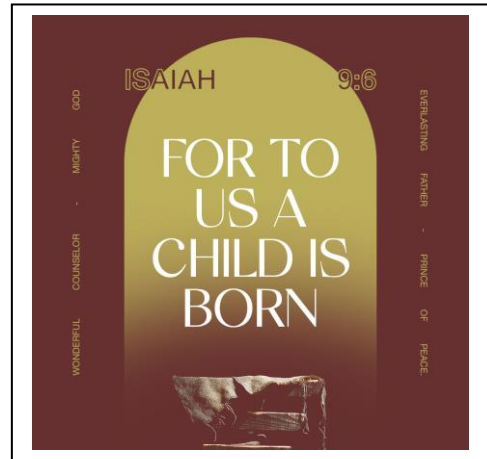


1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT Dec 3rd

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1–7 Prepare for the Christ child.

What is this? Yes, a calendar. You may not use one like this anymore, you may have a diary like this, or you may save your appointments into your



phone. Whatever way you do this, it is about waiting – waiting for that appointment, the holiday, pension day, contractors. We are in the waiting place.

Dr. Seuss wrote about a place called “the waiting place.”

*Waiting for a train to go
or a bus to come, or a plane to go
or the mail to come, or the rain to go
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow
or waiting around for a Yes or No
or waiting for their hair to grow.
Everyone is just waiting.*

The Christian calendar doesn't begin on January 1st – it begins today, the first Sunday of Advent, which is always 4 Sundays before Christmas. For Christians, all around the world, we are encouraged to awaken out of our complacency and to act. This means, we must prepare our hearts, our lives, our whole beings to receive the redeeming love of the baby Jesus.

What are some of the strange Christmas traditions you have ever experienced?

You may hang stockings over a fireplace – though most houses don't have fireplaces anymore.

You may bring in a dead pine tree into the house and then decorate it with colourful balls and ribbons.

Maybe not in Australia, but in America they put an egg in a beverage and drink it – Eggnog. What’s that all about?

I even heard of a family who eat cheap, frozen pizza on Christmas Eve!

And the tradition of wrapped gifts under the tree. Do you remember as a child, wondering what the gifts held, and maybe you crept closer to see if you could guess what it was. The anticipation would make the wait even more worth it. Then finally on Christmas day, you would run directly towards that special gift, tear the wrapping off and exclaim, hopefully with joy.

That is how we should be feeling now – excited with anticipation as we await the birth of our Lord and Saviour. Do you know what the word “advent” means – it means “coming” or “arrival.” **We need to prepare for 3 comings:**

God coming to earth in the infant Jesus whom we await at Christmas.

Christ returning to earth at a time we don’t know and Jesus coming into our hearts anew, each Advent.

Isaiah was one of the most prolific prophets of Israel. His name translates to “God is my salvation.” He spent most of his ministry foretelling the coming King for God’s people.

Back then, the Israelites lived in a time of unbearable war and bloodshed; they didn’t even live in their own land because violence forced them out as refugees; they were in constant fear

of violence; they didn't know where they would spend the month, let alone the next year and they didn't know when their sons would be called out to battle.

Then the prophet Isaiah promised a Prince of Peace. That is exactly what they needed. A king who was going to bring peace to the world. All the earth will rest on His shoulders, and He is going to rule fairly and lovingly. They were ready for this promised prince.

Do you ever get frustrated as you wait in line at the supermarket; wait to see your doctor; wait at the petrol pump; wait on the phone!! We may think the last one is the longest. But guess what, the Israelites had an even longer wait for the Prince of Peace.

100 years passed, 200 years passed, 300 years passed, over 600 years passed before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

What was on the other side of their waiting? The promised Messiah – God was going to step down into human flesh. Isaiah told them to be ready.

Jesus wants us to be ready. We must constantly keep alert, preparing ourselves, our hearts and continuing to hope in our loving God, who comes to us in Jesus Christ.

Have you ever experienced a situation where you felt like a big heavy stone was sitting inside and whatever you tried to do, it remained? To prepare us for our Lord, we all need to lay down some things, some stuff, some unforgiveness, some distractions – to make more room for God.

Volunteer to hand out small stones.

I would like each of you to take a stone to represent yourself. It may be different for each of us.

For some it may be the “what-ifs” of a recent experience – what if I had done more, been there more, said more, loved more.

For some it may be unforgiveness toward someone or toward ourselves. Unforgiveness blocks our hearts and doesn’t allow room for the Christ child.

Some of us may be angry or disappointed with someone or with God. God is surely big enough to take it, and sometimes we are small enough to hang on to it.

God wants only what is best for us. God knows more about our needs than we do. Many of us are carrying burdens these days.

1 Peter 5:7 says, “Let Him have all your worries and cares, for He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you.”

So, spend some time thinking about what your stone represents for you this very moment, as you begin to prepare your heart for the Christ child. Ponder on it now, in this time before we join in Communion.

When you feel ready, I would invite each of you to bring your stone to the front and place it on the table in front of the Nativity, laying your burdens down.

You will notice our Nativity scene still has lots of open space to add characters and animals as the weeks progress. It also reminds us to get rid of some of those things that are burdening

our hearts and minds, so there is more room for Jesus. Jesus comes into our hearts anew with each Christmas we experience.

Laying down the stone lets us rise with a free heart, with open arms for Jesus to enter. To rise with hope for all that God can and will do in our lives.

What does your stone represent? What is it that you must give up, put down, become aware of? My pray is that this Advent becomes a time to walk with God and for God to walk with us. As Advent begins, here we are in this holy place, all our path's converging, and we are learning how to breathe in time with the breath of God.

Wait, watch, stay awake – the Lord is coming.

Closing Prayer:

Father, no matter what burden I am carrying, I can trust that You will not only listen, but that You will also be faithful and righteous as You answer. Sometimes my burdens are heavy and difficult as I lay them at Your feet with loud frustration. Other times, I may not even be able to speak, but only utter pleas that have no words.

Please give me courage and strength during these times so that I can lay down the burden and walk away, knowing that You will handle it as You have promised!

Powerful, miracle-working God, help me to remember that there is nothing I will ever walk through that You can't handle. The same mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead is always at work in my life. I believe You are able, Lord! Walk me through this time of uncertainty and hold my burdens as Your own. Fill me with peace and the knowledge of Your continual presence moment by moment.

Loving God I have laid the burden that I have been carrying, at Your feet today and I want to prayerfully give this to You? I am releasing it into Your care. I trust with all my heart, that You are a God of miracles and will carry my burden and fill my heart with peace and joy, in its place. In Jesus Name Amen.

Benediction:

MAY THE LORD MAKE YOUR LOVE INCREASE AND OVERFLOW FOR EACH OTHER.

MAY HE STRENGTHEN YOUR HEARTS SO THAT YOU WILL BE BLAMELESS AND HOLY IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD WHEN OUR LORD JESUS COMES WITH ALL HIS HOLY ONES.

**MAY YOU EXPERIENCE GOD'S PEACE AND JOY AS YOU LEAVE
THIS MORNING AND MAY IT BE INFUSED FULLY IN YOUR
HEARTS AND MINDS THAT ALL PEOPLE YOU MEET WILL SEE
THE GLORY OF GOD SHINE IN YOUR LIFE.**