

Beyond Consumerism

Advent Resource



Arthur Rank
Centre

CONFIDENT RURAL CHRISTIANS



Introduction

This is the first part in a series of worship resources specially written for the Arthur Rank Centre to complement their Beyond Consumerism project. During the coming months, we will be able to reflect on the connection between faith and food as we move through the different seasons of the church and agricultural year. Here in the rural church, we have something unique to celebrate and to share.

I grew up in a village with numerous local farms and my husband worked in the agricultural industry for sixteen years before we were both ordained in the Anglican church. After over twenty years' ministry in suburbia, in March 2019 we moved to a group of four village churches in rural Northamptonshire. Here we have reconnected with our rural roots, surrounded by sheep, horses and arable. The Covid pandemic has also played an important part in reconnecting us with the natural environment around us and inspiring us to develop further our home-growing. This in turn has influenced the way we worship.



Doing December *differently*

The run up to Christmas can so often mean stress, exhaustion, and a frenetic period of spending leading into a period of excessive and prolonged food consumption for many. For some, however, this year will be a time of great challenge, financial hardship, poverty and hunger, all played out against a backdrop of family tensions and strain. When money is tight, many people find themselves on the edge, pressured to get into debt.

Advent is an invitation to a radical shake up in our thinking, a season in its own right, where cultures collide, holding together the tensions between the First and Second Comings of Jesus. The anticipation of the birth is juxtaposed with themes of godly righteousness and kingly judgement. God has a particular heart for the poor and the hungry, and the Old Testament prophets frequently cry out against greed and injustice.

Many of us long to 'do December differently' and to get away from the consumerism and social pressures which dominate the countdown to Christmas. As we prepare, we can make connections between farming and the food that we eat. We can recognise afresh the inequalities in the world, where some people struggle with obesity while others go hungry. We can acknowledge the threat of climate change, extremes in the weather, and the problems of plastic waste.

This worship resource is an opportunity to reclaim the fast before the feast, without undermining the sense of hope and joy. The food we buy and eat involves ethical choices and implications. Through our worship, we can begin to raise awareness and change the culture of consumerism. Instead of thinking the challenges are too big, let us celebrate what the small things we can do and start to make a difference.

Flexible resources

I am aware that many rural churches only have one service per month. I am also aware that one size does not fit all, so these materials are specially designed to be used flexibly. You will find a simple service outline, which can be used on any Sunday service during Advent. This can be expanded for an Advent Carol Service or pared back for a mid-week service. It can also be adapted for school use.

Covid has opened up other new ways of worshipping together, including worship in the home and worship online via Zoom. You will find a daily devotion for use at home on each day during Advent and liturgy for the Lighting of the Advent Wreath in church. And why not initiate a 'Doing December Differently' Zoom each week of Advent to refocus on its main themes and bring an alternative perspective into our preparations.



Creating atmosphere

The church is a sacred space, so how can we help others to meet with God? In rural communities, churches often have personal significance even for those who don't come to services often. During Advent, we can create sanctuary for busy, stressed and anxious people. We can offer space and stillness, and a perspective that our present culture cannot give.

Resist the temptation to add a Christmas tree to the church too soon and be mindful of costs if there are few services. Bare branches and evergreens that cost nothing and a simple empty crib awaiting the coming of Jesus may be far more profound than expensive or ostentatious decorations.

Welcome and hospitality are enhanced by food and, after all, this is a food-oriented project. Seasonal fayre is always appreciated, especially homemade. Cooking and sharing enhance hospitality and mutual care. However, as food prices rise and food supply chains tighten, think carefully about your choices and be sure to practise what you preach.

You can find further information and more suggestions to help you plan ahead in *How Village Churches Thrive: A Practical Guide*, ed. Robert Atwell, 2022, CHP.

Preparation and Invitation

During Advent everyone is really busy, so planning ahead will definitely help. Involving other people shares the load and gives them ownership. Our natural partners in this project are our local farmers and food suppliers. Consider including an interview with one of these people. A personal invitation will be really appreciated, but we need to be aware that our regular church services are not always held at a good time for farmers. If this is the case, get farmers' views beforehand, so that they can still be shared during the service. We may be able to think of others that we can involve, e.g. someone who volunteers in a local Foodbank. Also consider interviewing a young person. They can often surprise us with their comments and spiritual insights.

If we want people to turn up on the day, good advertising is vital especially in the busy run up to Christmas. Personal invitation is important, but bear in mind that families and young people rely heavily on social media for information. Young people are often last minute, so always send out a final reminder the day before or even on the day.

An Advent Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus.
Visit us now as we wait for your coming.
May we watch with anticipation,
as all creation strains towards
your coming in glory.
Give us courage to live differently,
to love mercy and to walk in
humility with you.
Fill us afresh with Advent hope,
because the Saviour is
drawing near.
Amen.

