

MONDAY
6 DECEMBER

Isaiah 35
Psalms 85:7-end
Luke 5:17-26

TUESDAY
7 DECEMBER

Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalms 96:1-10-end
Matthew 18:12-14

WEDNESDAY
8 DECEMBER

Isaiah 40:25-end
Psalms 103:8-13
Matthew 11:28-end

THURSDAY
9 DECEMBER

Isaiah 41:13-20
Psalms 145:1-8-13
Matthew 11:11-15

FRIDAY
10 DECEMBER

Isaiah 48:17-19
Psalms 1
Matthew 11:16-19

SATURDAY
11 DECEMBER

Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4. 9-11 or
2 Kings 2:9-12
Psalms 80:1-4. 18-19
Matthew 17:10-13

REFLECTION

“Comfort my people,” Isaiah is told. But this is not the comfort of a soft armchair in front of a

warm fire. This is a voice that sends shivers up the spine, that drives people on to the streets. The voice declaims to people in exile, who have lost everything, and sends them back across the desert to their true home, led by the God who redeems the people.

Isaiah is clear why this is possible. Despite all evidence to the contrary, despite other faiths in other gods, there is only one ruler in the universe. It has always been the God of Israel, from creation to exodus, from land to exile, and on into the future. “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 40:28). In the service of such a God anything is possible, as Elisha begins to discover in Saturday’s reading from 2 Kings.

In our Advent journey we are accompanied by the God who makes flowers bloom in the desert and promises us eagles’ wings, and who leads us to the most exciting destination of all, a stable in Bethlehem.

PRAYER

Almighty God,
purify our hearts and minds,
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again
as judge and saviour,
we may be ready to receive him,
who is our Lord and our God.



The prophet Isaiah, Cathedral of Dinant, Belgium. jorisvo / Shutterstock.com

ADVENT

PART II – EMBER DAYS

This week contains three Ember Days – on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The word “ember” comes from the Anglo-Saxon *ymbren*, denoting a circuit or revolution.

There are four Ember Weeks each year – each containing a set of three Ember Days. The weeks are roughly equidistant, depending on when Easter falls, and occur in the weeks leading up to the Third Sunday of Advent, the Second Sunday of Lent and the Sundays nearest to 29 June (the Feast of Peter and Paul), and 29 September (Michael and All Angels). In the medieval Church Ember Days were days of fasting and prayer. In more recent times they have become the traditional days on which members of the clergy are ordained.

Theologians debate the origin of Ember Days, but generally agree that the observance predates the Christian era. Some think they have Celtic origins, linked to the custom of observing various festivals at three-month intervals: Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain, although in fact they are only loosely related to these dates. Others think Ember Days have their roots in the Roman pagan custom of making seasonal offerings to the agricultural deities three times a year: in June, in the hope of a bountiful harvest; in September, to petition the gods for a rich vintage; and in December, to encourage productive sowing. It is suggested that the fourth week may have been added into the Christian calendar for the sake of symmetry.

At one time Christians sought to underplay links between the Christian calendar and other faiths, but perhaps we can rethink that, and celebrate it as something enriching. They may be remnants of bygone practices, their origins lost to us, but the very existence of Ember Days highlights a faith heritage with roots that go deep into the history of humankind.



LIVE
the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU
THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by
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Second week of Advent

Monday 6 December to
Saturday 11 December
2021

WEEK