

Waiting in hope

My enthusiasm for advent has become a bit of a standing joke in the All Saints office. Forget Spotify Christmas playlists – for me, it's 'O Come O Come Emmanuel' all the way.

Joking aside, the themes of advent are so resonant for our world today. If Amazon Prime, Uber and wifi feed our addiction to the quick hit, advent schools us in patience. If the clamour of a busy city drowns out anything other than today's entertainments or distresses, advent calls us back to God's voice, speaking promises and hope.

Advent teaches us to look out for Jesus, our king, coming again to set the world the right way up again.

I find something in my spirit gets lost if I rush through this season at the pace London seems to set. But it's very easy to get swept along, so I'm thankful for advent practices that help me intentionally set my compass back to Jesus again.

If you're looking for ways of looking out for Jesus in this season, as an individual, or as a family, here are some ideas...

Practicing prayerfulness

If you commute, you might already have ways of praying as you go – but if not, you might want to try **Pray as you Go**, who have an advent series of reflections based on various people associated with Jesus' birth. <https://homemadeours.wordpress.com/2014/12/01/making-a-christmas-story-advent-calendar-just-in-time/?fbclid=IwAR0ABhMahXkJvmmxPcQeoR4W8tLUuDC5hOYj5ig1ua1CHHCko-fEOK0rV8U>

Advent is a time when we look to Jesus, **the light of the world**. One family uses candles to help create a moment of quiet and prayer at each family mealtime in December. Others might want to use an advent candle, lighting the same candle each day to focus prayers on Jesus' light in the darkness.

24/7 prayer is releasing a new series of very short videos – the **Selah Series** – during advent this year. <https://www.24-7prayer.com/podcasts/category/advent16> Although they are only a minute long, it's worth watching them in the context of a longer pause, to give the Holy Spirit space to speak to you within a time of quiet.

The Diocese of London has released an **app for Advent** which offers a daily reading, reflection and prompts for prayer: https://spckpublishing.co.uk/a_good_advent

Cultivating Generosity

A **Reverse Advent Calendar** can subvert a season of 'getting'! Just add something new to a box every day during December, in order to give it away to a foodbank or another charitable cause. Here in Peckham, you can bring donations to Peckham Foodbank to All Saints. Peckham Sponsors Refugees also have a shopping list to get a house ready to receive a refugee family in the new year.

A **Baked Bean Sunday** means you forego your usual Sunday meals for simple ones – baked beans on toast. You can use the time saved to visit a neighbour, call a friend or listen to God in prayer, and you can use the money saved to give to a charitable cause.

Waiting with children

Making a **Jesse Tree** over advent, separate to the Christmas Tree, with decorations representing the promises of God, can create a moment each day to share and speak out those promises together. There are lots of online resources including suggestions for readings, printable symbols, or suggestions for crafts, so you can make this work for you in any number of ways. Here's one link to get you started: <https://www.whychristmas.com/customs/jessetrees.shtml>.

Ann Voscamp has written a book about how she makes a Jesse Tree with her family: <https://www.hive.co.uk/Product/Ann-Voskamp/Unwrapping-the-Greatest-Gift/19797828>

For crafty types, here's another set of prompts and ideas...
<https://homemadeours.wordpress.com/2014/12/01/making-a-christmas-story-advent-calendar-just-in-time/?fbclid=IwAR0ABhMahXkjvvmxPcQeoR4W8tLUuDC5hOYj5ig1ua1CHHCko-fEOK0rV8U>

For those with children who love to be outside, this book comes highly recommended, with activities which encourage **the advent-urous** (pun intended): https://www.eden.co.uk/shop/wild-advent-4554939.html?site_id=162595&adtype=pla_with_promotion&device=c&product_id=4554939&gclid=EAlaIqobChMIhdOirf_23glVGPIRCh1RkQiLEAQYA_iABEgJ_LPD_BwE

Alternativity (strapline: Just God, Simply Christmas) has a free family reflection box which offers a daily activity and reflection. They're entirely run by volunteers so if you order one of these, do be patient! https://www.alternativity.org.uk/store/product/5_festive-family-boxes/21_festive-family-boxes/

Reading

There are any number of excellent advent books around for those who love to read.

The Church of England has books for individuals and families offering a variety of 'ways in' to the advent season: <https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/category/christian-books/advent-and-christmas-1407> and the Church Times also publishes a list of advent books taking a number of different approaches: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/26-october/books-arts/book-reviews/advent-books-2018>

Tom Wright has written three books on advent, each picking up a different gospel or biblical book. For the last minute among us, these are also available as ebooks so can be downloaded quickly! <https://www.hive.co.uk/Search/Keyword?keyword=tom%20wright%20advent&productType=0>

I found this book from Walter Brueggeman a fantastic one to journey through advent with last year: <https://www.wjkbooks.com/Products/0664262279/celebrating-abundance.aspx> He's also written this one which may also be well worth a read. <https://www.hive.co.uk/Product/Walter-Brueggemann/Names-for-the-Messiah--An-Advent-Study/20137211>

A friend also recommends Ann Voscamp: https://www.eden.co.uk/shop/greatest-gift-the-hb-4087470.html?site_id=162595&adtype=pla_with_promotion&device=c&product_id=4087470&gclid=EAlaIqobChMIhNSP6lj33glVBs53Ch0IRglgEAQYA_iABEgKH5vD_BwE

This isn't reading, but the Zacharias Trust have a series of advent reflections to watch over Advent: <https://www.zachariatrust.org/thetimeisnow/?fbclid=IwAR106GyxSXnNa22JHebih5-e6egNUHo0BowLj5mIsAx8oDDfJ5l831nn8jw>

How about asking a friend if they will read the same book over advent, so you have a reading buddy to discuss or pray with?

What about you?

Do you have a way of entering into the advent season that works for you?

Perhaps reading through a gospel might be your way of focussing on Jesus. Maybe taking a quiet moment every day to praying for colleagues or friends might be something which helps you.

Do share your ideas! We're all journeying together, and God graciously gives us one another to journey with!