

St. Paul Anglican Church

Behold:

Through the Eyes of

An Advent, Christmas and Epiphany Journey



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Preface

Behold: Through the Eyes of...

An Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany Journey for Year A

To *behold* is more than to look. It is to gaze with reverence, to see not only with the eyes but with the heart. It is the kind of seeing that changes us — not just what we see, but how we see. In the Scriptures, the word “behold” often signals a moment of divine interruption: something is revealed, someone is awakened, a truth is uncovered.

Advent invites this kind of beholding. It is a season not simply of preparing for a holiday, but of preparing the heart. It asks us to slow down, to listen more deeply, to wait with hope in the dark. It beckons us to notice signs of God’s presence — faint stars, whispered promises, unexpected visitors — and to pay attention.

In this six-part devotional journey through Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, we’ll explore the story of Christ’s coming *through the eyes* of those who encountered it firsthand. Week by week, we’ll enter into the longing of the prophet, the faith of Mary, the awakening of Joseph, the joy of the shepherds, the vision of God, and the seeking heart of the Magi. Each perspective offers a fresh lens, inviting us to step inside the story — not as distant observers, but as participants in God’s unfolding love.

Whether you are using this resource on your own, with a friend, or as part of a small group, you are encouraged to move slowly and prayerfully. Each chapter includes:

- A passage of Scripture
- A short reflection
- An invitation to consider what this moment might mean for you
- A prayer or blessing to carry with you

You may wish to journal your own responses — what stirs, challenges, or comforts you along the way.

This season is not only about anticipating Christ's birth. It's about learning to behold him — here and now — in the world, in one another, and in yourself.

So come. Let us watch, wait, wonder, and follow.

Let us behold.

Through the Eyes of the Watcher

Advent 1 - Matthew 24:36–44

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”
— Matthew 24:42 (NRSV)

Reflection

Before the birds sing, before the sun rises, before the world stirs—there is a moment of deep stillness. This is the sacred hour of the watcher. Not one who merely waits, but one who listens, who watches the horizon, who reads the wind, the water, the stars.

Jesus says, “Keep awake.” His voice echoes through time, calling us not to panic or predict, but to pay attention. In his example of the days of Noah, it’s not catastrophe that surprises people, it’s that they were so distracted by everyday life that they missed the sacred unfolding in their midst.

Those who live close to the land, like the Snuneymuxw people whose territory we inhabit, have long known the importance of watching. They teach us to listen with the whole body; to pay attention to the rhythms of the tide, the teachings of cedar, the signs of salmon. This kind of attention is not hurried. It is practiced. Rooted. Sacred.

Advent begins here: not with noise or movement, but with a posture of stillness and alertness. To watch is not to anxiously wait, but to honour the present moment. It is to believe that even now, especially now, God is near. Not only in the extraordinary, but also in the ordinary. Not only in heaven, but on the land, among the people, in the silence between things.

To be a watcher is to be a student of the sacred: to look for the signs of God's nearness in the face of a neighbour, in the long shadows of winter, in the turning of the season. The watcher knows that something is always being born.

This Advent, we are invited to see as the watcher sees. Not with fear or frenzy, but with reverent attentiveness. The Spirit is moving. Not above us, but among us, within us, and through this land. Be still. Be awake.

Invitation

- What does “keeping awake” look like in your life today?
- Where in your daily rhythm might you listen more deeply – to the land, to others, to God?
- What signs of God's nearness might you be overlooking?
- Who in your life embodies the sacred art of watchfulness?

Prayer

O God of quiet mornings and ancient wisdom,
Teach us to see with reverent eyes,
To listen with open hearts,
To honour the wisdom of the land and its people.
Awaken us to your presence in all things,
That we may watch not with fear, but with hope.
Amen.

Breath Prayer

(Repeat slowly, in silence or aloud)

Inhale: Awake to the sacred

Exhale: I wait in peace

Through the Eyes of the Prophet

Advent 2 - Matthew 3:1–12

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” – *Matthew 3:3 (NRSV)*

Reflection

The prophet does not come gently.

John the Baptist erupts into the Advent landscape with wild hair, fierce words, and a message that cuts to the core: *Prepare the way of the Lord*.

Not in comfort. Not in control. But in disruption.

