

Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
Advent Sunday, 4th and hopefully last in second lockdown.

29th November 2020

'Expectancy, Struggle, Repentance'

Welcome everyone.

*Our reflections this morning are by Sheila and the
Intercessions provided by Jess. Many thanks to you both.*



The Lighting of the Advent Candles

This period was first called Advent in the fourth century and quickly developed into a month-long season of preparation not just for the birth of Jesus, but also for his second coming. The lighting of candles is another ancient tradition – the advent wreath is nineteenth century from Germany. Each candle symbolises a different aspect of the purpose of this season.

The first candle is often called the candle of hope.

If you wish to light a candle at home, do so now with these words, and we all join in with you:

Jesus is the Light of the world
A light no darkness can ever put out

We light this candle as a sign
that heaven and earth may pass away,
but the word of God will be present in the world for ever and for ever.

Call to Worship

Wintry questions circle the earth,
in struggles for survival,
tinged grey with cynicism and apathy.
The dead leaves have lost their colour
and lie among white coldness on the earth
as the hearts of the people wait,
and wait for the spring.

In faith and hope we wait in this time of Advent.

After the suffering in these days,
the Child of God will be seen
deep in the heart of the winter,
gentle in the centre of harshness,

and vulnerable in the midst of our vulnerability,
a frail but sure sign
of the presence of God.
In faith and hope, let us worship God.

Gathering Hymn

*'Hark the Glad sound, the Saviour comes', sung by the choir of Chichester Cathedral.
Words are on the screen.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeBRYhG86x0>

Confession

You challenge us this Advent time
This season of preparation
To put aside our pride
And understand our need
For repentance
Forgiveness
And mercy
Less of self
More of you
Preparation for our journey
To the stable and beyond
Purify our hearts
Sanctify our lives
That we might serve you
Faithfully this day and all days. Amen

The collect for Advent

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in
great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.



Worship song

'Hark a Herald Voice is calling', sung for us by the Choir of Norwich Cathedral. Words are below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQUEkBiPBvw>

Hark! a herald voice is calling:
'Christ is nigh,' it seems to say;
'Cast away the dreams of darkness,
O ye children of the day!'

Startled at the solemn warning,
Let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her Sun, all sloth dispelling,
Shines upon the morning skies.

Lo! the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all to be forgiven;

So when next he comes with glory,
Wrapping all the earth in fear,
May he then as our defender
On the clouds of heaven appear.

Honour, glory, virtue, merit,
To the Father and the Son,
With the co-eternal Spirit,
While unending ages run. Amen



Reading Mark 13:24-37

The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁴ "But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

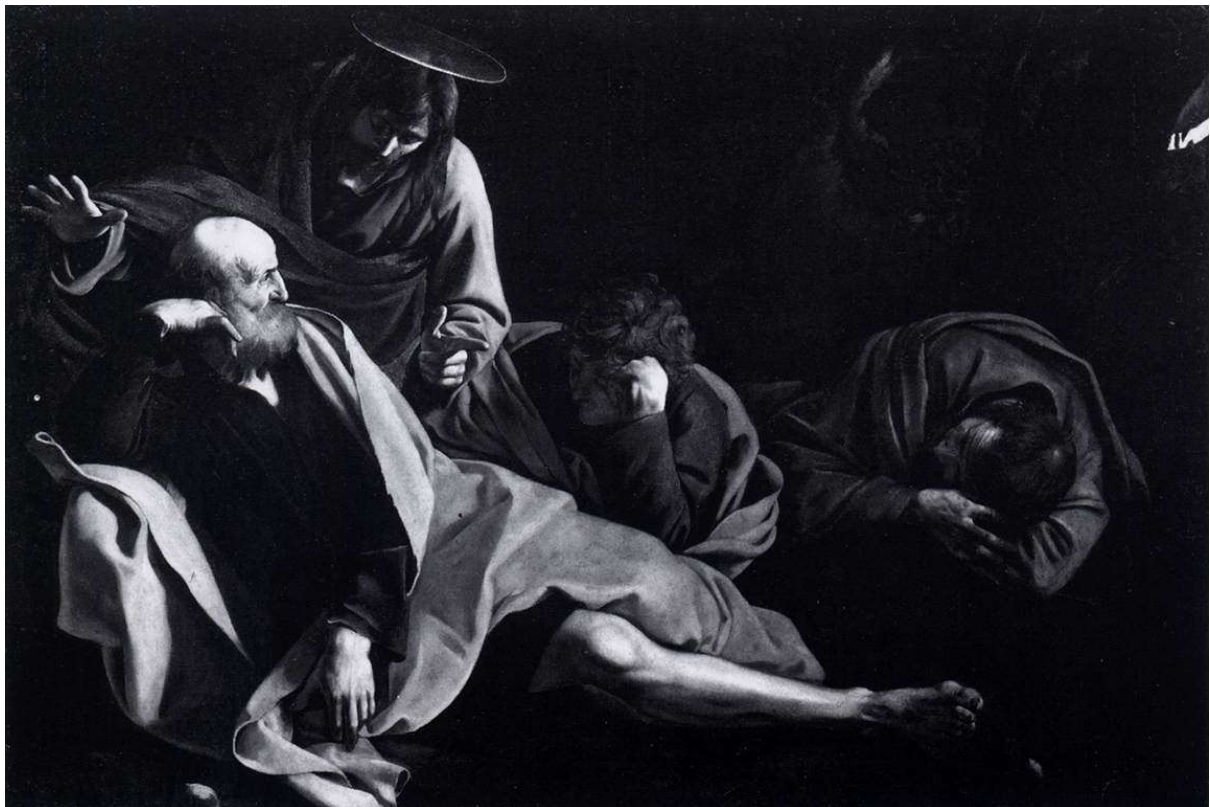
²⁶ Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵ Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”



