



Advent Wreath Prayers

A Form of Prayer to be used in the Home

*(And Devotional Commentary on the
Collects for Advent and Christmas Day
by Peter Toon & J. S. S. Patterson)*



The Incarnation and the love of God

In the Epistle for the first Sunday in Advent we read: "*Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law*" (Romans 13:8).

God has shown us what it means to love by means of the Incarnation, Life, Death, Resurrection, Ascension and Exaltation of the Lord Jesus. This manifestation of love is meant to evoke a response in us. The first part of our response is to receive His Love in faith and with gratitude. The second part of our response is to seek to imitate it. "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*" (1 John 4:11).

Love has always been a part of God's revelation to mankind. But whereas the old covenant said "*love your neighbor as yourself*" (in which self-love was the standard by which we love others), Jesus says: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another*" (John 13:34). This new commandment does not cancel out the old covenant's commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves; rather it defines the manner in which that love is to be expressed. We must love others as Jesus loves us.

In other words, Jesus has told us that His love for us is the standard (the pattern) by which we are to love each other.

As we seek to keep a holy Advent, I would like to suggest that you take some time to consider the love of God made manifest in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus. Let us also consider His holy life, offered for us in order that we might be redeemed from sin and made sons of God by adoption (and because we are sons, also therefore heirs of the kingdom of Heaven). Let us take time to meditate upon those things that characterize Jesus' love (things like selfless giving, humility, zeal for righteousness, longsuffering, unwavering resolve, submission to the Father's will, etc.) and consider how we might strive (with God's help) to be more and more like Him in our love for each other.

Jesus & Advent: Past, Present and Future

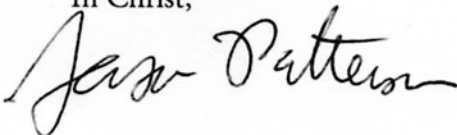
The prayers and Scripture lessons in *The Book of Common Prayer* during Advent tutor us to consider 3 aspects of Jesus' advent (his coming to us):

1. *Past.* Jesus' first advent was in the flesh, when he was born to Mary in the manger. The Incarnation was the greatest miracle that will ever be accomplished in all the cosmos. It was the perfect uniting of humanity with divinity in the one person of the Incarnate Son (fully God and fully man).
2. *Future.* Jesus' 2nd advent is yet to come. He has promised to return in all-power and glory to judge all flesh and usher in the new epoch of God's kingdom upon the earth.
3. *Present.* Jesus is not absent during this time in which we await the fulfillment of his promise. Though he is at the Father's right hand, he is also able to be present, though the mediation of the Holy Spirit. He comes to us and dwells within us by the Spirit - a mystery which we celebrate at the Holy Communion.

Each of these advents should move us to self-examination as we consider:

1. the wonderful grace of God displayed in the Incarnation. We must ask ourselves whether the babe we see in the manger is He whom we claim in faith to be our Saviour;
2. the judgment we each shall face before the throne of Him who was slain but who now is raised and reigns in all power and glory and
3. the degree to which our lives reflect that we love and are being obedient to the commandments of Jesus right now.

"Watch ye, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (St. Mark 13:35-37).

In Christ,


The First Week in Advent

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: **And with thy spirit.**

Let us pray.

OUR Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

ALmighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. **Amen.**

*The passage of the day may be read (to read a short reflection about each passage, see the devotional guide *Lo, He Comes*).*

Monday - St. Mark 1:1–13

Thursday - St. Mark 1:40–45

Tuesday - St. Mark 1:14–28

Friday - St. Mark 2:1–12

Wednesday - St. Mark 1:29–39

Saturday - St. Mark 2:13–22

Minister: Our Help is in the Name of the Lord.

People: **Who hath made heaven and earth.**

Let us pray.

☞ *One Advent candle is lighted.*

Minister: Let us pray.

STIR up Thy might, we beseech Thee, O Lord and come, so that we may escape through Thy protection and be saved by Thy help from the dangers that threaten us because of our sins. Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God forever and ever. **Amen.**

The Second Week in Advent

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: **And with thy spirit.**

Let us pray.

OUR Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. **Amen.**

¶ *A lesson may be read.*

Monday - St. Mark 2:23-3:6

Thursday - St. Mark 4:1-20

Tuesday - St. Mark 3:7-19

Friday - St. Mark 4:21-29

Wednesday - St. Mark 3:20-35

Saturday - St. Mark 4:30-41

Minister: Our Help is in the Name of the Lord.