Prophets are never tame. They speak not to soothe but to stir. John calls his people out of complacency and into the wilderness—not as punishment, but as possibility. For it is in the wilderness that old habits are stripped away and hearts can be re-formed.

John’s voice echoes ancient promises, yet his message is pointed and present. He doesn’t just speak about the future coming of the Messiah. He speaks into the now: *Repent. Bear fruit. Clear the path*. In other words: live as if God’s reign is already here—because it is.

To see through the eyes of the prophet is to refuse denial or distraction. It is to name what is broken, and still believe that healing is possible.

It is to live awake.

In our time, prophets might not wear camel’s hair or eat locusts, but they still cry out. They are voices at climate rallies, advocates for housing and healthcare, those who speak up when silence would be easier. Sometimes, they’re the quiet ones urging us to take another look—at ourselves, our systems, our assumptions.

Prophets do not always come from the centre. Often, they come from the edge. Are we listening?

Invitation

- Where are you being called to speak up?
- What needs clearing in your life or in your community to make room for love, justice, or joy?
- Is there a wilderness place you've been avoiding—where, perhaps, God is trying to speak?

Prayer

God of the prophets,
Shake us awake.
Clear our cluttered paths.
Speak to us through wilderness voices—
and give us courage to listen.
When truth is hard and the way is rough,
remind us that love is always worth the risk.
Prepare our hearts,
that we too may prepare the way.
Amen.

Through the Eyes of the Doubter

Advent 3 – Matthew 11:2–11

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” – *Matthew 11:3*
(NRSV)

Reflection

Even prophets lose their footing.

John—fierce, fearless John—is now behind bars. The wild freedom of the wilderness has given way to prison walls. From that dark place, his once-bold proclamation wavers: *Are you the one, or should we wait for another?*

Doubt is not the opposite of faith.

Sometimes, it is faith’s most honest voice.

This moment matters. The one who had pointed with confidence to Jesus as the Lamb of God now asks if he got it wrong. Not because he’s lost hope entirely—but because the world still looks like Rome is winning. Because the Messiah he expected doesn’t seem to be overthrowing injustice in the way he imagined.

John’s question is our question, too.

When suffering lingers.

When promises seem slow in coming.

When God doesn’t behave the way we thought God would.

Jesus does not scold him.

He does not rebuke the question or dismiss the pain.

Instead, he responds with signs of life:

Go and tell John what you hear and see—the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news.

Sometimes, reassurance doesn't come as a lightning bolt of clarity but as the quiet unfolding of grace around us. Healing where we least expect it. Hope in small, stubborn acts of love. The kin-dom of God arriving not with spectacle, but with compassion.

To see through the eyes of the doubter is not to see less—but to see more tenderly, more honestly, more humanly. Doubt, when faced with courage, becomes a doorway to deeper faith.

Invitation

- Where do you need reassurance?
- What questions are you carrying that won't let go?
- Can you trust that God receives your doubts—not as failure, but as faith seeking understanding?

Prayer

God of the honest question,
Meet us in our doubt.

When the path is unclear and your ways feel hidden,
grant us courage to ask, to seek, to wrestle.

Let your grace find us in the prisons of our disappointment.

And open our eyes to the quiet miracles unfolding around us.

Amen.

Through the Eyes of the Guardian

Advent 4 – Matthew 1:18–25

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid.” – *Matthew 1:20 (NRSV)*

Reflection

Joseph says nothing in scripture.

Not a single word is recorded from his mouth. And yet his actions speak volumes.

When his world was upended—when the woman to whom he was betrothed was found to be pregnant—he chose mercy over shame. He resolved to end the engagement quietly, to protect her rather than preserve his own pride. He was ready to walk away with dignity, until a dream invited him into something deeper.

Do not be afraid...

To trust the mystery.

To carry the weight of responsibility.

To believe that something holy could be growing right in the middle of scandal.

Joseph awakens from the dream and doesn't hesitate.

He chooses love.

He chooses courage.

He chooses to stay.

Through Joseph's eyes, we see another kind of strength—quiet, steadfast, grounded in trust. He becomes the guardian of what he cannot fully understand. The protector of a child not his own. The companion of a woman whose yes changed history.

