

## Prayers Reflections for Advent Sunday – Rev Claire Dawson

**The Advent mystery is the beginning of the end of all in us that is not yet Christ. (Thomas Merton)**

**Readings: Mark 13. 24-end. Isaiah 64. 1-9. Psalm 80.**

“But in those days, after the suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven ...” (Matt. 13.24)

Last night I looked out of my bedroom window and there was the moon shining high in the night sky surround by stars, there was something reassuring and hopeful about its presence. The reading in Mark’s gospel starts with a dreadful image of the sun and the moon being darkened and the stars falling from the sky – a hopeless image of the end times. We may have experienced a snapshot of this with the continual cruelty of Corona virus and its devastating effects on our lives. The things that we had trusted in slipping out of place, no longer able to feel confident about things that were certain ... as if the stars had indeed slipped from the sky.

We gather for our first Sunday in Advent via zoom or in private prayer, I wonder where we will find our hope for this coming season, when we may feel the stars have slipped from the sky? In verse 27 of the same passage we are told, “... he will send out the angels ...”. Angels are mysterious figures through out scripture, and not so mysterious. They are present as births and deaths and resurrections ... they are present to reassure, to bring messages from God. Sometimes in dazzling white robes, sometimes in the body of human beings – looking no different from you or I. In this Advent wait our hope will be found in the visit of an angel, that God is sending to us and has already sent to us, his messenger to reassure, to guide, to help to navigate through. When the star slips from the sky, then the angels will appear.

We are told also to learn the lesson from the fig tree ... as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. On the Advent of a most difficult winter we are encouraged to look to where the fig tree buds. It is not so much the hope that summer will come (I think we are all hoping that the spring and summer of 2021 will bring us relief and release through a vaccine) but it is more the encouragement for us to look and be attentive. Look, even in winter the buds are forming, look to where the shoots are coming and know that this is God’s doing! In winter our attention tends to be only towards that which is lost, the leaf falling, the stripping back. But the hope is being attentive to what new things are emerging. The bud, the new shoot which needs to be encouraged.

There was a tree I encountered in the Botanical Gardens – a winter flowering Japanese Cherry. I had noticed the leaves changing colour and they caught my eye. But as I looked there were also buds and then blossom. Even in the depth of winter there was blossoming too! Our Advent hope and encouragement comes through our being attentive to where we are tender, where our churches and communities are tender – there at that

***Hoping Beyond Hope: African women, writes the Ghanaian woman theologian Mercy Amba Dduyoye, ‘wear hope like a skin’. The more desperate a situation is the stronger the hope. We live by hope, says St Paul. Hope stretches the limits of what is possible. It is linked with the basic trust in human life without which we could not get from one day to the next. (Mary Grey – The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope, 2000)***

very place of loss shall be budding and blossoming.

Finally we are told to stay awake, keep alert ... wake up, "for you do not know not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn ...". The keeping awake through the darkness until the watchman sounds the trumpet for daybreak means we don't lose hope. And yes, it is challenging, and we may be feeling rubbish about the whole affair, but we are encouraged to stay awake, to keep looking for the dawn. This is not an empty hope, it's not like waiting for Godot (Samuel Becket Play: Waiting for Godot) who never comes, it is a hopeful wait, a certain wait.

In the book the Magician's Nephew, C.S. Lewis writes of the creating of Narnia: *And it really was uncommonly like nothing. There were no stars. It was so dark that they couldn't see one another at all and it made no difference whether you keep your eyes shut or opened. The air was cold and dry and there was no wind ... "Hush!" said the Cabby. They all listened. In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing ... far away, and down near the horizon, the sky began to turn grey. A light wind very fresh began to stir. The sky in that one place, grew slowly and steadily paler. You could see shapes of hills standing up against it. All the time the voice went on singing. The lion opened his mouth ... he was breathing out, a long, warm breath ... Narnia, Narnia, Narnia awake! Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters ...*

This Advent, as we feel the stars slipping from the sky, our hope will be found with the presence of angels (real and imagined); the attentiveness to our own tenderness and vulnerability; and being able to keep awake in the darkness that we may hear the voice of the new creation coming to birth.



**Winter Japanese Flowering Cherry**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
Your world awaits you.  
In the longing of the persecuted for justice;  
In the longing of the poor for prosperity;  
In the longing of the privileged  
For riches greater than wealth;  
In the longing of our hearts for a better life;  
And in the song of your Church,  
Expectation is ever present.

O come, Lord, desire behind our greatest needs.  
O come, Lord, liberator of humanity.  
O come, Lord, O come, Immanuel.

**Collect for Advent Sunday by Janet Morley**

O God our deliverer,  
Whose approaching birth  
Still shakes the foundations of our world,  
May we so wait for your coming  
With eagerness and hope  
That we may embrace without terror  
The labour pangs of the new age,  
Through Jesus Christ, Amen.