People: **Who hath made heaven and earth.**

Let us pray.

¶ *Two Advent candles are lit.*

Minister: Let us pray.

STIR up Thy might, we beseech Thee, O Lord and come, so that we may escape through Thy protection and be saved by Thy help from the dangers that threaten us because of our sins. Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God forever and ever. **Amen.**

The Third Week in Advent

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: **And with thy spirit.**

Let us pray.

OUR Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

OLORD Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. **Amen.**

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. **Amen.**

¶ *The passage of the day may be read.*

Monday - St. Mark 5:1-20

Thursday - St. Mark 6:1-6

Tuesday - St. Mark 5:21

Ember Friday - 2 Cor. 5:5

Ember Wednesday - St. Luke 12:35-48

Ember Saturday - St. Matt. 9:35-10:15

Minister: Our Help is in the Name of the Lord.

People: **Who hath made heaven and earth.**

Let us pray.

¶ *A lesson may be read.*

Minister: Let us pray.

STIR up Thy might, we beseech Thee, O Lord and come, so that we may escape through Thy protection and be saved by Thy help from the dangers that threaten us because of our sins. Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God forever and ever. **Amen.**

The Final 7 Days of Advent

During the last 7 days of Advent, the following "O Antiphons" may be added to your daily prayers, immediately following the lesson.

December 17th



O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of the Most High, Pervading and permeating all creation, mightily ordering all things:

Come and teach us the way of understanding.

December 18th



O Adonai, Captain of the house of Israel, who didst appear to Moses in the flame of the burning bush, and gavest him the law on Sinai:

Come with an outstretched arm and redeem us.

December 19th



O Root of Jessie, who standest for an ensign of the people, before whom kings shall shut their mouths, to whom the nations shall seek:

Come quickly and deliver us.

December 20th



O Key of David, Sceptre of the house of Israel, who can open and no man shut, and shut and no man open:

Come and rescue the prisoners who are in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 21st



O Day-spring from on high, Brightness and Eternal Light, and Sun of Righteousness: C

Come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 22nd



O King of nations, thou for whom they long, the
Cornerstone that unites all people:

Come and save thy creatures whom thou didst fashion
from the dust of the earth.

December 23rd



O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Desire of all
nations and their Saviour:

Come and save us, O Lord our God.”

The Fourth Week in Advent

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: **And with thy spirit.**

Let us pray.

OUR Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

LORD, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and 'deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world with out end. **Amen.**

ALmighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. **Amen.**

¶ *A lesson may be read.*

Monday - St. Luke 1:5–25

Thursday - St. Luke 1:46–56

Tuesday - St. Luke 1:26–38

Friday - St. Luke 1:57–66

Wednesday - St. Luke 1:39–45

Minister: Our Help is in the Name of the Lord.

People: **Who hath made heaven and earth.**

Let us pray.

¶ *Four Advent candles are lit.*

Minister: Let us pray.

STIR up Thy might, we beseech Thee, O Lord and come, so that we may escape through Thy protection and be saved by Thy help from the dangers that threaten us because of our sins. Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God forever and ever. **Amen.**

Historical and Devotional Commentary on the Collects for Advent and Christmas Day

by: Peter Toon & Jason Patterson

The First Sunday in Advent

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

The Epistle: Romans 13:8-14; The Gospel: St. Matthew 21:1-13

Historical Note

This beautiful and moving prayer was written specifically for the first edition of *The Book of the Common Prayer* (1549) by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. It was not until 1662 that it was appointed to be said every day in Advent (at which time the same instruction was given regarding the Collect for Ash Wednesday in the season of Lent).

Its structure, style and contents reveal just how perfectly Cranmer had mastered in English the grammatical structure of the traditional Latin Collects. It is a most appropriate prayer with which to begin the Christian Year for it is addressed to the Father, *Almighty God*, is centered upon the Lord Jesus Christ, *thy Son*, and looks for the direct help in daily living of the Spirit of the Father and the Son (*the Holy Ghost*). It takes specific guidance and inspiration from the

Epistle and reminds us that we cannot properly celebrate the first advent of the Lord Jesus unless we are preparing for his second advent.

Commentary on the Collect

Advent calls us to consider both Jesus' first coming – when he came in all humility to redeem us, and his second coming – when he will come in glory to be our Judge. The interplay of these two advents permeates the advent Collects.

