

St James' and St Peter's Churches, Birkdale

Advent Reflections



Week 1 - Preparation

What do you do to prepare for Christmas?

Every year I bring down a large number of decorations, lights, and even some Christmas-themed mugs from the loft. Every year I wonder if we've probably got too many and should sort them through, although by the end of the season, I still end up putting them back up here.

Advent is a season of preparation.

We count down the weeks until Christmas, preparing once again to remember Christ's birth, his incarnation, the God made man, Emmanuel God with us, and the breaking in of the kingdom of heaven in that small stable.

God in his infinite wisdom love and humility became a man for our sake. He did not have to do this but He chose to do this. It is a great act of love. We celebrate this at Christmas and prepare our hearts and minds through Advent. We also prepare for his great and glorious return, the second coming, the end time spoken about in Revelation 22 that is on it's way – behold I am coming soon!

There is a lot to take in, and lots to prepare.

How might we prepare for Christmas? For the coming of Christ? Christmas is a busy time with nativities, carol services, Christmas fairs, the shopping wrapping decorating, and cooking all to be done. Life is busy – and Christmas, even busier.

Martin Luther – the great church reformer once said “ ***I have so much business to do today, that I shall not be able to get through it with less than three hours' prayer.***” Now, most people would say, “***I have so much business to do today, that I have only three minutes for prayer; I cannot afford the time.***” But Luther thought that the more he had to do, the more he must pray, or else he could not get through it. The point is,

busyness should not be an excuse to keep us from praying. It should be the reason we start praying.

Ephesians 6:18 says – pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

We should be praying, at all times, and in all places, In the busyness, in the preparation, when it seems “Too busy” perhaps this is the moment to recognise our need for God. Our lack, our insufficiency, our need for God to get us through the day. We can't do it all on our own.

How might you include prayer more in your life?

For some, this looks like sitting down intentionally for an extra period of time a day. If you have three hours, like Martin Luther, then great – do that or maybe half an hour? If you don't What about finding 5 minutes? What about finding 5 lots of 5 minutes?

There are a variety of resources that we can use to help us to pray – the Church of England created a “Daily prayer” book, and recently an app. There are also resources such as “Word for Today” from UCB, to listen to or to read or things like Lectio 365 or Pray as you go that offer prayers and resources. Alternatively – if you're heading out on a walk in the little bits of sunshine we get, perhaps intentionally use that as a moment to pray. Perhaps find someone you could meet and have a chat and pray with – maybe even over one of the great cups of coffee available in Birkdale Village!

Take some time to Prepare your heart through prayer this Advent.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are you doing to prepare yourself for Christmas?
2. How might you include more time for prayer in your life?
3. How could we “Pray at all times?” (Ephesians 6:18)
4. Who could keep you accountable to pray this advent?
5. What do you think of Martin Luther’s attitude to prayer?
6. What keeps most people from praying regularly? What are some specific ways we can overcome those challenges?
7. How honest are you with God when you pray? Read Exodus 5:22-23. Are you as honest as Moses was with God? What are some reasons that keep us from being honest with God?
8. What resources do you use for prayer? What resources would you recommend to others? How do you pray?

Resources mentioned in the video:

Common Worship: Daily Prayer, (Church house publishing, 2011)

or as an app: <https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/apps/daily-prayer>

UCB word for today: <https://www.ucb.co.uk/word-for-today>

Daily bread: <https://odb.org/>

Lectio 365: <https://www.24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365/>

Pray as you go: <https://pray-as-you-go.org/>