



## ADVENT

### Prayer and the joyful expectation of God's mercy

The four Sundays of Advent mark the countdown to Christmas. For many people, this is a time of excitement, busyness and stress.

For you, it might be the very worst time to start thinking about prayer. But, it's a New Christian Year resolution!

In Mark's gospel there is a similar moment of hyper-activity and tension during the ministry in Galilee. The apostles are on a high, and Jesus says to them, "Come away to some lonely place" (Mark 6.31). They needed a chance to get things back into perspective; to rest and to pray.

The Advent season invites us to think of God's arrival among us in simplicity, in the prayerful wonder of the Bethlehem manger. It also asks us to reflect on the finality of God's arrival in mercy and judgement.

This is a good time to pause, because busyness and stress are only part of the Christmas story; reflection and wonder are also characteristic of this festival (Luke 2.19-20). Pause and take a look at yourself in the mirror. What do you see?

Very often we are the first to judge and condemn ourselves. It takes a little longer to come round to opening ourselves to the mercy of God, because that takes away our control over what we can condemn in ourselves and in others. And we are not good at receiving when we know how little we have to give in return.

So here are ways that Advent invites us to consider prayer:

1. How easily do you accept God's mercy, loving yourself and loving other people, because you are convinced of God's love for you?
2. How and when do you find a way of owning up to yourself and to God what you have done wrong, being sorry, and changing so as to be different in future?(Remember that this is part of every act of worship and one you should prepare for as carefully as if you were reading a lesson or leading the prayers.)
3. Could you find time to pray each day? How long could you manage? (5 minutes daily is better than a reservoir full of guilt because you can't ever do 20 minutes.) Where would you pray, and what would you do?
4. Do you keep a list of people, places and situations that you are praying for? When do you pray for them—every day, on a particular day? Do you tell those on your list you are praying for them?
5. Would it be helpful to join a prayer group?
6. Would it be helpful to speak with another Christian about how to develop your prayer life? (You could ask your parish priest about this.)

*Notes to help you plan your resolutions and the one or two priorities that will become part of your Way of Living.*

- ◇ How to recognise my failings, to be sorry, to accept forgiveness and change my behaviour.
- ◇ Planning time to pray, and how to pray.