Almighty God . . . now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead. Here in remembrance before Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we remember both (i) the advent of the only-begotten Son when he humbled himself, took to himself our human nature and was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, and (ii) the future advent of the same Son as the lord of lords and king of kings to earth at the end the age in great glory, to raise the dead and to judge the peoples, and to inaugurate the Kingdom of God.

Give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light. As baptized believers we live in a world darkened by evil and sin, but we are given light by Jesus Christ who is the Light of the world. Here we ask for the personal help of the Father, through the Holy Ghost, in order to live not as children of darkness but rather as children of light. Indeed, we pray to be protected by *the armour of light* (see Romans 13:12). When Christ Jesus returns to earth in his second coming he will dispel all shadows and darkness, clear up all doubts, chase away all sorrows and cause the new dawn of the new day of the new age to appear. Then we shall cast off our sleeping apparel and put on the shining dress of the kingdom of God, as we are raised to the life immortal.

Prayed each day at Morning and Evening Prayer and whenever the Lord's Supper is celebrated during the four weeks of Advent, this Collect is a real means of grace whereby we rightly pre-

pare to celebrate the incarnation at Christmas and the Epiphany a little later.

In some forms of churchmanship Advent is regarded as a time of penitence, a kind of short Lent. Such may be based upon the words *cast away the works of darkness*, which requires not only effort (assisted by divine grace) but also self-examination, in order that we might become aware of the sin and darkness in our heart, mind and soul. Further, the theme of the second advent calls forth fasting and prayer from the people of God, as they watch and pray.

Let us make full use of it and pray its words with appropriate piety and reverence.

The Gospel for the week sets forth another coming, the coming of the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week. He enters the city as the Messiah, the Son of David, the Prophet of God, bringing salvation for Israel and the world. He is welcomed as such by those who have previously heard his teaching and witnessed his exorcisms and miracles. Let us in Advent also prepare ourselves to heartily welcome the same Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the world and the Judge of the peoples.

The Second Sunday in Advent

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Epistle: Romans 15:4-13; The Gospel: St. Luke 21:25-33

Historical Note

For its length, there is no better statement of the Reformed-Catholic approach to the Bible as the Word of God than this Collect.

It is with great thanks that we note that, beginning with the first edition of 1549, this prayer is to be found in every authentic edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Cranmer's composition of this Collect demonstrates the English Reformer's concern that the Scriptures assume their proper authority and place, not only for doctrine and in worship, but also in daily living.

Commentary on the Collect

During the interim period of grace between Jesus' first coming to redeem us and his second coming as our Judge, one of the central ways that he instructs us is through the sacred Word, the Holy Scriptures. And so it is most fitting that as we begin the Christian year, we celebrate God's gift of the Holy Scriptures to the Church.

Blessed Lord. In imitation of such saints as the prophet Zechariah, who cried out "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*" (Luke 1:68) and St. Paul, who proclaimed "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3), we begin our prayer with an acclamation of praise to God as our *Blessed Lord*. He is the Lord of all being and the fountain of all goodness, wisdom and power.

Following this Invocation, we come to the Collect's Doctrinal statement: *who hast caused all holy Scripture to be written for our learning*. This is a statement of the purpose for which God has given the holy Scriptures to his people. It echoes such Pauline verses as: "*whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*" (Romans 15:4) and, "*All these things happened unto them for examples: and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come*" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Having identified and addressed the One to whom we desire to offer prayer, we now recall reverently before God what we have been taught concerning the use of the Scriptures – they were written, gathered and translated for our benefit, salvation, sanctification, instruction and education. He has given this amazing gift to his people to be used under his care as a perpetual possession for our good and his glory. They exist for our learning and they give us instruc-

tion in faith and morals. Thus when we read or hear the Scriptures, we do so in the humble confidence that God has foreseen our needs and will meet them as we receive his written Word.

Grant that we. Being in the presence of the Lord Jesus and suitably recollected by the help of his Spirit, we are in a position to offer our petition, which begins with a strong verb, *grant*. By using the word *grant* we are reminded that *he* is in charge, not us. We come not to make demands, but to submissively lay our requests before him. We are wholly and totally in need of the mercy of the One to whom supplication is offered. He must give his favour and grace if we are to benefit from the supremely wonderful gift that he has placed in the hands of holy mother Church.