Advent Candles

24 Day Advent Candle



This is a daily devotion to use at home. It can be difficult to introduce the season of Advent to children when contemporary culture and school activities draw them towards Christmas prematurely. This resource provides a different focus, introducing us to the Advent themes, whilst earthing them in real life and challenges to our consumerist culture. We journey from Creation and the Fall of Humankind, on through the voices of the Prophets, to the Coming of the Saviour and His Kingdom of Righteousness.

Any candle will do, it does not need to be a special one with numbers on it. You could light the candle at the same time as you open an Advent calendar and watch the candle as you savour the chocolate. Alternatively you could use it at a shared meal together.

There is a Scripture for each day, followed by something to think about, a suggestion or an action.



*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.
Genesis 1.31*

Greenery is a sign of hope and a promise of new life in the midst of winter bleakness. At the beginning of Advent, bring in some evergreens to decorate your home and remind you of God's good creation.



*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.
Genesis 2.15.*

Think about the back story to your Christmas food. Who has produced it? How will it get to your table? At your next meal, try to identify your food's countries of origin.



*God said to Adam: Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.
Genesis 3. 17*

Adam and Eve made a bad choice, which affected the land. We too have choices. Choose biodegradable Christmas packaging and avoid plastic as much as possible.



*The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.
Romans 8. 19*

Advent is a time of waiting for the Messiah's coming. Winter waits for the renewal and restoration of spring. Do one thing to tidy up outside ready for Christmas.



He is the Maker of heaven and earth...he remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. Psalm 146. 6 - 7

Advent is a good time to declutter before we receive more 'stuff'. What good quality items could you give away to charity to benefit others?



*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
Isaiah 9. 2*

Do some experimenting. What is it like to be in the dark – inside or outside? Spiritually? Give thanks for the light, and also for fresh insights and understanding?



The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. Isaiah 11. 6

Think about nature in proper balance and animal welfare. Go for a walk and pay special attention to the animals and wildlife where you live.



'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it?... "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Isaiah 58. 3

As you are preparing for Christmas, take a look through the food and presents and check out how many items are marked as Fair Trade goods. What more could you do?



The King will take pity on the weak and the needy... He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. Psalm 72. 13 - 14

Many will find themselves adversely affected by rising costs over which they have little control. Friendship is free. Phone or visit a friend in need today.



They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Micah 4.3

Consider which countries will be at war this Christmas. How might this affect how they mark it and what they eat? Turn your thoughts into prayers.



"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen... Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter. Isaiah 58. 6

Who do you know who will be struggling this Christmas? Why not put together a little gift box of homemade treats. It can be left on the doorstep anonymously as a surprise.



He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. Isaiah 40. 11

Display a small sheep (cut out or toy) in your window to remind you that you are part of God's flock and he cares for you. Get others in your community to do the same.



"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Psalm 46. 10

Halfway through Advent, take time to consciously stop for a few minutes. Breathe slowly and deeply. Watch the candle flame and simply be still in God's presence.



This is what the Lord says to Israel: You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Amos 5. 11

Grain exports are still vulnerable to tax and the effects of war today. This has a knock-on effect on poorer countries. Research who is affected and turn your thoughts to prayer.



"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen... Is it not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Isaiah 58. 7

Think about a family member you find difficult. Write them a special message in a Christmas card or carefully choose a particular present they will appreciate.



Away with the noise of your songs! But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5. 23 - 24

As we sing Christmas carols, let us remember the prophet's cry for justice. Consider making a donation to one of the aid agencies supporting Third World agriculture.



Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines... though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. Habakkuk 3. 17 - 18

Who will face a particularly tough Christmas this year? Plant a bulb in a pot as you pray for this situation. Give the bulb to the person as a sign of hope.



I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. Matthew 25. 35

Think about how Jesus identifies with the homeless person or the foodbank user. Put together a bag of groceries to give to a homeless person or a local foodbank.



Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness. Psalm 96. 13

Consider what you will eat over Christmas. What might a balanced Christmas diet look like? How can you adjust your eating to prevent overindulgence and reduce food waste?



Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting... James 5. 7

Christmas is nearly here, but we continue to wait for the Second Coming of Jesus as King. Talk to local farmers about how they wait for their winter crops to grow.



"There will be signs... When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Luke 21. 25, 28

Tonight is the longest night. This can be a difficult time for those who have lost loved ones during the year. Find a photo. Allow time for memories, tears and laughter.



Jesus said: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. Matthew 24. 42

Pay special attention to the TV news bulletins today. Which news stories touch your heart? Turn to prayer and Jesus into each situation.



Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5. 16 - 18

In what ways do you say thank you for your Christmas food? Give a special smile and thank you to the staff in our shops and supermarkets.



