



A MUSICAL JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT



⊕ THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND



The Church of England's Advent and Christmas theme for 2026, 'The Gift of Christmas', invites us to journey through the season with a sense of wonder, expectation and hope.

Our churches will - as always - be seeking to make the most of the opportunity December brings to share the good news of Advent and Christmas with their communities, and to help people discover afresh the mystery of God who comes to be with us.

Advent is a season filled with rich words, images, people and stories. From the prophets who call us to prepare the way, to Mary and Joseph, the angels and the star, each offers us a different glimpse of the God who comes among us in Jesus Christ.

To help communities to journey through Advent, this resource explores an A-Z of Advent, offered as a companion to the Everyday Faith app reflections and the Church of England's downloadable colouring sheets. Over the 24 days of Advent, each page offers the opportunity to pause and reflect musically on a different word, image or person from the Advent story. Through music, reflection and prayer, we are invited to make space for wonder, to deepen our hope and to prepare our hearts for the coming of Emmanuel - God With Us.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET



There are many ways to use this booklet, whether you are journeying through Advent on your own, with family or friends, or as part of your church community. As an individual, you might set aside a few minutes each day to listen to the music, read the reflection and allow the question or prayer to accompany you through the day. Families might choose to listen together, perhaps lighting an Advent candle as you do so, and use the reflection as a starting point for a conversation. You don't need to know anything about the music: simply listen, notice what catches your attention, and see what it might open up in you.

The booklet can also be used as the basis for a small group journey through Advent. Rather than trying to meet 24 times, you could gather once a week and explore the music and reflections from the days since you last met. You might divide the booklet into four weekly sections, listening together to several pieces of music, sharing what you notice, and allowing the questions and prayers to lead into conversation and prayer. However you choose to use it, the invitation is the same: to slow down, to listen, and to make space for the wonder of Advent as we journey together towards Christmas.

[You can download the Spotify playlist by clicking here, or scanning the QR code.](#)



WEEK ONE



A is for Advent



Creator of the Stars of Night - traditional, arranged by John Scott

This ancient Advent hymn takes us into the darkness and longing of the season. Before Christmas becomes celebration, Advent invites us to wait, to watch and to make room for the coming of Christ.

Listen for the stillness and simplicity of the melody. Notice how the music seems to create a space in which you can wait.



What am I waiting for this Advent? Where might I need to make space for God?



Come, Lord Jesus. Meet us in our waiting, and teach us to recognise your presence in the darkness. Amen.



WEEK ONE



B is for Bethlehem



O Little Town of Bethlehem

Bethlehem is small, ordinary and easily overlooked. Yet it becomes the place where God's purposes begin to take flesh. This hymn invites us to wonder at the possibility that God might still be found in the places and people we are tempted to overlook.

Listen for the contrast between the quietness of the music and the extraordinary event it describes.



Where are the “small places” in my life where God might already be at work?



God of Bethlehem, help us to see the holy in the ordinary, the extraordinary in the small, and your presence in places we might otherwise overlook. Amen.



WEEK ONE



C is for Candles



The Light of the World - Lauren Daigle

The lighting of candles is one of Advent's simplest and most powerful images. One small flame does not remove all the darkness, but it changes the way we see it. This contemporary song invites us to recognise Christ as light, present in the midst of a world that still knows darkness.

Listen for moments when the music moves from darkness towards light and hope.



Where in my life, my community or our world am I longing for light?



Christ our light, shine gently in the places where there is fear, sorrow or uncertainty. May your light in us become light for others. Amen.



WEEK ONE



D is for David



O Key of David - Tamsin Jones

The Advent Antiphons draw on ancient biblical images for Christ. The Key of David speaks of authority, liberation and the one who opens what has been closed. Tamsin Jones's setting invites us to hear this ancient prayer with fresh ears.

Listen for the sense of yearning within the music — the longing for the one who can open what is shut.



What have I closed off? Where might I need Christ to open a door?



Christ, Key of David, open what is closed, free what is imprisoned, and lead us into the spaciousness of your kingdom. Amen.



