

ADVENT

2010

Learning from each other



Week One

Let your light shine!

Song This little light of mine. (Junior Praise 258)

This week includes the start of the Jewish Festival of Lights – Hanukkah, which starts this year on December 2, and lasts for eight days.

The festival marks the phenomenal (2nd Century BC) victory of a group of Jews called the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks, the most powerful army of the ancient world.

At the end of the three-year war, the Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem and rededicated the temple.

When the Maccabees rededicated the temple, they discovered a single cruse of oil with the seal of the High Priest still intact.

When they came to light the eight-branched temple candelabrum, the menorah, they had enough oil to last only a day.

But the menorah miraculously stayed alight for eight days. This became known as the miracle of the oil.

The word Hanukkah means rededication and commemorates the Jews' struggle for religious freedom.

Take time this week to reflect on the struggle many Christians face today against secularism, and rededicate yourself to proclaiming the Christian message.

Does your light shine out?



Do your work colleagues or neighbours know that you are a Christian?

Prayer

Almighty God, help us to be beacons of life-giving and life-changing light. May our love for You and for our neighbour be rekindled so that others may be drawn more closely to You.
Amen

Week Two

Don't just do something, sit there!

Song

Be still.

(Church Hymnary 4 189)



This Wednesday, December 8, is Bodhi Day, when Buddhists all over the world remember the enlightenment of Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha. This special day commemorates when the Buddha understood the answers to many of life's difficulties.

Prince Siddhartha Gautama was born about 500 BC in Nepal. He never went outside

the palace grounds, and had no idea what life was really like for most people. He had a rich and happy life, with everything he could possibly want.

Eventually he began to grow bored with his sheltered life and one day he left the palace. Now he began to see the world as it really was. As he rode around he saw suffering everywhere. He saw an

old man who was weak and nearly at the end of his life. He saw a man who was sick and in great pain, and he saw a funeral with the family of the dead man crying around his body.

Then he came across a holy man, a man who had devoted his life to following God. This man seemed to be happy and peaceful.

These things made Siddhartha think, and on the night before his 29th birthday he left his palace with its riches, beauty and safety. He left behind his beautiful robes and put on the simple clothes worn by holy men and shaved off all his hair just like the holy man he had seen.

For the next six years he travelled around the country in search of the answer to the question of why there is suffering in the world, but he could not find the answer. He travelled on until he came to a great tree, now known as a Bodhi tree (it's like a fig tree). He sat under this tree and began to meditate. After a long time, the truth came to him and discovering the truth gave him a feeling of great peacefulness. Suddenly he was able to stop thinking about himself and his worries. Siddhartha had become enlightened - he had found truth and so he became known as the Buddha - the enlightened one.

The Buddha learned many things while meditating under the Bodhi tree and he spent the rest of his life teaching people about what he had learned so that they might find peace in their own lives. One of the things he discovered is that very often people make themselves and others unhappy because they are always wanting and needing things. They are tied to the things they need and want, like a dog tied to a tree. The more they want the more they get tied up in knots, like the dog getting tangled in the rope that attaches it to the tree. The Buddha taught his followers about how they could be free of the things that tie them down and how this would give them peace and happiness. He taught them that they could become enlightened too by following his teachings.

Christmas commemorates the Incarnation of God – that God took flesh and lived the life of a human. God ceased to be a remote forbidding figure, but became a tiny baby and dwelt among us.

Take time this week to really read the Christmas story, and reflect on its true meaning. This will help towards achieving true Christian enlightenment.

Prayer

Almighty God, help us to think less of ourselves and more of what You want of us. Enable us to focus on the real message of Christmas. As the hustle and bustle of the last few days before Christmas threatens to overwhelm us, enable us to take time out to reflect on the miracle of the Incarnation. Amen

Week Three

Our past shapes our future

Song O God our help in ages past. (Church Hymnary 4 161)



This Thursday (December 16) is the Islamic festival of Ashura. This is the day when Sunni Muslims commemorate many of the incidents of God's intervention into the lives of his Chosen People in the Islamic tradition. Christians and Jews have many similar beliefs that we read in the Old Testament.

These include the occasions when

- God had mercy on Adam
- Noah was delivered from the flood
- Abraham was saved from Nimrod's fire
- Jacob's blindness was healed after Joseph's shirt was brought to him on this day
- Job was healed from his illness
- The Israelites were saved from Pharaoh's army.

It is also the day when Muslims remember what they believe happened on Good Friday - that Jesus was brought up to heaven after attempts by the Romans to capture and crucify him failed.

Shia Muslims remember it as the day when the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husayn ibn Ali, was martyred at Kerbala (in present day Iraq), and remember the sacrifices made by members of Muhammad's family.

The Christmas story also had pointers towards Good Friday, with the Magi's gift of myrrh reminding us that the baby Jesus was born to suffer a human death.

As we prepare for a time of celebration, remember that there are those in the world who have little or nothing to celebrate.

Christ is the Prince of Peace – but many know only war and violence.

Christ is the Saviour of the poor – but many are destined for a life of poverty and neglect.

Christ is the Healer – but many know only sickness and bereavement.

Christ is the Resurrection and the Life – but many do not know of the Communion of Saints or believe in the life eternal.

Prayer

Almighty God, help us to remember that all that has happened in the past can help us prepare for the future. As our celebration of the birth of Your Son approaches, let us not forget the rest of the story of His life. Amen

Week Four

Our past shapes our future

Song In the bleak midwinter. (Church Hymnary 4 305)

The winter solstice, December 21, is a time when astronomical observation confirms the rebirth of the Sun. As the days start to lengthen, we can start to plan for the future, and acknowledge that as the longest night passes, longer days lead our thoughts towards the ending of winter.



Pagans celebrate the Solstice as Yule, a time to show that we care about all the other life with which we share this planet.

As others celebrate the rebirth of the sun, we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Son. Many have adopted the Pagan Yule, and conflated it with the Roman Saturnalia, as a time of excessive consumption involving a mammoth spending spree and excessive eating and drinking.

As we pass by empty fields, let us give thanks that spring will soon be with us – unlike parts of the world where drought and flooding means that fields are likely to remain barren for the foreseeable future.

There is enough food in the world for everyone to be fed – but unfortunately much of it is in the wrong place, and stays there due to the greed of the 'haves' condemning many to be the 'have-nots'.

Prayer

Almighty God, as we look forward to celebrating the birth of Your Son, help us not to forget those who have little to celebrate. May we remember those whose harvests have failed, who face a winter of hunger, and have little hope for the future. Amen

This year's Advent material has been prepared by Andrew Sarle.

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(Pictures are from Microsoft Office ClipArt)

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