May in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them. “Hearing” is the first way in which we receive the oracles of God, as they are read in the church services of Morning and Evening Prayer, in the Order for Holy Communion, and in Family Prayers. To “hear” is to hear both with the outer ear and with the inner ear and thus hear in the mind and the conscience, where the seed of the Word of God must be sown. But hearing the oracles is only the beginning of our reception of them, for in addition to hearing them we are also called to read them.

When we hear the Scriptures read, they are set before us at someone else’s pace – we are without the ability to linger over a phrase or idea, we cannot reread or investigate cross references. But when we are alone, in our times of quiet, we may take up the Scriptures and read them at our own pace.

The purpose of both hearing *and* reading (whether done at the same time or separately) is that we may *mark* them – that is, give careful attention to what we hear and read concerning God and his salvation in Jesus Christ. If we are to inwardly digest them, we must first slow down and “chew the cud” as it were. We should give close and careful attention to the text, mulling it over and meditating upon in again and again. This is what leads to understanding, and to God’s Word becoming lodged in our memory and implanted within

our heart – “*Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee*” (Psalm 119:11).

This entire exercise – hearing, reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting God’s Word – may be called meditation. It is the route appointed by God whereby his Word goes from the written page into our inmost souls. Merely to hear or merely to read the Bible is not enough; we are called to dutifully and humbly employ the means necessary to allow the Word of God to enter into our lives. We need to have both the spiritual appetite and the spiritual digestion in place to come to the experience of the Psalmist who declared: “*How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth*” (Psalm 119:103).

That by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word. The result of the right reception of God’s Word is that we might hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life (see also Romans 15:4). To do this, we need to cultivate the virtue of patience. Specifically, in light of the comfort of God’s Word we must wait patiently for the second coming of Christ to bring to an end this evil age and to inaugurate the age of the Kingdom of God.

We may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. As St. Paul told Titus, the Christian hope is a *blessed* hope: “*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:13). Having addressed God as the *Blessed Lord*, we now celebrate the *blessed hope* which he alone provides for us (in Latin the first “blessed,” used of God himself is *Benedictus* and the second, in reference to his gift is *beatus*).

A basic theme of this Collect is asking God to help us rightly to use the Holy Scriptures as a means of preparing for the second advent and of life together with Christ in glory.

Which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. The Collect ends in similar fashion to the manner in which it began – with the use of phraseology unique in comparison to the rest of *The*

Book of Common Prayer. Neither the invocation *Blessed Lord* nor the prepositional phrase *in Jesus Christ* is found elsewhere in the Collects. The usual ending of these short prayers is *through Jesus Christ, etc.* The reason for the variation is of great theological significance, for our Christian hope is not merely through Jesus the Mediator but is actually all bound up *in* him. Our hope is related not simply to what he did (or will do) but to who he is. Jesus is himself our hope, as St. Paul told the Colossians, the hope of glory is “*Christ in you*” (1:27a). This hope keeps us steadfast not only in Advent but throughout the whole Church year.

Amen. So be it, O Lord, the Blessed One and blessed be thy kingdom now and always, even unto the ages of ages.

The Third Sunday in Advent

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee: Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Epistle: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; The Gospel: St. Matthew 11:2-10

Historical Note

Whereas in the first two Collects of Advent we have benefited from Archbishop Cranmer’s exceptional genius, in today’s Collect we meet the polished hand of a different (and lesser) genius – Bishop Cosin of Durham who wrote it for the 1662 revision of the prayerbook. Prior to this, the Collect was very brief and read simply: *Lord, we beseech thee, give ear to our prayers, and by thy gracious visitation lighten the darkness of our heart by our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Commentary on the Collect

This collect continues the theme of the previous two collects (preparation for Christ's return, in light of his Nativity), while also introducing a new idea, namely the calling of God's minister's to be active in the preparation of the people for Jesus' second advent.

In the first collect of Advent, we confessed our need to be made ready for Christ's return (*give us grace that we may cast off . . . and put on . . . (so that) when he shall come again . . . we may rise to the life immortal*). Last week we learned of one means of godly preparation – rightly receiving and using the Holy Scriptures. This week we are tutored to consider a second means of preparation, namely the right exercise of the Christian ministry: *send thy messengers to prepare thy way before thee*.

O Lord Jesus Christ. This is one of only three instances in the Collects of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* in which we address our prayer to the Lord Jesus rather than to God the Father (the other two being St. Stephen's Day and The First Sunday in Lent). Let us consider the significance of addressing Jesus as the *Lord*. Though shortly we shall celebrate his Nativity (a theme of which is his humility, see Philippians 2), today we address our prayer to the exalted Messiah, he to whom the Father has given the name "the Lord."

