

# twelvebaskets

*FREE TO DUPLICATE AND DISTRIBUTE*



## **ADVENT 4A**

18th December 2022

A short act of worship and daily devotions

A Free resource funded by donations from Individuals, churches and **twelvebaskets**.

If you would like to help fund this resources [click here](#).

For more information <https://theworshipcloud.com/terms/free-weekly-resource>

## Opening prayers

Amongst the mid-winter,  
Jesus is here.

Amongst the cold and the uncertainty and the cost-of-living crisis,  
Jesus is here.

Amongst the family gatherings and the carols and the scent of possibility,  
Jesus is here.

I am here, Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus,

*Pause*

Lord, as we edge closer to Christmas, I give thanks and praise to you for the capacity you have given us for joy, laughter, and fellowship.

While I thank you for the material joys I experience at this time of year, I thank you even more for your relentless pursuit of me, a pursuit so great that you humbled yourself to come amongst us, Immanuel.

Lord, I also bring to you my sadness. For the people I wish I could spend this time with but cannot, for the things that make Christmas difficult, for the times where the hope of the Christmas story struggles to break through.

Lord, I also bring to you my disappointment in myself, for when I have not acted as you would have me do. Not in shame and self-hatred, but in humble acknowledgement that I have sinned and will sin again, and that through your grace I have both the assurance of forgiveness and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in better aligning with your will.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

**You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in whatever language or tradition with which you are most comfortable**

### Hymn:

208 STF – Let earth and heaven combine - [YouTube](#)

*[Please note Twelvebaskets does not own the copyright to this video so please check with the rights owners before using in public worship or online]*

**Readings:** Isaiah 7:10-16 – [Click for reading](#)  
Matthew 1:18-25 – [Click for reading](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> Opening prayers written by All We Can

## Response to the readings

Here is a question for us to consider: How is Jesus being 'God with us' of any relevance in our crisis hit communities?

In Isaiah 7:14, we read: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and we will call him Immanuel. Immanuel means 'God with us', and that is what this Christmas season is all about... but how does it change the way we live, the way we engage with the world around us?

Isaiah is written into a time of political tension and empire – the Assyrians ruled Israel and Judah at this time and the rulers were involved in power struggles and the complicated balancing act between rebellion against the oppressors and trying not to start a war they couldn't win.

This context seems to mirror much of what is happening in society today, particularly if you are a Christian living in the Ukraine. We are seeing uncertainty, a surge in the cost of living, rising prices, rising mortgages. Our communities are struggling.

Like Ahaz, our response is often to be paralysed by fear. We don't know what to do so we do nothing. Like Ahaz we just worry and do nothing. We dig in, we shut down.

Into this situation steps Isaiah with a message from God. 'say to him "be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid."

How do we respond when all around are caught up in a cycle of fear?

Which leads us to Joseph. He too, could have given in to fear, the fear of shame and societal pressure after learning about Mary's pregnancy. In the Matthew reading we read about his plans to divorce her quietly and extract himself from this story...but he listens when God speaks to him in a dream and changes his plans.

Have you ever had a sudden change of heart, or a clear message from God about what you are supposed to do next? Did you listen? Are you listening now?

Spend some time reflecting on the questions that have come up in this response. How does the Christmas story, and the story from the Old Testament speak to you, how does it change your life, your actions, speak into this current moment?

*You might like to watch and sing along to this video from the Methodist Choir of Great Britain as you reflect: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbqyAX5JKCs>*

## Blessing

Go out and play your part in bringing the Kingdom of God closer,  
Go out and practice the peace, the love, the grace, the love and the hope we encounter in the Christ.

Go out and be a person of the Spirit,  
Embodying all that is hopeful, grace-filled, peace-driven,  
Show the world what it looks like for God to be with us,  
Immanuel,

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

## Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week

### Monday 19<sup>th</sup> December

- Watch this 'There is Room' video from the Methodist Church: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-DxY1hSohE> – you might like to follow the links and read the stories of the people featured in the video.
- Pray for all who feel excluded, sad or lonely this Christmas season. As you pray, listen for a prompting about something you might be invited to do to reach out to someone in need.

### Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> December

- Light a candle. As you watch the flame flicker, think about the parts of your life, your community, our world, that need to know something of the light of the world. You might like to pray this prayer:
- Lord of Light, shine into the darkness in me, the darkness in this community, the darkness in our world. In the midst of all that is frightening and cold and uncertain, come Prince of Peace.  
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.  
Amen.

### Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> December

- God of all grace,  
God of the Christmas season,  
Show me how to share the hope of the Christmas story with those around me this year, in conversation, in the giving and receiving of gifts, in the way I live my life.  
Help me to be a guardian and an evangelist for your good news this year.  
Amen.

### Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> December

- Go outdoors and find something natural: a stone, leaf, flower, or something else. Consider the ways God has made this thing and then reflect on how you too are wonderfully made by God.
- What does this mean to you?
- Pray about the answers to this question.

### Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> December

- As we get closer to Christmas, it's likely that some of the 'usual' rhythms are coming to an end for a few days as the world moves into 'holiday mode'. Perhaps you are travelling, or seeing friends, or finishing work for a few days.
- Why not make use of this Christmas mantra today – repeat it as often as you can: in the car, at the sink, when you have a moment to yourself on the sofa. As you repeat the mantra, listen to the words but also to how they change you, how they are a prayer:

- Christmas God, be born in my heart this year. Amen.

### **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> December**

- It's Christmas Eve! On this night-before-Christmas, you may wish to make space to experience something of the magic of waiting, of stillness, of preparation.
- For example, why not carve out some time to listen to the service of 9 lessons and carols from King's College Cambridge (<https://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel/a-festival-of-nine-lessons-and-carols>) or hold some moments of quiet and stillness in the midst of all the preparation and people and parties and pastries to ensure you are listening to the voice of the divine. Could you go for a walk? Or light a candle and just watch the flame for a few minutes?