'Christ in the Garden' by Caravaggio c 1605

This painting was originally in an Art Gallery in Berlin, and was destroyed during World War II. It exists today only through surviving black and white photographs.

Wachet Auf Ann Lewin (*Watching for the Kingfisher*)

Advent.

Season when dual citizenship
holds us in awkward tension.

The world, intent on
spending Christmas,
eats and drinks its way to
oblivion after dinner.

The Kingdom sounds insistent warnings:

Repent, Be ready,
Keep awake, He comes.
Like some great fugue
the themes entwine:
the Christmas carols
demanding our attention
in shops and pubs,
bore their insistent way
through noise of traffic;
underneath, almost unheard,
the steady, solemn theme of
Advent.

With growing complexity,
clashing, blending,
rivals for our attention,
themes mingle and separate,
pulling us with increasing urgency,
until in final resolution,
the end attained,
harmony rests in awful stillness,
and the child is born.
He comes, both Child and Judge,
And will he find us watching?

Music

Before Sheila's comments, you may like to listen to Bach's prelude to the cantata: 'Wachet Auf ruft uns die Stimme' – often given in English as 'Sleepers awake!', which inspired Ann Lewin's poem. Played on the organ of St Catherine's Church, Hamburg by Wolfgang Zerer for the Netherlands Bach Society.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZvQEOOpOnw>

Reflection

As I started to think about Advent Sunday, I went first to an anthology of readings for Advent and Christmas and found the poem by Ann Lewin that you will have just read. Next I looked in '*Glory in our Midst*' by Michael Perham, from the library of Jean Wride (who died in 2012), and discovered that it also included the poem, and then from Averil's library, traced its source to Ann Lewin's book '*Come Emmanuel*'. I will quote her...

'The music that inspired that poem, Bach's Chorale Prelude *Wachet auf*, evokes the season for us: the dancing notes above the sonorous melody represent the world around us getting caught up in the Christmas rush; underneath, the solemn tune reminds us of the Advent call to wait, prepare, get ready to greet the one who comes as Child and Judge' (*Come Emmanuel*, p5)

The Christmas rush may be a little different this year though the retail and hospitality sectors of the economy are hoping that many will be able to go out and spend on however many shopping days to Christmas are permitted. Still, as Ann Lewin writes 'The Church reminds us that the same number of *praying days* remain.' The question then is how are we to use these praying days? Now I will quote again a section that Averil had marked with a pencil line.

'But prayer is not just about the time we set aside to focus our attention on God. Prayer is the life blood of our relationship with God, a relationship that continues through all our activities and dealings with others. We miss the point if we dismiss all that is going on around us as irrelevant to the real meaning of Christmas. The real meaning of Christmas is that God came into the world and got involved in all that human life is engaged in. Advent is a time for us to embody that truth in the way that we live.' (*Come Emmanuel*, p5f)

The bible readings for Advent focus on the 'end times' when God will act to judge and end the world as we know it today. The language is full of symbolism that is hard to understand. Michael Perham (retired bishop of Gloucester) acknowledges the difficulty of understanding the language and how the passage of time has changed attitudes to this thinking which both Jesus and the early church seemed to consider was imminent. Yet he cannot dismiss it entirely and I will now try to summarise his reasons. The first one is that it reminds us that salvation is not just for me, personally, but that it has a social significance. God plans to bring everything to completion one day. We cannot tell how or when, but the language reminds us that one day 'the Son of Man is coming'. Secondly this belief should encourage us to share the good news of Jesus more urgently and not think that we have plenty of time. He goes on to describe three marks of Advent if we take the fact of the second coming seriously.

