

Advent 4

A future hope

*As our worldly selfish gains
snare our hearts in servile chains
still the love of God remains
strong to set us free.*

*Lay all trite temptation low
false gods are a vanquished foe
liberty in every blow
justice will decree.*

"God has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation". (Luke 1.50)

Magnificent and magnanimous, mighty yet merciful.

This, the message to and through Mary:
mothering the Saviour into being.

Prophets' promise fulfilled in time in this child in a royal line.

The past waiting is ended,
the present presence welcomed,
the future hope assured.

In each day and every age

**Living God, as birth became you,
from the womb of heaven to the world that awaited,
the hungry would find "Hallelujah!" on their lips,
the proud resentment in their hearts.
Nothing was as before, messiah means change;
each moment a sacred space
for worship and service or rejection and disregard.
Praise be to you, now and always!**

Reflections through Advent 2006

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A MATTER OF TIME

Reflections through Advent 2006

*[The verses at the head of each section together comprise a
hymn, after Robert Burns' "Scots Wha Hae"]*

Advent 1

A past perspective

*Those who roamed by manna fed
those who Moses bravely led
no one place to lay their head
far from journey's end.*

"In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous
Branch to spring up for David and he shall execute justice
and righteousness in the land"
(Jeremiah 33.15).

He was a long time coming, to those who had grown used to
expecting rather than welcoming. Travelling hopefully was easier
than arriving for those who feared messiah might mean change. No
date and time precisely predicted, so ample room for various
spurious claimants to the throne: each saying messiah was present
in them. But the one who was to come was still future, the present
impostors a distraction. The waiting continued.
He was a long time coming.

**Living God, we pray for patience, but also impatience.
Soothe us to wait, as you need, for your will to be done;
fire us to restlessness, as you require,
to act for the sake of justice
and heal for the sake of hope.**

Advent 2

A present pledge

*Now's the time and now's the hour
born a child of Godly power
saints rejoice and wicked cower
no one can pretend.*

"The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of his servant David"
(Luke 1.69)

The long wait is almost over. Generations have expected it. Prophets predicted it. The principal players are announced. The stage is being readied. And the director is busy setting the scene. There will be a supporting act: a warm-up man, preparing the crowd, a prophet delivering a prologue, setting all in context, opening hearts, minds and whole beings to receive the good news of great joy that an angel will proclaim to some surprised shepherds very soon. A birth beckons: the past expectation will give way to present celebration.

**Living God, we are expectant: filled with excitement and,
if we are honest anxiety. Like twins vying in the womb,
these feelings fight in our hearts.**

Will we welcome your arrival as we should?

**The waiting is almost over,
the watershed time near.**

**The birth of hope is rarely easy,
but worth the weight our hearts have borne.
Calm us for the coming hour!**

Advent 3

A birth in time

*Who will place their trust in him
who so brave when faith is dim
who reject all godless whim
let them come and see.*

*Who for gospel and for law
grace to pierce our deepest flaw
freed from sins' restricting claw
need not turn and flee.*

"I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise." (Zephaniah 3.14-20)

Why then? Why there? Why them?
A birth in time. A particular place. A unique people.
Why not here and now, to us?
But: this birth brought heaven to earth, timelessly,
for all time and all places and all people.
They *are* we and there *is* here and then *is* now.
Advent is not a pantomime of re-enactment
but a powerful opportunity for readiness
in our present for the gift of hope and healing.

**Living God, forgive our folly; forgive our sin:
the bad we have done,
the good we have left undone;
the hurt we have inflicted,
the healing we have withheld.**