WEEK ONE



E is for Emmanuel



O Emmanuel - Bernadette Farrell

“Emmanuel” means “God with us”. The promise at the heart of Advent is not simply that God will come, but that God chooses to be with us: in human life, in vulnerability, in joy and in sorrow.

Listen for the moments when the music seems to draw you towards the words “God with us”.



What would it mean to live today believing that God is truly with me?



Emmanuel, God with us, open our eyes to your presence. Help us to discover you beside us, within us and among us. Amen.



WEEK ONE



F is for Forerunner



On Jordan's Bank

John the Baptist is the forerunner: the one who stands at the edge of the story and points beyond himself. His call is simple and challenging - prepare the way. Advent asks us what preparation might mean not simply for Christmas, but for the coming of God's kingdom.

Listen for the sense of movement and direction in the music. Notice how it seems to draw us towards something - or someone - beyond itself.



Who or what helps me to recognise where God is at work? How might I point beyond myself towards Christ in the way I live?



God of the wilderness, prepare your way in us. Make straight what is crooked, soften what is hard, and awaken what has grown asleep. Amen.



WEEK TWO



G is for Gabriel



The Angel Gabriel - Susan LaBarr

The angel Gabriel arrives with news that will change everything. This Basque carol has an almost dance-like quality, reminding us that God's good news is not merely information: it is an invitation into a new way of living.

Listen for the moment when the music seems to change the atmosphere - from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Notice how the melody carries a message of unexpected good news.



What good news might God be inviting me to receive, or to share?



God of good news, give us ears to hear your invitation and courage to respond when you call. Amen.



WEEK TWO



H is for Hope



Wait for the Lord — Taizé

Christian hope is the confident expectation that God is at work, even when we cannot yet see what God is doing. This simple Taizé chant gives us permission to stop striving and simply wait.

Listen for how repetition changes the way you hear the words.



How can I allow myself simply to wait, without needing to know what comes next?



God of hope, meet us in our waiting. Keep hope alive in us when the way ahead is unclear. Amen.



WEEK TWO



I is for Incarnation



O Nata Lux - Morten Lauridsen

“O Light born of Light”: this ancient text speaks of the extraordinary mystery of the Incarnation. In Jesus, God does not remain distant from human life but enters it completely. Lauridsen’s luminous choral setting gives us space to dwell in that mystery.

Listen for the moments when different voices seem to become one.



Where do I encounter God in the ordinary, embodied realities of human life? How might I become more attentive to the holiness already present in the world around me?



Word made flesh, enter more deeply into our lives. Help us to recognise the holiness of human bodies, human stories and ordinary human existence. Amen.



WEEK TWO



J is for Joseph



Joseph Was an Old Man - traditional Appalachian carol

Joseph can sometimes disappear into the Christmas story, overshadowed by Mary and the angels. This traditional carol gives him space to be remembered as a human being: someone confronted by mystery, uncertainty and a future he had not planned.

Listen for the earthy, folk quality of the music.



Where am I being asked to trust God with something I cannot yet understand?



God who speaks in dreams and surprises, give us Joseph's courage: the courage to listen, to trust and to make room for what we did not expect. Amen.



WEEK TWO



K is for Keep Awake



Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning — traditional African-American spiritual

“Keep awake” is one of Advent’s recurring commands. This spiritual turns watchfulness into song; a reminder that faith is not passive waiting, but a life kept attentive to God’s presence and God’s coming.

Listen for the steady rhythm and repeated call of the music. Notice how, as the words return, they can begin to sound less like a command and more like an invitation to remain attentive and ready.



What helps me stay spiritually awake?
What might be making me inattentive?



God who comes to us, keep our hearts awake. Help us to notice you in the people, places and possibilities before us. Amen.



WEEK TWO



L is for Last Things



Wachet auf - J. S. Bach

Advent looks towards the end as well as the beginning. Bach's great setting of "Wake, awake" captures the excitement, urgency and joy of Christ's promised coming. It reminds us that Christian hope ultimately looks towards the renewal of all things.

