

coastal

SANCTUARY



AN ADVENT PILGRIMAGE

A set of reflections and images exploring the coming of Jesus

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Welcome to our second Coastal Sanctuary, this is an Advent resource based on readings from Luke's gospel. As before, the reflections, liturgy and images are put together by the folks at BeachcomberFX. You will see that for each week in Advent we have a written reflection for you to ponder on, as well as providing an opportunity for you to join with us at gatherings around North Tyneside to make altars in the world in everyday places.

We hope this Advent Coastal Sanctuary will provide an opportunity for you to spend time in preparation and in anticipation for the coming of Jesus. We also hope, that it will give you an insight into some of the ways BeachcomberFX explores faith and spirituality.

Rob Wylie

Politicians compete for the highest offices. Business tycoons scramble for a bigger and bigger piece of the pie. Armies march and scientists study and philosophers philosophise and preachers preach and labourers sweat. But in that silent baby, lying in that humble manger, there pulses more potential power and wisdom and grace and aliveness than all the rest of us can imagine.

Brian D McLaren

ADVENT 1



Through the door of nature
Tynemouth Station

Luke 21:25-39

ANDREW SKINNER

Growing up in Leicester I lived about as far from the sea as you can get. In fact, the nearby town of Ashby-de-la-zouch is statistically the furthest place you can get to the sea (and the nearest beach to that is Skeggy!)

The term 'land locked' is then an entirely appropriate adage for my upbringing and I recall vividly the sheer magic of going on holiday to the sea. Those first glimpses of the ocean coming along the A30 in Cornwall mesmerised me. How could something that big and vast exist? No limits, no boundaries. No walls, no fences. No roads, no people.

I discovered that not only did this vast wilderness exist but that you could actually go in it and have fun! So every morning I would scuttle down to the beach with my polystyrene Fat Willy's Surf Shack bodyboard and ride the waves to a blissful stop on the sand. (I remember less fondly the terrible nipple chaffing from the board!) The interaction with the energy sea was utterly infectious. As I look back this was a hint of the freedom I still seek and crave today, back then it was pure childhood joy.

For much of my life the sea remained just that, a special treat that we had to travel for hours to get to. This would all change around 13 years ago when I felt the sudden pangs of the ocean unexpectedly returning. I guess I was a bit lost at the time. I had just finished uni and was spending an unhealthy amount of time sat in my boxer

shorts watching Bargain Hunt. Something needed to change. I didn't know what but I knew I needed to go back to the sea. I packed up my Renault 5 and headed off into the unknown.

I got lucky and got a job on the West Coast of Ireland and it was here I realised what I had been missing. The sea no longer had to be an occasional treat, it was something that could be enjoyed every single day. The majesty, the beauty, the rawness. I embraced it all.

I upgraded my Fat Willy's board and dived head first into surfing. I quickly started to experience the different faces of the sea. From the trickling waves of the summer to the raw power of the winter, I realised this was not something that could be controlled or taken lightly.

At times I felt completely overwhelmed, even dominated by the ocean. The more I fought against the currents the less success I had. But, as time went on I started to learn how to be more comfortable in its presence. I became more aware of what was going on. I learnt to look for the breaks in the waves that would let me out. I discovered I could read the energy of the waves and use this to help me rather than hinder me.

I will never master the ocean. There will always be more to discover and just when I get comfortable it never ceases to teach me a lesson. However I am learning to enjoy it, to be more at peace within it and to find harmony with it.

The same goes with my journey of faith.

There is no doubt we live in turbulent times. How we interpret these times is in some way less important to me than how we respond to it. Do we exhaust ourselves fighting against it or do we look, watch and move with the energy around us to make a difference. Can we learn to observe the seasons knowing that death in winter is essential for new life in spring.

Another world is always possible.

ADVENT 2



Through the door of the prophets
Cullercoats Station

Luke 3:1-6

NOREEN REES

Are you prepared for Christmas? Presents wrapped and under the tree? Pudding plump with fruit and silver charms? Turkey ordered and guest beds aired? But are you *really* prepared?

Advent is a time of waiting and anticipating, a time to explore the impact Jesus's coming had on the world, and still has. It's a time when we might be more caring towards our neighbours—letting go of past irritations such as them blocking our drive or not inviting us for coffee. As we write our Christmas cards it's a time to re-evaluate our friendships, for saying sorry for not being in touch all year and really meaning it.