Sometimes, the holiest calling is simply to hold space for what is fragile and unfolding.

To protect what others might reject.

To offer the shelter of love, when fear or suspicion might be the easier path.

Advent is filled with wild prophets and angelic choirs, but Joseph reminds us that the Kin-dom also arrives through ordinary acts of faithfulness—through the decision to show up, to stay, to believe, even in the dark.

Invitation

- How are you being invited to protect or nurture something sacred?
- What dream or whisper are you being asked to trust, even when it's hard to explain?
- Where might your quiet courage make room for love to grow?

Prayer

God of silent strength,
Teach us to listen like Joseph did—
to trust what we cannot fully grasp,
to protect what is tender,
to act with quiet courage.
Give us faith to shelter your love
in the ordinary and uncertain places of our lives.
Amen.

Through the Eyes of God

Christmas – Matthew 1:18–25

“They shall name him Emmanuel, which means, ‘God is with us.’” – *Matthew 1:23*
(NRSV)

Reflection

From the beginning, God’s vision has been love.

Not love from a distance—not a watchful gaze from some heavenly throne—but love that draws near. Love that bends low. Love that takes on skin.

The Incarnation is not just a divine rescue plan. It’s a way of seeing the world. Through God’s eyes, every human life is worth touching, healing, redeeming. Every body is worthy of being dwelled in. Every story matters.

When we see through the eyes of God, we notice what love notices:

The child with no cradle.

The mother with no room.

The father who stays anyway.

The shepherds whose hands smell of sheep.

The outsiders and the unseen.

To call Jesus *Emmanuel*—God with us—is to affirm that God chose to be here. With us. In joy and pain. In the dust and wonder of the human journey. In a world marred by violence, greed, and fear, God doesn’t turn away. Instead, God is born *into* it, offering a new way of being—love made flesh.

God does not fix the world from afar. God moves in, one heartbeat at a time.

And so, Christmas is not merely a celebration of birth long ago.
It's a reawakening to the truth that we are seen, known, and held.
It's an invitation to look again—at ourselves, at one another, at this bruised and beautiful world—through the eyes of Emmanuel.

Invitation

- What does the world look like through the eyes of love?
- What if God is not somewhere else, but right here, seeing through your eyes, longing through your heart, reaching out through your hands?

Christmas Blessing

Emmanuel, God with us,
may you be born again
in every aching place,
in every flicker of hope,
in every act of mercy.

May you teach us to see
as you see—
with love that stays,
with courage that bends low,
with joy that breaks open the night.

And may we,
with hearts made flesh,
become your dwelling place
again and again.

Amen.

Through the Eyes of the Seeker

Epiphany – Matthew 2:1–12

“We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.” - *Matthew 2:2*
(NRSV)

Reflection

The Magi were outsiders—strangers from distant lands, guided not by prophecy but by the shimmer of a rising star. They were not born into the story of Israel, yet they longed for something beyond themselves. Their journey was not one of certainty, but of hope. Not of arrival, but of pursuit.

To seek is to admit we don’t have all the answers. It is to be curious, humble, open to the possibility that the truth might lie in unfamiliar places—in a different land, through an unexpected sign, in the arms of a refugee child.

The journey of the Magi reminds us that the spiritual life is not static. It calls us to move, to follow, to risk. To leave the comfort of what we know in search of something—someone—holy. It asks of us courage, imagination, and a willingness to be changed.

We don’t know exactly what the Magi expected to find. But what they discovered was not a palace, not a throne, not a king crowned with gold, but a young child in the arms of his mother. And still—they bowed. Still—they offered gifts. Still—they were filled with joy.

To look through the eyes of the seeker is to live in awe. It is to watch the sky, to trust the longing within, and to believe that the sacred might show up in the most surprising of places.

Invitation

- Where is the star rising in your life?
- What new path, unfamiliar terrain, or courageous question is calling you forward?
- What are you seeking this year—not just with your mind, but with your heart?

Epiphany Prayer

O Guiding Light,
shine on the roads we do not yet know.
Give us eyes to see the star,
feet to follow,
and hearts open to wonder.

Like the Magi,
may we seek with longing,
journey with courage,
and worship with joy
when we find you—not where we expected,
but where you've always been.

Amen.