ways of peace. In return, from God they receive instruction in justice, resolution of their disputes, and as a result the weapons of war can be turned into tools of production. The poetry of

this promise is unforgettable and its words can take us to searing heights of hope. This is no pipe dream for Isaiah—he has faith this day will come.

Of course we are surrounded by a different reality, with conflict stalking the earth in Syria, Palestine/Israel, in many parts of Africa, to name but a few. A regularly updated list of current conflicts (some dating back almost a century) details 44 different conflicts spread across the globe that are ongoing at this time.

Even in our own communities and families, peace can seem elusive and difficult to find. Undercurrents of dissent, frustration, and unease can readily stir protest when the triggers of inequality and injustice are pulled.

Martin Luther King Jnr said “Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal.”

Perhaps in preaching this week it is important to voice those longings, and to find an honest place for them in our worship. Scripture speaks to our reality, and it is important in order to hear its promise that we speak the truth about our lives and circumstances.

But we must not forget the promise. Will we begin that pilgrimage of peace this Advent to God’s holy place where we may learn, against all the odds, to walk in the ways of peace? Will we open ourselves to learning the ways of justice, the values of God, God’s priority for the poor?

In this passage God is the agent of transformation, but it begins with our turning to God. The challenge is for us to recognise our part: that change will not come until we turn to God in order that we might learn the ways of peace.

Peace, it seems then, is a matter of practice. In our thinking this week we may want to reflect on how in fact we might learn the practice of peace?

Who in history, or in your community would you recognise as a peacemaker and someone whose example we could follow? Indeed are there individuals in our families or communities with whom it is time to make peace with? How different would our communities be if only we could turn our energies away from negativity and destruction, to peacemaking, and the building up of others instead?

Retelling for Young People – *Peacemaker, Peacemaker*

The rhythm for this is based on the nursery rhyme ‘pat a cake, pat a cake, baker’s man’.

Peacemaker, peacemaker,
give me a chance
To turn back to God as fast as I can,
Singing, and praying,
and worshipping You,
To help make the world,
at peace for me too!

Peacemaker, peacemaker,
give me a chance,
To turn back to God as fast as I can,
To serve Him and praise Him
and follow Him too,
To help make the world,
at peace for me too!

Peacemaker, peacemaker,
give me a chance
To turn back to God as fast as I can,
To love Him, and serve Him,
obey his truth too
To help make the world,
at peace for me too!

Peacemaker, peacemaker,
give me a chance
To turn back to God as fast as I can
To bring peace to others, say sorry too,
To help make the world,
at peace for me too!

Peacemaker, peacemaker,
give me a chance
To turn back to God as fast as I can,
To build tools of peace,
and fight no more too,

To help make the world,
at peace for You too!

Prayers for Others

If “double-edged”
was not already a phrase,
this time of year would need it coined.

Loving God, Christmas is a crisis
in all kinds of ways:
a reconvening of families far flung,
with tensions amid the tinsel;
a mad rush for readiness,
with time evaporating
like steam from a kettle;
a panic for presents
as measures of care;
a chaos of cards,
for the ones not near.

A double-edge to the season, to be sure.

But these crises will calm:
the day comes and the gathering
and the sharing and the tears
and the hugs and the pledges
for next time to be less fraught.

But there is a sharper double-edge.

Loving God, Christmas is a crisis
in much more cruel ways.
While the rest of the world, it seems,
celebrates,
the homeless lament,
the friendless grieve,
the lonely mourn.
They feel so much apart
from the heart of it all and yet, we know,

they are firmly in Your heart—
You, whose son was homeless at birth;
You, whose son's friends fled in the end;
You, whose son felt forsaken.
Amen.

Sending Prayer

Leader: Go from this place
to be messengers of God.

**All: We go with God beside us
to learn of his ways,
to walk in his paths,
to travel towards peace.**

Leader: And may his blessing
always be with us,
now and forever.