This one to whom we pray is no longer the fragile babe in the manger; he is the Lord of lords and King of kings, reigning in heaven at the right hand of the Father. He is the Head of the Church whose authority encompasses the entire universe and the Kingdom of God, wherein are found the holy angels and the great company of the redeemed of mankind.

Who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee. As we address the Lord Jesus Christ, we recall in his presence that he, as the Lord of history and salvation, called St. John the Baptist to prepare his way among the people Israel. The purpose of this recollection is not to presumptuously seek to inform

the Lord Jesus about St. John’s ministry. Our purpose is to remember in his presence that which we need to have in mind so as to be prepared for the latter part of the Collect, where we shall pray for those in the present day who, in ways analogous to John, are called to serve the Lord Jesus and advance God’s kingdom.

Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries. God’s people pray especially this Sunday and during the week for those who are ordained ministers, that they may be faithful heralds of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ even as John the Baptist was a faithful herald of the ministry of the Messiah at his first coming.

This Petition’s wording is taken from today’s Epistle and it is worth noting that in the original Greek of the New Testament the word which is translated here as *minister* is not the usual word that we typically find for minister (*diakonos*; δίακονος), it is “*hupēretēs*” (ὑπηρέτης) a literal translation of which is “under-rower” and it means “one who serves a master or a superior.” In the New Testament, the Apostles are called the *hupēretēs* of Christ – that is, they are Christ’s servants (Acts 26:16; 1 Corinthians 4:1). Whereas *diakonos* emphasizes the relationship of the minister to those in his charge (like a shepherd caring for his flock), the emphasis of *hupēretēs* is upon the relationship of the minister to his Lord – he is a minister of Christ; he serves Christ.

Prayers for the clergy are especially appropriate today and throughout the week, seeing that this Sunday begins an Ember Week (of which there are three throughout the course of the year) – in preparation for The Fourth Sunday in Advent, traditionally a time in which laborers are sent out into the Lord’s vineyard through ordination.

Just as God prepares his people for his glorious return by means of the Holy Scriptures, so too he wills to use the ministers and stewards of his holy mysteries to ready his people for his return. And so, just as at each celebration of Holy Communion we pray for God to give grace to all “*Bishops and other Ministers, that they may, both by their life and doctrine, set forth thy true and lively Word, and*

rightly administer thy holy Sacraments,” so now we pray for these same men – that they might faithfully prepare the way of the Lord amongst his people for his second advent, even as John the Baptizer sought to prepare the Jewish people for the Messiah’s first advent.

And we pray this, knowing that despite John’s heroic witness, the Israelites were not prepared to receive the Messiah as God desired. We must pray that in our own day this work of preparation for the Messiah’s second advent will be both faithfully executed and faithfully received.

That at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight. We now confess our faith in the surety of God’s Word regarding that which is yet to come. In the midst of the many distractions that attend our daily lives, how needful it is have our sometimes shortsighted perspectives challenged by God’s promises about the future. In light of Christ’s promised return, the Church is ever called to watch and pray, and at no time more specifically than in advent.

We are given the sobering reminder that at his second advent, the Lord Jesus will judge the living and the dead, thereby bringing to a glorious conclusion the purposes of God with mankind in space and time. As Jesus warned in the parable of the wise manager: *“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more”* (Luke 12:48).

In general, this collect reminds us that in Advent – while we prepare liturgically for the celebration of Christ’s birth – we must also prepare, in heart and mind, for his return.

Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen. Since this Collect is addressed to the second person of the holy, blessed Trinity, the ending unites him with the first and third persons in a brief doxology. There are three persons, each of whom possesses in totality the one Godhead or divinity/deity and thus we say, “Three Persons and one God. A unity in Trinity and a Trinity in unity.”

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

The Epistle: Philippians 4:4-7; The Gospel: St. John 1:19-28

Historical Note

This is the first Collect amongst the Sundays in Advent which Archbishop Cranmer translated from the Latin rather than writing himself. He based his translation on the Gelastian Sacramentary (6th century) rather than on the medieval Sarum Missal, the significant difference being that the Sarum is addressed to the Son but the Gelastian is addressed to the Father. Some scholars, such as Mason Neale, have claimed that this was a major mistake because it results in a nearly complete loss of the true spirit and emphasis of the Collect as it was found in the Sarum Missal, which was used widely in England until 1550.¹ For Neale, the Collect dramatically calls upon God the Son to raise up his power, that is to be born among us in order to be our Saviour. And thus to address this prayer to the Father is to lose the sense of the proximity and power of the approaching festival of the incarnation.