First, he writes about 'expectancy' which he thinks is stronger than 'hopefulness'. It reminds us that God did not just act in the past but that he is active now if we are alert and awake enough to notice that. Are we expectant?

Secondly, he writes about 'struggle' and in particular 'to discern God's word for us'. (*Glory in our Midst*, p10). Though this is part of all Christian living he suggests that in Advent we have the specific struggle with interpreting both the prophecies from the Hebrew scriptures and the language of judgement and end times. However, God's word comes to us not just through scripture, the tradition of the church in the past and through Christians today, but also from outside the church through culture in all its variety. This is indeed a struggle and a challenge. People will disagree on interpretations.

The third mark is that of 'repentance', indicated by the words of judgement and the ministry of John the Baptist, which is the focus for the next two Sundays of Advent.

To conclude, I wish to revisit the alternative collect for the second Sunday before Advent, with its call to move from apathy or indifference and to encourage new hope.

Heavenly Lord, you long for the world's salvation:
stir us from apathy,
restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope
that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we await your coming,
We wait filled with hope,
Knowing your light will shine in the darkness.
We wait anticipating your peace,
Believing that one day it will fill our world.
We wait embracing your love,
May we reach out to share it with our neighbours.
We wait with joy,
Bubbling us in expectation of your birth.
Lord we wait,
Come soon and fill us with your life.

(written by Christine Sine (2012), and posted on GodSpace)

Affirmation of Faith

Jesus taught us to speak of hope as the coming of God's kingdom.

We believe that God is at work in our world
turning hopeless and evil situations into good.
We believe that goodness and justice
will triumph in the end
and that tyranny and oppression cannot last forever.

One day all tears will be wiped away;
the lamb will lie down with the lion,
and justice will roll down like a mighty stream.

True peace and true reconciliation are not only desired,
they are assured and guaranteed in Christ.

This is our faith.
This is our hope.

(20th century South African creed.)

Worship song

‘Long ago Prophets knew’, sung by St Martin’s Voices in St Martin’s in the Fields, London.
Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6wccPVN5YE>

Intercessions

At this, the beginning of the year, in a very dark time, as we wait, fearfully, for the coming of Christ, with our oil lamps hopefully filled to the brim, let us pause and, as we read through the words below, bring to mind people and events close to us.

In the places in this world where there is greatest need

Let there be light

Where there is war, destitution, hunger, thirst and little medical care

Let there be light

Where there is anger at injustice and inequality

Where there is hopelessness about the future

Where there is violence on the streets and in homes

Let there be light

Where there is loneliness; at home, in hospital, in prison

Let there be light

Where there is meaninglessness

Where people long to live the life of the Spirit but don’t know how to begin

Where there is disillusion and despair

Let there be light

In the life of our church

In the hearts of our people

In our own eyes as we meet with others

Let there be light

**And in our waiting through this time of fear, awe and wonder, may the light grow in us
and around us until the bridegroom comes.**

(Adapted from Roots on the Web)

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

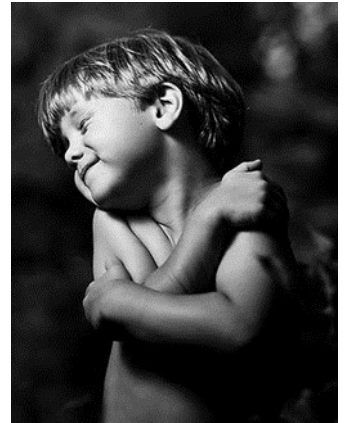
An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

*As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to a Taizé version of Wait for the Lord.
This is a full version of the chant.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7GexlvX8HU>





Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Post Communion Collect

O Lord our God,
make us watchful and keep us faithful
as we await the coming of your Son our Lord;
that, when he shall appear,
he may not find us sleeping in sin
but active in his service
and joyful in his praise;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Commission & Benediction

It is not enough to acclaim Jesus Christ
as our Lord and King.
Our mission in life is
to make his kingdom a reality among us
and to bring it to those around us
by our words and deeds.
The way to do this is to live as he lived:
for others, in love and service.
May almighty God bless you for this task:
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
and to give shape to his kingdom. **Thanks be to God!**
(from Liturgies Alive, Models of Celebration.)