Listen for the moment when the music seems to move from anticipation into celebration.



What kind of future do I hope God is bringing into being?



God of all things, keep before us your vision of a world made new. Give us courage to live now as people of that future hope. Amen.



WEEK THREE



M is for Mary



A Hymn to the Virgin - Benjamin Britten

Mary stands at the heart of the Advent story: a young woman who receives God's call and becomes the bearer of Christ. In A Hymn to the Virgin, Benjamin Britten weaves together English and Latin voices, creating a sense of heaven and earth singing together around the mystery of Mary and the child she carries.

Listen for the way the voices seem to answer and surround one another. Notice how the music grows in richness and beauty, as though the mystery of Mary is opening out before us.



What might it mean to make room for God in my own life? Where might I be invited to carry something of God's love into the world?



God of Mary, give us her courage to say yes to you, and her imagination to believe that your kingdom can change the world. Amen.



WEEK THREE



N is for Names



The Call - Ralph Vaughan Williams

Throughout Scripture, names carry meaning: they tell us something of who we are and how we are known. In Advent, we encounter a God who calls people by name - Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, Elizabeth - and who comes among us in Jesus, the God who knows and loves each one of us, taking on the fullness of human life.

Listen for the simplicity and directness of the melody. Notice how the music gives weight to the words, as though the call is personal and addressed to each of us.



What does it mean to know that God knows me by name? Is there a name, person or story that I need to hold before God today?



God who calls us by name, thank you that we are known and loved by you. Help us to recognise your call, and to honour the names and stories of those around us. Amen.



WEEK THREE



O is for Overshadow



Breath of Heaven - Amy Grant

Mary is told that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and that the power of the Most High will overshadow her. “Overshadow” can sound frightening, but it can also describe the mystery of being held within something greater than ourselves.

Listen for the way the music surrounds and carries the voice, creating a sense of being held within something larger than yourself. Notice the moments when the music becomes quieter or more intimate, and allow yourself to imagine what it might feel like to be overshadowed not by fear, but by the presence of God.



Where might God be asking me to trust without having all the answers?



Holy Spirit, breathe upon us. When we are afraid of what we cannot control, teach us to trust your presence and your love. Amen.



WEEK THREE



P is for Purple



Veni, veni, Emmanuel - traditional Advent hymn

Purple surrounds us during Advent: the colour of waiting, longing, royalty and preparation. It reminds us that Advent is a season with its own character, inviting us to slow down, to make space and to look beyond the brightness and busyness of Christmas towards the mystery of Christ's coming. This great Advent hymn gives voice to that longing, crying out again and again: come.

Listen for the repeated cry of "Rejoice!" alongside the deep longing of the verses. Notice how the music holds together both waiting and hope.



What is the deepest prayer I want to bring to God this Advent?



Come, Emmanuel. Come into our waiting, our world and our lives. Teach us to hope for your coming. Amen.



WEEK THREE



Q is for Quirinius



When the King Shall Come Again **- Christopher Idle**

Quirinius places the Christmas story within the real and complicated world of empire and political power. Against this backdrop, the Christian story announces a different kind of kingdom: one whose king comes not through military strength, but in vulnerability and love.

Listen for the sense of expectation in the hymn.



Where do I see power being used for good? Where is power being used to diminish or control others?



God of justice, challenge the powers of our world. Teach us to recognise the kingdom of Christ wherever love, justice and peace are being made real. Amen.



WEEK THREE



R is for Return



Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus - Charles Wesley

Advent teaches us to look in more than one direction: back to Christ's birth, towards Christ's coming among us now, and forward to the day when Christ will come again. This hymn gathers these hopes together, giving voice to our longing for the one who comes to bring freedom, justice and peace.

Listen for the repeated longing of the word "come". Notice how the hymn moves from our hopes and longings towards a vision of the life Christ comes to bring.



What am I longing for Christ to bring into my life and into our world? How might I live today as someone who trusts that Christ is coming?



Christ who comes to us, awaken our longing for your presence. Help us to live with hope and expectation, trusting in the future you are bringing to birth among us. Amen.