In the reading Luke tells us that John the Baptist (Jesus's cousin) has a role which is two-fold-

- Preparing the way for Jesus's ministry, which is near
- Teaching us about forgiveness and redemption

In verse 4 Luke echoes the words of Isaiah in the Old Testament by telling us that John's was a voice calling *in the wilderness*.

So, John isn't to be found in a town where he is visible, can be pointed out and approached. No, he is to be found on the margins of habitation, in a wild and threatening place where water and food are scarce. My thoughts on this is that in order to find John, and more importantly his

message, followers had to deliberately seek him out, and travel through a menacing environment to do so. But this is also a metaphor. John can be found in the dark and troubled places of life, and as John prepares the way for Jesus, so we can transfer that thinking to Jesus. He is in the wilderness of our lives and if we call out to Him in our hopelessness, He will hear us.

Not only that, as Luke says in Verse 5, 'Every valley can be filled in, every mountain made low.' This isn't a grand building scheme put forward by Luke, but a way of saying that Jesus can transform our lives and make it completely different to what it was before. So as we journey towards Christmas, will you be making changes in *your* life?

ADVENT 3



Through the door of generosity
North Shields Station

Luke 3:7-18

STEPHEN HOLMES AND ROB WYLIE

This passage is a call to arms, a call to being judged only by the fruit we bring into the world not by what we say or believe. John is asking people not to bring their heritage, background or faith as a point of pride or virtue or to see themselves as completed projects. He asks to see proof of their changed lives by the actions they live out.

John encourages everyone to produce good fruit. The good fruit in this case is of a very practical nature rather than a spiritual one. John asks us to share what we have, not be greedy, to be honest and trustworthy, to give food to the hungry and clothes to the poor. "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."

"What should we do then?" verse 10 tells us... It's not about feelings, it's not even about belief... but it is what 'we do'... Being a follower of Jesus should be seen through practical acts too; give your shirt, provide food for those that don't have any.

All this makes me ask the question, how much do we know about the needs of those around us, in the church? In the community? Our neighbours? Our friends? Even our family? This leads me to another question, how open are we, to share our needs with those who could possibly help us out?

The practical way in which this text is played out suggests that I know my mates needs, he needs a shirt... I have two... I'll give him one of mine.

Simples!

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ADVENT 4



Through the door of the present
Monkseaton Station

Luke 1:39-45

SUE HUTCHINSON

Christmas is an amazing time of the year. The festive lights, the carols, the festive bakes from Greggs and Christmas coffees, the unveiling of Fenwicks window, Christmas markets and parties. Christmas day itself is the fulfilment of the excitement, the hope and expectations created during the run up. The planning and preparation, the stress and hardwork to make Christmas day the best yet. On Christmas day we get to see the smiles and happiness our planning and preparation has created. The smiles and gratitude when gifts are received.

My husband and I are Christmas crazy. We put our tree and decorations up on 1st November and begin our planning and preparation for our favourite time of year. We have lots to celebrate during this time such as our wedding anniversary, birthdays as well as Christmas itself. Yet, as it is for so many it is also a time that we are reminded of a sadness, a longing and a desire that has yet to be fulfilled and at times seems impossible. Christmas is a time when our longing to wake on Christmas morning to the sound of our longed-for child shouting with excitement "Mummy, Daddy, Santa has been!" echoes amidst the silence of the early hours of Christmas morning.

And it is with that longing and desire for a child that my heart connects to Elizabeth's heart.

At the very start of the Gospel of Luke we are told about Zechariah and Elizabeth's longing for

a child. Elizabeth was old and unable to have a child. For Elizabeth this meant she was looked down upon by society for not being able to make her husband a father or provide the family with an heir, and herself seen as a disgrace.

With this longing Elizabeth would have felt an array of emotions. Elizabeth would have watched others announce their excitement of being pregnant and witnessed as they and others planned and prepared for the arrival of the child. Just as we plan and prepare for the arrival of Christmas day.

Imagine planning and preparing, being filled with hope and expectation but Christmas day never arrives. This may have been how Elizabeth felt, the excitement and joy for those expecting, watching as their 'Christmas day' arrived with the birth of their child and yet sadness for her own unfulfilled 'Christmas Day', unfulfilled hope and expectation that one day it would be her to announce she too was pregnant and to give birth. Praying to God for Him to fulfil her desire.

And yet God had a plan for such a time. With the fulfilment of the words spoken by the angel Gabriel to Zechariah regarding the forthcoming child Elizabeth would and did conceive. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Mary was told of conceiving Jesus through the Holy Spirit by the angel Gabriel. Mary then travelled to Elizabeth and on entering and greeting Elizabeth, the child within Elizabeth leapt with joy in

acknowledgment of who Mary and the child she was carrying was.