The Lord says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Revelation 22. 20

Pray for those who will be working tomorrow, feeding our animals and serving our dinner in restaurants and at home.

A photograph showing the hands of children holding each other in a circle, with an advent wreath made of pinecones and nuts in the foreground.

LITURGY FOR USE WITH AN ADVENT WREATH

The Advent Wreath is a central part of our European Advent traditions. The circle is a shape with no beginning and no end to remind us that God is eternal and full of never-ending mercy. The evergreens are a sign of hope and new life in the midst of the bleakness of winter. The candles are a visible sign of light, shining in the midst of winter darkness, reminding us of Jesus' words: 'I am the light of the world.' Traditionally, the four candles represent The Patriarchs, The Prophets, John the Baptist, and Mary, which are echoed here.

Usually one candle is lit on each of the four Sundays during Advent, but in churches where there is only one monthly service all four sections could be used in the same service following the outline below. The outline can be readily adapted for use in collective worship in school. The Bidding and Response could be spoken, or it could be sung, using the Taizé chant from which it comes. On Christmas Day, the response changes to an expression of joy, taken from the carol 'Joy to the world'. This carol could then be sung after the lighting of the wreath.

ADVENT 1: A SIGN OF HOPE

'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60. 1 – 3)

The first candle is lit.

Jesus, Light of the World,
we watch like our forebears for the promise of hope:
to restore balance to the land,
to bring equity to all peoples,
to give wisdom to the leaders
and peace to the nations.

Space for silent reflection.

Bidding: Wait for the Lord whose day is near.

Response: **Keep watch, take heart.**

ADVENT 2: A CRY FOR JUSTICE

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. (Micah 5. 2 & 4)

One candle is already lit. A second candle is lit.

Jesus, Light of the World,
we wait with the prophets for the coming Shepherd King:
to bring justice to the exploited,
to speak up for the powerless,
to provide food for the hungry,
and to comfort those in distress.

Space for silent reflection.

Bidding: Wait for the Lord whose day is near.

Response: **Keep watch, take heart.**

ADVENT 3: A CALL TO REPENT

A voice calls out: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. (Isaiah 40. 3 – 5)

Two candles are already lit. A third candle is lit.

Jesus, Light of the World,
we hear John's call to repent of our sins:
to turn away from our consumerism,
to curb our wastefulness,
to care responsibly for creation,
and to prepare for God's coming Kingdom.

Space for silent reflection.

Bidding: Wait for the Lord whose day is near.

Response: **Keep watch, take heart.**

ADVENT 4: A PATH OF HUMILITY

"My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble...He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1. 46 – 48, 51 - 53)

Three candles are already lit. A fourth candle is lit.

Jesus, Light of the World,
we recognise Mary's choice of humble obedience:
to serve with grace and generosity,
to lift up the poor,
to see the hungry filled with good things
and to bring glory to your name.

Space for silent reflection.

Bidding: Wait for the Lord whose day is near.

Response: **Keep watch, take heart.**



CHRISTMAS DAY: A CELEBRATION OF JOY (SACRAMENT)

Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. (Isaiah 9. 6 – 7)

Four candles are already lit. The central candle is lit.

Jesus, Light of the World,
we welcome you into our midst:
born in a humble stable,
identifying with the poor and lowly,
God made flesh in vulnerability,
God with us, God one of us.

Space for silent reflection.

Bidding: Joy to the world, the Lord has come!

Response: **Let earth receive her King.**

A Service Outline

This outline could be used for any one Sunday during Advent or as the basis for an Advent Carol Service. The length of the service can be varied by omitting the optional items. It is important to create space and stillness in the midst of a busy season, so less may be more. It could also be adapted to a school setting. Readings and prayers can be shared around the congregation to involve as many people as possible.

The Advent wreath and the empty crib should be in prominent positions in front of the congregation. A basket of Christmas Blessing cards should be placed close to the crib.

Welcome

Introduction to the Service

Hymn/Song

Advent Candle 1

Advent Candle 2

Optional Hymn/Song

Optional Interview with a local farmer, food producer, foodbank volunteer, young person

OT Reading: Isaiah 11. 1 - 10

Hymn/Song

Advent Candle 3

Advent Candle 4

Gospel Reading: Matthew 3. 1 – 12

Hymn/Song

Optional Talk

Space for Reflection and Action (See below)

Optional Hymn/Song

Prayers of Intercession (See below)

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn/Song

Blessing



‘Doing December Differently’ on Zoom

This could be a one-off at the beginning of December or a weekly gathering throughout Advent. Encourage people to set aside one hour together on Zoom to consider how they might ‘do December differently’ reflecting on their own preparations for Christmas.

As an ice-breaker, encourage everyone to share their Christmas loves and hates. Draw out those that relate to consumerism and particularly to food and the natural world around us.

