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ADVENT 4A

21st December 2025

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening prayers

You might like to spend a few moments in quiet, perhaps with a candle or two lit around you. Amongst all the noise, busy-ness and advertising of this December season, lean into the stillness of Advent.

Into the darkness of this world,
Shine your light I pray.

Into the fears and doubts of this community we call home,
Shine your light I pray.

Into the anxiety, worry and pain that I carry,
Shine your light I pray,

This Advent and always, Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar

Reading: Matthew 1:18-25 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

Here we are, the fourth Sunday of Advent. The final Sunday before Christmas, perhaps the lighting of the final candle on the advent wreath, the final few doors on the calendar, the last few bits of preparation, wrapping, decorating, cooking to do.

The waiting is nearly over, but not quite. There's still one more step, one more story, before we reach the manger.

And today, the story we hear is quiet, uncertain, and very human. It's not about shepherds or angels yet: it's about one man trying to decide what to do when his life falls apart.

As Christmas draws near, we often focus on Mary's 'yes': the brave, tender courage it took for her to carry and bear Jesus. But today, in Matthew's telling of the story, we're invited to reflect on Joseph's 'yes.'

Joseph doesn't speak a word in the passage. He doesn't get a long prayer or a song like Mary does. But his actions speak volumes. Joseph's world has been turned upside down. He learns that Mary, his betrothed, is pregnant, and not by him. He has every reason to walk away, quietly and respectfully. And at first, that's exactly what he plans to do.

But then an angel comes to him in a dream, not with hard evidence or proof, but with a call to trust. "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife... for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

Joseph wakes from his dream, and says yes.

He says yes to mystery, to uncertainty. He says yes to the possibility that God is at work in ways he can't fully explain. Yes to a future that will ask more of him than he likely imagined.

For us, standing on the threshold of Christmas, this story is an invitation to reflect on what kind of “yes” we are willing to offer in our own journey of discipleship. God still shows up in ways that unsettle our assumptions. God still invites us to say yes to people and paths that stretch us. Sometimes the work of grace doesn’t look like a shining miracle, it looks like choosing faithfulness, compassion, and courage in the face of uncertainty.

God doesn’t just work through loud voices or grand gestures, but through quiet, steady faithfulness. Through those who protect the vulnerable. Through those who believe in love, even when the world says “walk away.”

So today, as we await the coming of Christ once more, consider:

- What “yes” is God inviting you to speak in your own life right now?
- Where are you being asked to make space: for grace, for trust, for love to be born?
- What might it mean to follow in Joseph’s quiet footsteps: faithful, courageous, open?

May we, like Joseph, have the courage to trust the dream, to protect what is sacred, and to believe that God is with us, even when the path is unclear.

Hymn / Song:

Love shone down (I had a dream) - [YouTube](#)

OR read/sing through 210 STF – Love came down at Christmas

Responding in prayer

As we draw near to Christmas,
I turn to you in prayer, Immanuel, God with us.

God of all nations and peoples,
today I pray for peace where there is war, for Israel and Palestine, for Ukraine, and for all places where violence overshadows hope.

Bless those who work for peace: diplomats, aid workers, journalists, and ordinary people who choose compassion in the face of hate.

In a world threatened by climate change and division, renew my courage and our global commitment to protect the earth, and to live as people who believe your creation still matters.

God with us, hear my prayer.

Christmas God,

Today I give thanks for my local community, for neighbours who look out for one another, for volunteers who bring light in dark seasons, for every small sign that love is still alive among us.

Where the Church has been silent in the face of injustice, wake us up. Where we’ve been harsh or exclusive, soften our hearts.

May I, like Joseph, listen for your voice and act with courage and kindness.

God with us, hear my prayer.

God of quiet miracles, as Christmas draws near, help me to make space for your presence in my hearts.

When I am uncertain, give me trust. When I am afraid, give me courage. When I am busy or distracted, draw me back to what matters most: your love, born among us, still at work in the world.

God with us, hear my prayer.

