

MONDAY
30 NOVEMBER
Andrew the Apostle
Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalms 19:1-6
Romans 10:12-18
Matthew 4:18-22

TUESDAY
1 DECEMBER
Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalms 72:1-4, 18-19
Luke 10:21-24

WEDNESDAY
2 DECEMBER
Isaiah 25:6-10a
Psalms 23
Matthew 15:29-37

THURSDAY
3 DECEMBER
Isaiah 26:1-6
Psalms 118:18-27a
Matthew 7:21, 24-27

FRIDAY
4 DECEMBER
Isaiah 29:17-end
Psalms 27:1-4, 16-17
Matthew 9:27-31

SATURDAY
5 DECEMBER
Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26
Psalms 146:4-9
Matthew 9:35 – 10:1, 6-8

REFLECTION

“What are you waiting for?”

That question often encourages us to do something exciting. As Advent begins, the theme of waiting is already prominent. What are we waiting for?

Readings from Isaiah this week promise something very exciting – an end to tyranny, injustice, poverty, hunger, sorrow, even death itself. By the time Jesus walked the earth this hadn't happened. It still hasn't. The waiting goes on. But in his ministry and sacrifice, something had begun.

Friday's psalm urges patience. But that doesn't mean sitting back and waiting for something to happen. A week that begins with the calling of four fishermen concludes with Jesus sending all his disciples to follow his own example of teaching and healing. Doing so would eventually lead to us all hearing about Jesus.

During Advent, as we wait to celebrate a special birth, we wait also for the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies, the reality of salvation. Meanwhile, we can tell others about Jesus, God incarnate, born as a human baby to die for human sins and bring salvation closer. We don't have to be wise and intelligent (see Tuesday's Gospel). So what are we waiting for?

PRAYER

God of new beginnings, as the new church year begins, we thank you for the chance to start again.
 May this Advent deepen our faith,
 restore our hope,
 and inspire us to serve our Lord and Saviour,
 in whose name we pray.



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ADVENT HYMNS

PART I – “JESUS SHALL REIGN WHERE’ER THE SUN”, BY ISAAC WATTS

Caroline Hodgson looks at the hymns of Advent, their writers and composers.

Right up until the nineteenth century many Protestants considered it subversive, even blasphemous, to sing anything other than words from scripture. Hymn-singing was not seen as a form of self-expression, and to sing human words was to put them “on a par with Holy Writ”, as John Betjeman put it in *Sweet Songs of Zion*. Instead of hymns, psalms were chanted, most often without accompaniment, to very basic melodies.

Enter Isaac Watts. He was born in 1674 into a committed nonconformist household. His father had been imprisoned twice for his views and was incarcerated at the time of Isaac's birth. At sixteen Isaac complained that, as they sang only psalms, the faithful could not sing about Christ. His father challenged him to see what he could do, and the result was Watts' first hymn, “Behold the Glory of the Lamb”, based on Revelation 5. He went on to pen some 750 hymns and is recognised as the “father of all English hymnody”.

“Jesus Shall Reign” is a hymn of missionary zeal, and many of its verses are no longer sung due to their dated sentiments (such as a reference to “barb'rous nations”). It was sung in 1862 when the people of Tonga, Fiji and Samoa accepted a Christian constitution. The scholar G. J. Stevenson depicts a service attended by some thousand islanders sitting under the banyan trees: “It would be impossible to describe the deep feeling manifested when the solemn service began, by the entire audience singing Dr Watts' hymn...”

The hymn's associations with British colonialism (and, indeed, the endorsement of him by the deeply conservative Betjeman) might put many people off. Yet it would be a shame for his words to be entirely discredited and for congregations never to be able to join their voices in singing:

Let every creature rise and bring
 Peculiar honours to our King;
 Angels descend with song again
 And earth repeat the loud “Amen!”

LIVE
the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU
THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by
 Caroline Hodgson
 and
 Heather Smith



Isaac Watts

First week of Advent

Monday 30 November
 to Saturday 5 December
 2020

WEEK