This is another opportunity to invite a local farmer or food supplier to join and share their experiences. Then choose some of the suggestions and actions from the 24 Day Advent Candle to take the conversation further.

End the hour with the Advent Prayer or if you are meeting each week, the appropriate section from the Advent Wreath.

Advent *Reflection* and Action

This can be included in the Advent service in place of a talk

- Invite the congregation to come forward and gather around the empty crib
- If you have animals in your nativity set, add them to the crib now

Ask the congregation

- to consider the stable and the animals
- to consider the shelter it offers to the homeless

Encourage the congregation to wait in silence (warn everyone how long it will be)

Invite each person

- to collect a Christmas Blessing card
- to take it home
- to put it in a small box with a food treat – a mincepie; a cake; some sweets
- to give this away as a thank you or an encouragement to someone who is struggling



Christmas **BLESSING**

God, who created us,
hold the good earth in
balance.

Jesus, who came and lived
amongst us,
bring peace in our world.

The Spirit, who nourishes and
sustains us,
fill us with joy.

And may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with us now and for ever.

Amen.



MUSIC SUGGESTIONS

The hymns, songs and short chants that follow can be used with organ, piano, sung unaccompanied or played on mp3.

'Come, thou long expected Jesus, Charles Wesley, AM29, StF169, HON117, CH4 472, MP102

'Earth was waiting, spent and restless', Walter Chalmers Smith, AM34

'Great is the darkness', Gerald Coates, Noel Richards, with the compelling chorus 'Come, Lord Jesus', StF405, HON236, MP835, SoF742

'Hark the glad sound! The Saviours comes', Philip Doddridge, AM36, StF171, HON249, CH4 277, MP210, SoF154

'He became poor', Iona Community, effective unaccompanied, Innkeepers and Light Sleepers, Wild Goose Publications, StF344

'Hills of the north, rejoice,' Charles E. Oakley and editors of English Praise, AM39, StF 172, HON270.

'Longing for light' (Christ, be our light), Bernadette Farrell, identifying with the hungry and homeless, AM42, StF706, HON401, CH4 543, MP 1201, SoF2417

'Look up and wonder', John L. Bell, Innkeepers and Light Sleepers, Wild Goose Publications

'Make way, Graham Kendrick, AM160, StF264, HON436, CH4 279, MP457, SoF384

'O come, O come Emmanuel', Latin 13th Century, translated by John M. Neale, AM45, StF 180, HON469, CH4 273, MP493, SoF410

'People. Look east', Martin Leckebusch, AM 47

'Praise to the God who clears the way', Jan Berry, StF183

'Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord!', Timothy Dudley-Smith, AM 394, StF186, HON612, CH4 286, MP631, SoF520

'The kingdom of God is justice and peace', Taizé chant
The Lord is my light, J. Berthier, Taizé two melody round, HON786

There is a hope that burns within my heart, Mark Edwards, Stuart Townend, AM803, MP1358, SoF2558

'There is a longing in our hearts', Anne Quigley, a prayer for justice, AM409, HON643, CH4720

'Wait for the Lord', J. Berthier, Taizé, AM53, HON790, CH4 276,

'When out of poverty is born', Kathy Galloway, set to Tune: Kingsfold, CH4 291i

'Who would think that what was needed', John L. Bell, Heaven Shall Not Wait, Wild Goose Publications, set to the tune of Scarlet Ribbons, CH4 295

Hymn numbers, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the following hymnbooks:

Ancient and Modern:

Singing the Faith (StF)

Hymns Old and New: One Church, One Faith, One Lord (HON)

Church Hymnal 4th Edition (CH4)

Mission Praise (MP)

Songs of Fellowship (SoF)



Prayers of Intercession:

An Advent Litany of Justice and Hope

Alert and watchful, let us pray to the coming King with open hearts and minds.

Wonderful Counsellor, we pray for those in authority around the world, and those who make decisions about the resources of the earth, that we may use your gifts responsibly. Give wisdom to those who seek to promote fair trade, safe working environments and sustainable methods of food production.

Bidding: We wait for your coming Kingdom.
Response: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Mighty God, we pray for those who work on the land and sea, that all may enjoy the fruits of their labours and marvel at your creation. Forgive us when we consume food and goods with no consideration for their production, and help us to act with justice and mercy.

Bidding: We wait for your coming Kingdom.
Response: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Everlasting Father, we pray for the wellbeing of creation, the care and welfare of the animals and the impact of our food choices on others. Keep us mindful of our natural world as we prepare for your coming and careful to avoid excess or careless waste.

Bidding: We wait for your coming Kingdom.
Response: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Prince of Peace, we pray for those who find themselves in poverty as a result of war, exploitation, climate change and situations beyond their control. Bring peace and restoration to our troubled world and fulfil your promises to all generations.

Bidding: We wait for your coming Kingdom.
Response: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

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