Amen.

Blessing

May the God who came as a child
enter my waiting and my wondering.

May the God who spoke to Joseph in the night
speak peace to my fears and courage to my hearts.

May the God who is forever Immanuel, God with us
walk beside each of us in love,
this day and forevermore. Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers For This Week

Monday 22nd December

- In these final few days of Advent, you might like to whisper your own version of Joseph's prayer: not one of certainty, but of courage: God, help me to listen. Help me to trust your presence when I don't understand it. Help me to believe that love is being born here. Help me to say yes.

Tuesday 23rd December

- 'Tis the season, so they say...the season for what? As you head into the 12 days of Christmas over the next couple of weeks, take a moment to think and pray: what does this season need to mean for you, for your walk with Christ, for your response to God's love?

Wednesday 24th December – Christmas Eve

- Christmas Eve might be one of the most precious gifts in the annual calendar – an invitation to pause, to breathe in, to think of others as you put the final touches to a meal prepared to share or a present bought with love.
- Loving God, help us to accept the gift of this day, the power of anticipation, the spirituality of waiting.
- Come Lord Jesus, Amen.

Thursday 25th December – Christmas Day

- During each of the 12 days of Christmas, our prayer prompts here in The Vine at Home are short poems, which we hope will help act as an invitation to prayer. You may like to read them aloud if that helps.

What are you hoping for this year?

Oh just the usual, I guess.

Meaning?

Oh, I think an antidote to overwhelm, would be useful,

Don't you?

And whatever the reversal of anxiety looks like.

I'd love a stocking full of love,

In bite-sized, manageable chunks.

And the tiny flicker of hope

That next year might be a little bit better -

Can you bring me that?

I definitely need somewhere to put my climate grief,

And something about peace on earth would really help -

Especially when I watch the news by accident.

Can I get a picture of my family together,

And a taste of sophistication and grace,

With a sprinkling of laughter and a wreath

That reminds me how wonderful God's creation is,

To hang on the door, please?

I'd like to unwrap a sense of self-worth,

An ability to be kind more often than I'm cynical,

And an abundance of patience. Do you have that?

Are you beginning to wish you hadn't asked?

No, and I can't promise, but I think a little bit of all that is contained in these next two words.

Are you ready?

Yes.

Happy Christmas.

Friday 26th December – Boxing Day

Just as the songs become unbearable,

Just as the overused jumper becomes unwearable,

Just as the much-fixed lights become unrepairable,

Suddenly, its done and gone, another year over, or so they say.

But wait –

Christmas is much more than a day,

It's a season, and it's here to stay.

So yes, Santa may be packing up the sleigh,

But the Immanuel doesn't go away,

God is really with us, here,

And that can help us face our fear:

Come near, come near O God, and show me

that even though you truly know me,

You love me, with the tender unconditionality

Of a tiny infant's hospitality,

And may I nurture a spirituality,

Just as simple, just as brimming with vitality.

Saturday 27th December

Hush, hush, hushhhhhh
in the crush of the pavements
the rush of the shopping centre
the gush-mush-lush of adverts turned up to eleven,
how am I supposed to hear the song of heaven?
So won't you hush, just a moment,
own the hereness of now,
and now, and now.
The noises will keep on noising,
the shoppers will keep on shopping,
the nations will keep on warring,
the stresses will keep on stressing,
the money-worries won't entirely go away,
and I cannot stop them, cannot silence them, cannot ignore them,
but I can still me, and just be:
set myself free
and perhaps this Christmas I can witness
to the delicious richness of stillness,
and the perpetual, eternal love song
not louder than all those distracting gongs,
but deeper, older and strong,
rolling on and on, even amongst all that is broken, grieving and wrong.
Perhaps this Christmas I can see,
perhaps perched upon a laden fir tree,
a divine messenger sent just for me.

Amongst all that commercial litter,
all that glitz and glitter,
Amongst all that is sparkling, let me be still.
And, just for now,
let me hushhhhhh.