

## Advent 2020 Reflection – Week 1

We hope that this weekly series of Advent Reflections will be an opportunity for us to relax, reflect and refresh ourselves spiritually.

### Explanatory Notes before we begin:

In this first week's Reflection there are two suggested pieces of music to tune into via YouTube with the relevant link to access them (skip any ads that appear). I am a novice at using this type of technology so hope it will work ok for you!

**However**, if you are unable to access YouTube, hopefully you can find music for the hymns, and also the words for the second hymn, which cannot be included due to copyright regulations. The hymns are Silent Night and How Great Thou Art. Apart from that everything is included in the Reflection.

This Reflection can take as long as you wish, ie if you want to spend some time thinking about a particular part before continuing, but I suggest that you set aside about 30 minutes.

With love in the Lord,  
*Jean*

### Introduction

Sometimes in the run up to Christmas our lives can become rather hectic, and this year with the added problems caused by the coronavirus, we may be feeling in extra need of some quiet time and space.

Advent is a time of expectation, and some of us will be going through various stages of preparation to meet the challenges of this special time of year. Sometimes with all that we are involved with we can forget what the true, the real, meaning of Advent and Christmas is, so that by the time we reach Christmas Eve we may be too exhausted to enjoy and celebrate the birth of Jesus as we should.

So, for a short time today, let us step back, set aside all the busyness and relax, make ourselves comfortable, and prepare to spend some quality time in the presence of God.

To start, let us pray:

Almighty God, we have drawn aside from the world so that we might return to it with faith renewed. We have set this time apart so that we might consecrate time itself, offering our past, present and future to you. We have come to be silent so that we might hear, to empty ourselves so that we might be filled, to make some space in our busy schedules so that you may find space in our hearts, to teach, challenge, inspire and nurture. Meet with us now, and help us to meet with you always, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Reflection

Here we are near the end of a very dark year for the whole world. However, there are rays of light appearing on the horizon as the promises of vaccinations against the coronavirus become a reality. It has been a year that most of us will never forget.

*"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined."* [Isaiah Ch 9 v 2]

We sometimes hear the question: ***"Where were you when..."***

- **President Kennedy or Martin Luther King were assassinated**
- **Nelson Mandela was released from prison**
- **The Berlin wall was brought down, or**
- **9/11 happened.**

Most of us will remember, or will have heard of, these shattering historical events, but for many, the landing on the moon in July 1969 was the most amazing event in the history of the world so far –

## OR WAS IT?

Advent is

- a time of expectation,
- a time of wonder and hope,
- a time of preparation,
- a journey,
- a time of challenge about who we are and where we are going.

All these experiences can be related to the Apollo Space programme, which culminated in the first manned moon landing in 1969. In preparation for the momentous event of the Apollo 11 moon-landing, several previous flights were made to test the men and equipment, and the journey of Apollo 8 at Christmastime in 1968 is probably the best remembered of them all.

The crew of Apollo 8 were the first human beings to pull free of earth's gravity and to orbit another planet. The experience was deeply moving for each one of them, Commander Frank Borman, Command Module Pilot Jim Lovell, and Lunar Module Pilot William Anders, who did a live television broadcast from lunar orbit, in which they showed pictures of the Earth and Moon seen from Apollo 8.

Lovell said, *"The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring and it makes you realize just what you have back there on Earth."* They ended the broadcast with the crew taking turns reading from the book of Genesis chapter 1 verses 1 – 10:

William Anders:

"For all the people on Earth the crew of Apollo 8 has a message we would like to send you".

*"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.  
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light:  
and there was light.  
And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."*

Jim Lovell:

*"And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.  
And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.  
And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.  
And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day."*

Frank Borman:

*"And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.  
And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good."*

Borman then added, *"And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you - all of you on the good Earth."*



Time for Reflection, using music – Simon & Garfunkel – Silent Night / 7 o'clock News on <https://youtu.be/WgYFXCUEL4Y>

## Silent Night:

1. Silent night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
'Round yon virgin Mother and Child  
Holy infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace  
Sleep in heavenly peace
2. Silent night, holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight!  
Glories stream from heaven afar;  
Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!  
Christ the Saviour is born!  
Christ the Saviour is born!
3. Silent night, holy night  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace  
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth  
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth

We could contrast that journey to the moon and back with the journey of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem all those years previously. It wasn't exactly hi-tech, but what an impact it subsequently had on the history of the human race!

2,000 years on, despite rampant secularism and materialism, cynicism and despair, the legacy of that amazing birth is all around us in...

- the dates on the calendars we use
- Christian festivals celebrated (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost)
- the Churches and Cathedrals in villages, towns and cities
- the millions of Christians throughout the world
- music, art, literature beyond counting

and all from such humble beginnings.



## **One Solitary Life:**

He was born in an obscure village the child of a peasant woman  
He grew up in another obscure village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty  
when public opinion turned against him

He never wrote a book  
He never held an office  
He never went to college  
He never visited a big city  
He never travelled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born  
He did none of the things usually associated with greatness  
He had no credentials but himself

He was only thirty three years old when His friends ran away  
One of them denied him  
He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial  
He was nailed to a cross between two thieves  
While dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing the only property he had on earth

When he was dead He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend

Twenty centuries have come and gone  
And today Jesus is the central figure of the human race  
And the leader of mankind's progress  
All the armies that have ever marched  
All the navies that have ever sailed  
All the parliaments that have ever sat  
All the kings that ever reigned put together  
Have not affected the life of mankind on earth  
As powerfully as that one solitary life.

**Do you think that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus was the most important event in history?**

Delia Smith, in her book “A Feast for Advent” (Friday, Advent 1) says:

*“What we need to draw from this as we grapple with unbelief in our own lives, is the necessity to keep on following Jesus, to be persistent in prayer, to earnestly desire to receive more and more sight as we learn to step out in faith. So, as we receive more healing, so will the shadows recede and our vision become sharpened. The more we begin to see Him, the more He will awaken in us the reality of His work of restoration and healing within us. ‘Happy are those who have not seen [Jesus] and yet believe’. [John 20:29].”*

**Hymn – How Great Thou Art** performed by Chris Rice – for music go to <https://youtu.be/Cc0QVWzCv9k>.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that for this short time of reflection we have had the opportunity to set aside the worldly cares, pressures and anxieties that affect us. Help us now as we move on, to do so with our faith refreshed. At this time of Advent, fire our imaginations with the sweep of your salvation. Catch us up in the cause of your kingdom, already breaking into this world in our ransomed lives yet waiting for its final fulfilment when Christ shall come again. And let your Spirit, wild as the wind, gentle as the dove, move within us and among us, to enliven our worship and strengthen our faith and to journey on with anticipation and joy. Amen.

