



Advent and Christmas

DECEMBER

The season of Advent is a season of waiting: waiting for God, waiting for light and truth, waiting for justice.

For congregations celebrating their diversity and wanting to think creatively about justice and inclusion, the themes and readings of Advent have much to offer. This section of Racial Justice Through the Year looks at its topic through the lens of Advent and Christmas and is ideal for those who are looking for ways of connecting their celebration of the festive season with the challenges facing contemporary Britain.

MENU

Appetisers

Ways of weaving racial justice into advent

- In your worship, focus on 'the Kingdom' - what does it *look* like? How does present reality match that vision?
- Celebrate other cultures by borrowing Orthodox/Armenian/Ethiopian elements of Christmas this year.

Main courses

Bible connections and theological themes

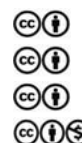
Acts 10:9-13

Although the story of Peter's vision comes after the time of Jesus and therefore seems to miss the advent and Christmas message, it is really about the way in which God comes to the world in the era of the Church. What Peter sees and hears radically disturbs his expectations as a practicing Jewish believer: God is inviting him to change his view of the world and his understanding of his own place and purpose in it. The coming of Jesus challenges our cherished assumptions, including the inherited beliefs that form the basis of our stereotypes and value judgements. Explore how the lesson Peter learns from this vision (Acts 10:34) might relate to God's desire for racial justice.

Romans 13:11-14

While Christians normally think of Advent as a time of waiting, the season is anything but inactive, as this passage from Romans makes clear! Similarly, several of the parables of Jesus in addition to some of the prophets emphasise the need for preparation to be *active*. Here Paul speaks about "waking up from our sleep" and "taking up weapons of the light." The advent season can be used to explore what this might mean in terms of racial justice, so that we might be ready to receive the Messiah at the time of God's choosing.

Photos of food: Christmas dinners, Jason Cartwright
Black Forest Ham, Jeremy Keith
Deserts page, Emi Yañez
Chef's Specials page, abbyladybug



Ideas for Advent Bible Studies

NB – Sessions 1, 3 and 4 based on Common Lectionary Readings for 2008 (Year B)

Advent 1: 1 Corinthians 1.3-9 ; Mark 13:24-37

Aim: To meditate on the generosity of God to all of us whatever our position or condition, the promise of blessing and fellowship, and inclusion.

Corinth was a great cosmopolitan metropolis, a vibrant and multicultural place where traders met and a wide range of desirable goods was available. It was also a place of widespread immorality and a variety of religions. The Corinthian citizens were also a very proud and arrogant people, and the church of the day was in many ways a reflection of the society, both in its virtues and its sins.

Consider your own community/church:

- Is it a mirror of society?
- What are the good and bad aspects of a local church reflecting its society's assumptions, preferences and prejudices?
- What difference does the promise of God's grace and Christ's coming make to our relationship with Him and our relationship with others, inside and outside our church?

Advent 2: Acts 10

Aim: to meditate on the idea of 'the guest' in Acts 10; the concept of 'hospitality' and 'generosity' and the concept of taking risks – both for Cornelius and for Peter (the newcomer is uncertain of his welcome, Peter is worried about compromising his position and what people will think).

Cornelius was known to God for his generosity to the poor in Caesarea (v. 2).

Simon the leather-worker in Joppa was showing hospitality to Peter who was staying there on his travels (v 5).

God's shows Peter a vision of a feast in which all are welcome and cultural prohibitions and transcended.

Peter's upbringing and also his faith inclined him to certain prejudices.

- What prejudices can we identify in ourselves, for example in terms of what we consider good to eat, religious practices, cultural expectations and so on?
- What are the challenges to us in relating to the variety in our community with generosity and hospitality?
- What practical steps can we take as individuals or as a church to address these challenges?

Advent 3: Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11 (See also Luke 4:16-20)

Aim: To meditate on God's call to Isaiah, the justice message of Jesus' ministry and the challenge to us to carry out that ministry and mission in our own lives.