Closing Music

Let's end on a high note with The Glory of the Lord – from Handel's Messiah. Sung with panache by the Gramophone Chorus from Ghana.

'And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.' Isaiah 40: 5

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUNWVSNhc7A&feature=emb_logo



Scroll down for Coffee Break

Coffee Break

An Email From God

One day God was looking down at Earth and saw all the evil that was going on. He decided to send an angel down to Earth to check it out. So he called one of his angels and sent the angel to Earth for a time.

When she returned she told God, yes it is bad on Earth, 95% is bad and 5% is good.

God thought for a moment and said, maybe I had better send down a second angel to get another point of view.

So God called another angel and sent her to Earth for a time too.

When the angel returned she went to God and told him yes, the Earth was in decline, 95% was bad and 5% was good.

God said this was not good. So he decided to E-mail the 5% that were good and encourage them, by giving them a little something to help them keep going.

Do you know what that E-mail said?

Oh, you didn't get one either!

Viv has sent in the item on the next page which is the ten point charter of St Martin's in the Fields, and which is a powerful statement for any church to make.

Viv says that the first reference to a 'St Martin's church in the fields of Kent' is in 1222. Since then several new builds and refurbishments have led to the St. Martin's in the Fields of today, now surrounded by the world, as it passes around Trafalgar Square.

St. Martin's is well-known for its work with the vulnerable and it was from the crypt that the Big Issue was launched in 1991. Viv says the part she likes best is the east window in the church where a grid of lines pushes back to reveal a plain glass circle, which she sees as the still calm point where we can find space with God in the busyness of life.



St Martin-in-the-Fields – our ten point charter

1 We believe in and proclaim both the mystery that is God, whom we partly know and partly do not know, and the human need to worship-

2 We believe in and proclaim the person of Jesus Christ who distinctively reveals the nature of God and the meaning and purpose of life, and who calls us to follow him through the death of the cross to the place of Resurrection

We trust in the Holy Spirit who prompts liberty, beauty, truth, love and joy against the waywardness of human nature

5 We are committed to a Church that conveys the Christian revelation in signs and symbols, particularly in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion

6 We are committed to exploring the meaning of the Kingdom of God and to making connections between what we profess and the way in which we live and work

3 We are committed to using the Bible in a way that takes account of all truth and relates it to the real experiences, both good and bad, that people have of life

8 We are committed to taking all people seriously wherever they might be at their particular point of understanding, while at the same time sharing with them whatever insights may have been gained by our relationship with God

7 We draw inspiration from our patron saint St Martin who, by cutting his cloak in two, demands that we look both at the resource that we create and possess, and the way that it is shared

St Martin-in-the-Fields
Mission Statement
St Martin-in-the-Fields exists to honour God, and to enable questioning, open-minded people to discover for themselves the significance of Jesus Christ

St Martin-in-the-Fields
Trafalgar Square
London WC2N 4JJ
020 7766 1100
website: www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org

9 We acknowledge the destructive power of human sinfulness, and we welcome gratefully the forgiveness that God offers to those who are prepared to turn to the truth

10 We are committed to identifying and affirming what is good and identifying and opposing what is evil, and living as best we can in the mess in the middle

Night Prayer

Sunday before Advent
22nd November 2020

'The Great 'O's -
O Wisdom

Preparation

Father God,
We rest in you.

Jesus the Son,
We rest in you.

Holy Spirit,
We rest in you.

Silence

Introduction

An antiphon is a short liturgical chant sung responsively by two choirs. The Advent antiphons, usually attributed to Pope Gregory the Great, are known as 'The Great O's'. Each one addresses Christ with a title derived from the Old Testament, such as 'O Key of David,' 'O Adonai', 'O Dayspring'. This invocation is then briefly amplified before the antiphon concludes with a petition 'come and teach us/save us/bring us light' and so forth. There are seven Advent Antiphons, five of which are incorporated in the hymn "O come, O come Emmanuel". We shall hear this hymn each week of the Advent Night Prayers, but a different version each time.

Traditionally the antiphons were sung in the last days of Advent as acclamations on either side of the Magnificat, framing Mary's great song of expectation. When the last of them was sung, the singers could look back over the titles of Christ he had invoked, and see that their illuminated first letters spelled the words ERO CRAS, the promise Christ fulfils on Christmas Day: "Tomorrow I will be there."