Song - We pray for peace (Tune: *Greensleeves*)

1. We pray for peace, God, in our world,
so wrenched by war and sorrow.
Give us rebirth, and heal our earth
of fear and hate tomorrow.

*Teach peace in every mind,
and heal all wounded humankind.
Teach peace in every heart,
as people of one Maker.*

2. We pray for peace, God, in our streets,
where neighbours fear to travel.
Let gunfire end, our ways amend,
let violence unravel.

Teach peace...

3. We pray for peace, God, in our homes,
where we have hurt those nearest.

Renew each will, and help us still
to reconcile our dearest.

Teach peace...

4. We pray for peace, God, in our souls.
Oh, heal our selfish blindness!
God, touch each heart and help us start
to love each self with kindness.

Teach peace...

[Words: Deborah L Patterson © Rev. Dr Deborah L. Patterson, 1995. Used with permission.]

The song is from a collection called “Balm in Gilead: Hymns of Healing and Wholeness,” published by the International Parish Nurse Resource Center in St. Louis, Missouri in 2010.]

Alternative Material ©2013 Spill the Beans Resource Team

Carols for Christian Aid

Make 1 December Christian Aid Sunday in your church!

Bibi has lived under the shadow of war in Afghanistan for a long time. She and her family had nothing to eat during the drought and war. “We were forced to leave home and we lost everything.”

Despite Bibi’s severe hardship and hunger, she is determined that her children will prosper. Echoing the hope of Mary’s Magnificat, she says: “I want a bright future for my children, I want them to be educated.” Read more of [Bibi’s story here](#).

You will find global reflections for your service and a carol written for Christian Aid on the [Christian Aid website](#). Let's raise our voices together across Scotland for our neighbours around the world.

Musical suggestions

You can hear samples of these suggestions in the 'Weekly Worship' section of <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>. This new online music resource will allow you to listen to and search the breadth of music available in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4).

You will find hidden gems and alternative arrangements to familiar songs that will inspire creativity and spark fresh curiosity about how we best use music in worship.

- CH4 211 – “Today I Awake” – An upbeat hymn as we approach God in worship; with resonances of the themes of ‘awakening’ with the lectionary readings, and of the ‘clothing in Christ’ from the reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans
- CH4 275 – “Come now, O Prince of Peace” – A hymn from Korea, a country divided by war, making these words all the more poignant as we pray for peace (Psalm 122) and await the birth of Christ. Verse one, sung in harmony, unaccompanied, can offer a powerful invitation to all into the worship of the Prince of Peace
- CH4 166 – “Lord all Hopefulness” – A positive, up-beat affirmation of the healing presence of God at each stage of the day
- CH4 82 – “Pray that Jerusalem may have” – A setting of verses 6-9 of the lectionary reading (Psalm 122) focusing on the peace of Jerusalem. Could be sung unaccompanied
- CH4 83 – “I rejoiced when I heard them say” – A beautiful setting of Psalm 122. Using ‘Shalom’ in the chorus is a reminder of the holistic peace, more than an absence of war, that we seek (‘Salaam’ has the same holistic meaning)
- CH4 284 – “Hope is a Candle” – A great candle-lighting song for Advent, sung to a Scottish folk tune; you could add one verse each week throughout Advent. Particularly relevant for the first Sunday of Advent, with the focus on hope. You might like to sing verse 1 through twice on this first Sunday
- CH4 286 – “Tell out, my soul” – A well-loved Advent hymn, paraphrasing the words of Mary in the Magnificat
- CH4 278 – “Wake awake for night is flying” – A great Advent hymn, a call to alertness, rooted in the words of Paul

- CH4 789 – “Now go in Peace” – A wonderful upbeat song to conclude worship on the first Sunday of Advent, as we leave one another with the peace of Christ. It echoes the words of Psalm 122. Could be sung first by a small group, then by all together
- CH4 786 – “May the God of Peace” – An alternative, gentle ending set to a well-known tune. Could be sung three times

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