However, if Elizabeth had already had children before this time, would she have been so understanding towards Mary if she, herself had not experienced God enabling the impossible to become possible? Would Elizabeth had understood or experienced the revelation the Holy Spirit brought to her upon hearing Mary's greetings of who Mary was carrying? And would Elizabeth have understood the magnitude of God's gift through her son or the plan God had for her life?

Elizabeth believed God had redeemed her from her 'disgrace' and as far as we can tell this was without the knowledge of Zechariah's encounter with the angel Gabriel. She simply believed and gave God praise for the gift of the child now growing within her. Just as she exclaimed over Mary "You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do as he said" so too was Elizabeth blessed for believing what God would do for her.

The joy and excitement Elizabeth and Mary exchanged was the revelation that God can make the impossible possible. Elizabeth was experiencing the happiness and gratitude of the fulfilment of her long-awaited 'Christmas day'. The gift God had given Elizabeth through her unborn child was to be a very significant part of His plan. For Mary, Elizabeth was a friend to

believe and understand her. Mary, young, unmarried and with child would have been a disgrace in society. Elizabeth knew how this felt and would have understood Mary's pain.

Elizabeth's baby, John the Baptist, would plan and prepare the way for many to have hope, excitement and expectations to encounter a very different 'Christmas day'. A 'Christmas day' that would be the fulfilment of meeting Mary's son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, face to face and baptising him.

We don't always understand the planning and preparation that happens behind the scenes to ensure 'Christmas day' happens. But like Elizabeth and Mary, to quote *The Polar Express* "we have to believe".

A BEACHCOMBERFX
ADVENT WORK OF THE PEOPLE

We begin each gathering with these words shared together.

**Each one of us is caught up in this story of grace
Part of a journey from darkness to light
From slavery to freedom
So we share in this story for it is a gift from God**

We end each gathering with these words shared together.

**We are a community of faith
Strandlopers on a journey
We have shared in this story
Let us continue to live this way now and always
By God's grace we go
Amen**

Words taken from Signs of Grace : A beachcomberFX work of the people and adapted for this advent liturgy.

ADVENT 1

1 We look up at the sky
2 But we don't see the signs
3 We are blind

4 We hear the roar of the ocean
5 But we don't listen to its voice
6 We are deaf

7 We sense the change in the air
8 But we take no notice
9 We are numb

10 Stand up!
11 Lift your heads high!
12 It's coming close
13 It's drawing near

14 Let us stare at the stars
15 Let us take in the music of the sea
16 Let us feel each breath we take
17 So we can see the world transformed
18 So we can hear its cry and respond
19 So we can sense that things will be different

20 Stand up!
21 Lift your heads high!
22 It's coming close
23 It's drawing near

ADVENT 2

- 1 Who is the most influential person in the world?
- 2 Who pulls the strings of power?
- 3 Who makes the choices that affect each day of your life?

- 4 Whose child are you?
- 5 What message do you have to share?
- 6 Where do you cry out, hoping others will listen?

- 7 How will you prepare this world for others?
- 8 How will you change the landscape?
- 9 How will you help people see the bigger picture?

ADVENT 3

1 We can't rely on our history
2 Or where our parents are from
3 These things don't save us
4 They don't protect us from pain

5 It's the things we make that are important
6 They show where our heart is
7 They reveal the path we are on
8 These are the fruits of our life

9 We give to others
10 We make space for them
11 Only take what we need
12 Make sure we only speak what is true

13 We are called to think differently
14 To rise from the past
15 Into a new way of being
16 A new way of thinking

17 And the one coming will do this
18 Will be different
19 Will think different
20 The time is near

ADVENT 4

1 We sense it
2 The shivers down our spine
3 The butterflies in our stomach
4 The goosebumps on our neck
5 That moment is near

6 We feel it
7 The joy rising up inside
8 The anticipation of what is coming
9 The hope that this is it
10 That moment is at hand

11 We hear it
12 The welcome of a friend
13 The words of blessing
14 The sound of change
15 That moment is breaking in

16 Be blessed those who sense it
17 Be blessed those who feel it
18 Be blessed those who hear it
19 That moment is here

**A NEW KIND OF COMMUNITY EXPLORING LIFE
AND SPIRITUALITY IN ITS FULLNESS**



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