These antiphons have inspired several poets. In 1989 Jim Cotter wrote a series of 24 'Cries of Advent', developing further metaphors for Christ derived from the bible; in 2005 Richard Skinner, inspired by Jim's work, published 'Invocations', developing a further 40 metaphors drawn from non-biblical sources; and in 2008 Malcolm Guite wrote a set of sonnets as meditations on, and conversations with, each of the original 'Great O's', exploring the ways in which those ancient titles of Christ might resonate with our present-day concerns.



For the night prayers on each of the four Sundays in Advent, we are offering one of the original Advent Antiphons (but in English, not Latin!), followed by Malcolm Guite's sonnet, one of Jim's 'Cries' and one of Richard's 'Invocations.'

We are not offering any further analysis or unpacking of them, but invite you to reflect on them prayerfully, finding which image or images particularly resonates with you, even if you can't quite tell why. (*Richard S & Church Times*)

We start this week with Wisdom:

Advent Prayer

Here's a prayer for the start of the Advent season from Rev. Deborah Vaughn, hospice chaplain and minister in Maryland. The prayer was posted on *RevGalBlogPals*.

silently and gently
falling and failing
changing and resting
seeking you, Lord...

we watch
we wait
we dream
we pray...

for the earth to renew
for our hearts to soften
for your grace to cover us
for your justice to pour out
for time and space to listen
for courage to act

on the edge of Advent,
we sit with you...
we pause...
we hurt...
we repent...
we rage...

*When will it be?
Will it ever be?
Come quickly, Lord Jesus.
Amen.*

Hymn

O Come O Come Emmanuel

We wanted to start with a traditional version to remind us of its ancient roots. So we shall hear Hayley Westenra, singing in Latin and with the words in Latin and English on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tId6ePj7Zpo>

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 11: 1-4

The Peaceful Kingdom

- 11** A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;

The Great 'O's - O Wisdom

O Wisdom,
coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,
reaching from one end to the other,
mightily and sweetly ordering all things:
Come and teach us the way of prudence.

Gregory the Great

We suggest you maintain a period of silent reflection after each piece, and you might like to close each session listening to the original (short) Gregorian Antiphon: O sapientia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ngcQDQfhIA>

O Sapientia

I cannot think unless I have been thought,
Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken;
I cannot teach except as I am taught,
Or break the bread except as I am broken.
O Mind behind the mind through which I seek,
O Light within the light by which I see,
O Word beneath the words with which I speak,
O founding, unfound Wisdom, finding me,
O sounding Song whose depth is sounding me,
O Memory of time, reminding me,
My Ground of Being, always grounding me,
My Maker's bounding line, defining me:
Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring,
Come to me now, disguised as everything.

Malcom Guite

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ngcQDQfhIA>

O Wisdom
dwelling in the womb of God,
generating and nurturing the earth
through nights of darkness,
come and cherish in us
the seed of wisdom.

Jim Cotter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ngcQDQfhIA>

O Doubt
offspring of knowledge,
shadow-side of certainty;
O challenger of comfortable illusion,
interrogator of the well-accepted;
you are the scalpel of the spirit:
come, cut through our layers of self-deception,
excise the errors of blind belief.

Richard Skinner

Prayer

Benefactor and Wisdom,
in trying times,
you challenge us to be
the people you call us to be.

You endow us
with creativity
and courage,
with wisdom
and strength,
with hope
and conviction.

You lavish us generously
with more than we could ever ask or imagine.
Some go forward boldly,
risking reputation and stability
to do what you expect.

Be present with them, Lord.
It is not easy to do your bidding
in a world that calls your wisdom
foolishness.

Strengthen their spirits,
for they are the rule-changers,
the life-givers,
the promise-keepers;
they are the prophets
and the examples.
Teach us to be like them.

Julie Gvillo on revgalsblogpals.org

Blessing

God's love surround you, God's Spirit guide you,
God's whisper cheer you, God's peace calm you,
God's shield protect you, God's wisdom arm you,
wherever God may lead you.

Closing music

'The Lord Bless you and Keep You' by John Rutter sung by the Batavia Madrigal Singers,
Indonesia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akT32E83zjl>

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who has participated, especially Sheila for this morning's reflection, Jess for the intercessions, Richard for the poems and introduction to Night Prayer, and Viv for Coffee Break on St Martin's. Material taken or adapted from other websites has an attribution made where possible.