WEEK FOUR



S is for Star



O Morning Star - Esther Bersweden

The Morning Star is an ancient image of Christ: light appearing at the edge of dawn, announcing that darkness will not have the final word. Esther Bersweden's setting of this Advent Antiphon allows us to linger in that moment just before sunrise.

Listen for the way the music seems to emerge gently from stillness, like the first light of dawn. Notice how the voices gradually create a sense of warmth and radiance, and allow yourself to imagine what it might mean to look towards Christ as the light that guides us through darkness.



What signs of God's presence might I be overlooking because I am looking for something more obvious? How might I become more attentive to the quiet ways in which God is guiding and inviting me?



Morning Star, shine upon us. Help us to trust that even the smallest light can be a sign of your coming. Amen.



WEEK FOUR



T is for Time



The Times They Are A-Changin' - Bob Dylan

Advent is about time: remembering what God has done, waiting for what God will do, and learning to recognise God's presence in the present moment. Bob Dylan's song provides a deliberately unexpected companion, reminding us that the world is always changing — and asking what kind of change we are willing to embrace.

Listen for the sense of movement and inevitability in the song.



What is changing in my life? What change might God be inviting me to welcome?



God of past, present and future, help us to live faithfully in this moment. Give us wisdom to know what needs to change and courage to take part in your renewing work. Amen.



WEEK FOUR



U is for Upside-down



Canticle of the Turning - Siskin Green

Mary's Magnificat imagines a world turned upside down: the powerful brought down, the lowly lifted up and the hungry filled. This contemporary setting gives that ancient song a strong, joyful and prophetic voice.

Listen for how the joyful, almost dance-like quality carries words about profound social change: the powerful being brought down, the hungry being fed, and the humble being lifted up. Listen for how music can turn a prophetic vision into something we can inhabit together — not simply an idea about a different world, but a song that invites us to become part of it.



What would our world look like if it really were turned upside down according to God's vision?



God of the Magnificat, turn our world towards your kingdom. Give us courage to challenge injustice and to join in the work of making your world new. Amen.



WEEK FOUR



V is for Visitation



Magnificat - Sarah MacDonald

The Visitation is a meeting between two women whose voices matter. Elizabeth recognises and blesses Mary, and Mary responds with a song that is both deeply personal and boldly prophetic: a vision of a world where the powerful are challenged and those who have been overlooked are lifted up.

Listen for the way the music gives Mary's words room to breathe and gather strength. Notice how her personal experience opens into a wider vision of justice, dignity and hope.



Whose voices might we need to listen to more carefully? Whose dignity might we be called to defend?



God of Mary and Elizabeth, help us to listen to voices that are overlooked, to challenge what diminishes human dignity, and to join in your work of creating a world where all can flourish. Amen.



WEEK FOUR



W is for Worship



O Come, All Ye Faithful - traditional carol

Worship is our response to the God who comes towards us. “Come and adore him” is both invitation and instruction: Advent draws us towards the mystery of Christ, not simply so that we can understand it, but so that we can encounter it and respond with our whole lives.

Listen for the way the music grows towards its great declaration of praise.



What does worship look like for me beyond Sunday? Where might my ordinary life become an act of worship?



God who comes among us, receive our worship - our songs, our work, our relationships, our joys and our struggles. May our whole way of life become one uninterrupted prayer. Amen.



WEEK FOUR



XYZ is for Zechariah



Benedictus, the Song of Zechariah **- John Harper**

After a long silence, Zechariah finds his voice again — and his first words are words of praise. His song looks back to God's promises and forward to the child who will prepare the way, reminding us that sometimes faith grows quietly before it finds its voice.

Listen for the way the music moves between stillness and fullness, allowing Zechariah's song to unfold. Notice how the voices give shape to a hope that has been waiting to be spoken.



What has been quietly taking shape in me during Advent? Is there something I am now ready to name, speak or give thanks for?



God of Zechariah, meet us in our silence and our waiting. Give us words when it is time to speak, and help us to recognise and celebrate the hope that is already taking root among us. Amen.





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