Consider the generosity, invitation and inclusion of all peoples in God's message.

- Who are the people whom the Lord will save?
- What is he offering in his gift of justice and hope?
- Whom can we identify among our 'neighbours' who, according to this passage, will receive these gifts.
- As we wait for the Lord's return, and as we anticipate Christmas, how can we respond practically to the call to embody this generosity and welcome in our community?

Advent 4: Luke 1.26-38; (See also Matthew 1:18-2:1-2, 9-11)

The Christmas Story, Welcome, Adventure and Giving

Aim: To meditate on

- Mary's willingness to welcome the Holy Spirit's gift.
- Joseph's willingness to welcome into his marriage and into his family line a baby who was not his own.
- The smallness of the welcome for the birth of God into our world.
- The wise men's courage and adventure to go and search for the unknown.
- The generosity of God to welcome those from far away – physically and spiritually.

Consider the breadth of our own understanding of welcome and hospitality to strangers as well as to friends, over the Christmas season.

What opportunities and challenges does Christmas give us to practise hospitality and generosity?

Questions for discussion

How can we best prepare hearts, minds and churches for God's kingdom? How can churches in turn help to prepare the community?

How do we measure the moral health of our society? What yardsticks do we use?

Desserts

Book suggestion

Doing December Differently: An alternative Christmas handbook – Nicola Slee/Rosie Miles, Wild Goose, 2006, ISBN 1-905010-23-0/978-1-905010-23-2, admin@ionabooks.com

Intercessions and petitions

“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.” This phrase from the Lord’s Prayer is really an advent prayer. Explore its meaning in your prayers, perhaps with something like the following...

We pray for those weary from travel,
especially for those forced to move by oppressive regimes;
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

We pray for people with inadequate shelter,
especially for those exploited because they have little economic power;
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

We pray for young single mothers and their children,
especially for those who lack support from their wider family;
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

We pray for children born into situations of injustice,
especially for those likely to face racial discrimination in later life;
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

We pray for groups of people on the margins of respectable society,
knowing that they are sure to be central to God’s purposes;
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Chef's Specials

Challenges for response by the congregation

Be deliberate about using Christmas traditions from around the world in your seasonal celebrations this year.

How did you come to Christ: who invited, challenged, and supported you? How could you play a similar role with groups and/or individuals that at the moment are marginal to the life of the churches?

Encourage gifts to be given at Epiphany, rather than Christmas this year, to experience something of what it is to go without. Try to buy fairly traded or 'alternative' gifts via Oxfam or similar. You may even save some money. If you do, make a donation to the Racial Justice Fund?

Ideas for young people

Detail of activity idea for young people (based on Acts 10 or I Corinthians 12)

Aim:

- to experience how some foods seem unattractive, unappetising, but which are all vital to creating a beautiful taste.
- To consider this in the light of issues of prejudice, inclusion, welcome and hospitality.

Items needed:

Small bowls containing a little of each of the following

1. Plain flour
2. Ground almonds (*optional - may omit if worried about nut allergies*)
3. Ground Cinnamon
4. Ground Nutmeg
5. Mixed Spice
6. Brown sugar
7. Butter
8. Lemon zest
9. Beaten egg
10. Currants
11. Raisins
12. Sultanas
13. Candied peel
14. Glace cherries
15. Flaked almonds (*optional may omit if worried about nut allergies*)
16. Brandy/sherry (if doing this with adults)

The leader asks participants to close their eyes and then puts a little of one of the ingredients on their tongues (*one each if there are enough people – or more per person in smaller groups*). Ask each of them to then say what they thought it was, and whether they thought it tasted nice or nasty – whether they'd want to eat any more of it.

Ask them to close their eyes again and give them each a small piece of rich fruit cake (*ideally already made from those ingredients*).

Ask them if they can identify the taste they first had.

Discuss issues of first impressions when it comes to people: why do we 'take against' or feel drawn to certain people?