Other Anglican scholars have shared Neale's opinion that liturgically it is more appropriate to address the Son rather than the Father at the eve of the Christmas festival.² However, what Neale does not mention and what is often not observed is that the Latin Collect in the Sarum Missal is taken from the older Gelasian Sacramentary, in which it is addressed to the Father, not the Son, as is

1 See Mason Neale, *Essays on Liturgiology*, London (1863) p. 51.

2 The Liturgical Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada in the 1950's chose to follow the Sarum as is reflected in the Canadian BCP 1960.

obvious by the use of the preposition *per* (“through”) in the Termination: *through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

As the Collect is an essential part of the Eucharist, and since the Eucharist is addressed to the Father through the Son and with the Spirit, it is the general norm that Collects are addressed to the Father, *per* (through) the Son.³ But, of course, both Collects make sense and there is certainly added “drama” when it is addressed to the Son as the Church expects (in liturgical time rather than chronological time) his nativity & arrival on December 25th. However, the second part of the Collect concerning *the race that is set before us* more naturally fits into a petition to the Father in the name of the Son.

Commentary on the Collect

Throughout Advent, the Collects and biblical readings appointed by *The Book of Common Prayer* have led us to consider our devotion to Jesus in light of not just his first, but also his second coming. There seems no strict logic as to the manner in which the prayerbook moves us (in our minds and in our prayers) between these two advents. What is clear, however, is that we are being trained by the prayers of the Church to not only interpret both advents in light of each other, but furthermore to consider our relation to Jesus in the light of them both.

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us. We address our prayer to the Lord, (in this case, the Father) and earnestly appeal to him to gather up his power and descend to his people (by the Holy Ghost) in order to help, succour and sustain them. The choice of this language is based upon the words of the psalmist, uttered centuries earlier: *“Hear, O thou Shepherd of Israel . . . stir up thy strength, and come, and help us. Turn us again, O God: show the light of thy countenance, and we shall be whole”* (Psalm 80:1-3).

3 However in several old Sacramentaries (Hadrianum, Paduan &, Gregorianum) this Collect is allocated to Advent IV and is addressed to the Son (see *Liturgy & Worship*, ed. W. K. Lowther Clarke, p. 383).

The petition for God to *come among us* should also lead us to recall the seven Advent anthems/antiphons that are traditionally sung in the last week of Advent at the Daily Office. Each of the seven antiphons contain the verb “come” – e.g., “come to teach;” “come to redeem,” and so on, likewise moving from the first advent to the second as the primary referent.

That whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us. Here we seek to be honest before God and his all-seeing eyes and all-knowing mind. We recognize that due to our sins of omission and commission we have failed to run the race of faithful discipleship in holiness and love, as we are called to do and as we ought to have done.

The Scriptures speak of the Christian life as a race towards the goal of heaven, that is, the Kingdom of God, the Father and of his Son, Jesus Christ. We are exhorted: “*Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us*” (Hebrews 12:1). To run this race faithfully and in the right direction, we shall need God to give us grace and mercy, and so we ask that:

Thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord. During Advent (and at all times of the year), we need God to deliver us from both the guilt and power of sin. Thus we beseech the Father to graciously and mercifully provide us through the Son and by his Spirit the help that we need. In particular we look to *the satisfaction of thy Son*, which is his perfect obedience to the Father in both his life and his death. Christ’s satisfaction is the basis of our asking for the assistance and deliverance which is the work of God’s mercy and grace – given by the Father through the Son who became man for us, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Jesus, in satisfaction of the Law and its claims upon us sinners, died as a sacrifice in our stead, and was raised from the dead for our justification and adoption as children of God. Obviously

the full effects of this satisfaction will be only known at the second advent; but now, because of Jesus' first advent, we experience by the Holy Spirit's agency the first-fruits and beginnings of this full salvation.

If we are to live as God would have his people to live – ever expecting the return of the Lord Jesus – we shall have to fashion our lives accordingly; not simply watching and praying but also seeking to live as obedient and faithful servants of God, engaged in his service and daily running the race that is set before us. This is not only the right way to approach the Christian life, it is also the best preparation for the celebration of the festival of the incarnation.

To whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world with out end. Amen. The Collect ends in doxology to the three Persons of the blessed, holy and undivided Trinity. Advent thus ends in adoration and praise.

Having received the message of the two advents and a little of what they both give to, and demand of us, we are now ready to hear the Collect, Epistle and Gospel for the feast of the nativity of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Nativity of our Lord, or the Birth-day of Christ commonly called Christmas Day

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

The Epistle: Hebrews 1:1-12; The Gospel: St. John 1:1-14

Historical Note

Before the *Ecclesia Anglicana* began to use English in her prayers (a change begun with the first edition of the Book of Common Prayer in 1549), there were 3 Latin Collects appointed for Christmas Day. This was because the Sarum Missal, which was in use up to 1549, made provision for three Christmas Masses – one at cockcrow, one at the break of dawn, and one in full daylight (there was no Christmas Eve Mass at that time).

An English translation of the Collect for the first mass (at cockcrow) is: *O God, who madest this most sacred night to shine with the brightness of the true Light; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, as we have known the revelations of the Light upon earth, so we may also have the fruition of his joys in heaven; who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth one God, world without end. Amen.*

This recalls Jesus as the light of the world especially as he is so presented in the prologue and text of the Gospel according to St. John.

At the mass at dawn the Church prayed: *Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, to us upon whom the new light of the Word made flesh is shed forth, that the light which shines by faith in our hearts may also shine brightly in our works. Through the same Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.*

This also specifically recalls the prologue of the Gospel According to St. John.

At the mass in the full light of day was prayed: Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the new birth of thy only-begotten Son through the flesh may set free those, who are held fast by the old bondage under the yoke of sin. Through the same Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Here the incarnation of the Son of God, born from Mary his virgin mother, is seen as the basis for the salvation offered to us through the same Jesus Christ.

In the first *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), the reformed-catholic Church of England provided only one Collect for the Christmas festival. This Christmas Day Collect was different from the three Sarum Collects and was a new creation from the hand of Archbishop Cranmer, which he paired with the epistle and gospel texts formerly appointed for the third mass in the Latin Church.

Commentary on the Collect

In this Collect we have a most beautiful combination of sound Doctrine and of inspired Petition.

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin. The Son of God was the second person of the holy Trinity before he took to himself human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary. At the Annunciation and Conception, Mary conceived Jesus miraculously by the presence of the Holy Ghost. At the same time the Son of God, who has had his divine nature from all eternity, acquired the beginnings of a human nature, thus becoming one person made known in two natures – divine and human.

Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit. As the Son of God was born according to his human nature from the Blessed Virgin Mary, so each of us is to be born of the Holy Spirit into the Kingdom of God and thereby made into the adopted children of God, through the love of the Father and the grace of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And as the Son of God in his human nature lived as Jesus of Nazareth, fulfilling the vocation of the Messiah and Suffering Servant of God, so we are to fulfill the vocation of the children of God called unto holiness and service in the kingdom and Church of God our Father.

Christmas is a time for rejoicing with the heavenly host that the Son of God has become man for us and our salvation. It is also a time to see and accept what is the vocation of the regenerate children of God and by the help of the Holy Ghost fulfill the same.



ST. MARK'S CHURCH
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Christmas Eve and Christmastide Services:

Christmas Eve: A Festival of 9 Lessons & Carols, 5 pm.
Holy Communion, 10:30 pm.

Christmas Day: Holy Communion, 10 am (Bishop Hicks, Celebrant)

Christmastide: The Feast of St. Stephan (Dec 26) - Holy Communion, 9 am
St. John (Dec 27) - Holy Communion, 9 am
Holy Innocents (Dec 28) - Holy Communion, 9 am
The Circumcision of Christ (Jan 1st) - Holy
Communion, 6 pm (dinner following)

SUNDAY SERVICES - 10:00 am

Holy Communion (1st and 3rd Sundays)
Morning Prayer (2nd, 4th and 5th Sundays)

Sunday School - 11:20 am
Feast Days - as announced

MONDAY, TUESDAY,
WEDNESDAY & FRIDAY:
Morning Prayer - 8:30 am
Evening Prayer - 4:30 pm

THURSDAYS:
Morning Prayer - 9:00 am
Holy Communion - 9:15 am
Bible Study - 10:00 am
Evening Prayer - 4:30 pm