



Shine

Advent Prayer Diary

Advent is a time to watch and wait. The coming of Jesus into a dark world changed things forever. The light that shone that first Christmas day continues to shine in our lives. And, with thankful hearts, we are called to be light to others. This prayer diary is an opportunity to pause, reflect and lift our eyes to the mountains during Advent. May we find his light anew this season.

1. WALKING IN DARKNESS 7 days (Sun 3rd – Sat 9th Dec)
2. BEING LIGHT TO THOSE IN NEED 7 days (Sun 10th – Sat 16th Dec)
3. THE LIGHT HAS COME 8 days (Sun 17th – Sunday 24th Dec)

'Waiting is a period of learning. The longer we wait, the more we hear about him for whom we are waiting.' Henri Nouwen

Walking in darkness

Sun 3 Dec – Sat 9 Dec

'Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world'

C.S. Lewis

Toilet Twinning's ministry is bringing light to some of the darkest places in the world. Toilets might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you consider your personal response to Jesus' command for us to be salt and light in this needy world. But we know toilets save lives. They stop the spread of disease, enable children to stay in school and keep women and girls safe from attack.

This week, we think especially of men, women and children who are living through very dark times indeed as refugees and displaced people. They have lost their homes, their loved ones and often their hope for the future.

Sunday 3 December

Read

'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.' Isaiah 9:2

Sunday church congregation story to read out

In Central African Republic, Sowa and her husband grabbed their children and ran, leaving behind their land, animals and livelihood. They walked 75km to a displacement camp, which has been their home now for three years. There were no toilets initially: typhoid was rife. Mothers had to collect up their children's faeces in bags – until Tearfund helped fund proper latrines.

'We were ashamed when local people refused to let us use their toilets, and we were afraid we'd be attacked if we went in the bush. You've given us back our health – thank you!'



Sunday church congregation prayer to read out

Lord God, as a church we offer you this season of Advent. We pray for Sowa and her family and all those in displacement camps around the world. We pray for the work of Tearfund and their partners as they reach out to those in dark places. And thank you that Toilet Twinning is raising vital funds for this work. May we see people in need through your eyes and reach out in love and kindness. Amen

Monday 4 December

Read

'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.' Psalm 119:105

Reflect

Have you ever arrived late at the cinema? The lights are already low so you have to stumble around to find a free seat (hoping against hope that you don't fall over or worse still, sit on someone). You will probably pause until your eyes adjust to the light from the screen so you can walk with dignity to sit at the end of a row.

All too often we stumble around in the darkness; yet God's offer to be our light is always there. We just need to adjust our eyes to re-focus on his word.

Pray

Lord God I need your light on the path of my life. It is often dark and hazardous but I know that you will not let me fall. Help me to adjust my vision in this dark world to focus on you. Amen.

Tuesday 5 December

Read

'The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.' John 1:5

Reflect

Have you ever seen something that is so unexpected that you simply don't get it? Cognitive dissonance like this is very common. There are moments in life when we can't believe what we're seeing. And so we tend to hurry on our way and avoid stopping. It seems easier to just carry on. But something powerful happens when we stop and look. Really look. Because those moments of perplexity often lead to deepening wisdom and new perspectives. Light shines in the darkness.

Pray

Heavenly Father, your works defy human understanding and too often I pass on by. Help me to stop and reflect and listen so that you can teach me the wisdom that comes from being a child of God. Amen.

Wednesday 6 December

Read

'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.' James 1:17

Reflect

There's something about change. It's challenging, often unplanned, occasionally exciting. In uncertain times we are told to embrace change. But there's something about it. Something unsettling. When shifting sands are sliding we tend to long for solid ground. When the storm rages we reach for the anchor. God is the only one we can rely on who never changes. Shadows shift and move and disappear but the light shines on – pure and steady.

Pray

Lord God, I praise you for your unchanging love. I praise you as the father of the heavenly lights who gives good and perfect gifts. May I rest on that solid and sure foundation. May I seek the safety and certainty of your light. Amen.

Thursday 7 December

Read

'For God, who said "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.' 2 Corinthians 4:6

Reflect

"There was just something about him." "She kind of had an inner light." Sometimes we meet people and there's something special. Even a daily interaction at the supermarket can bring moments like this. Even by a hospital bed. If we truly live in the light of the knowledge of God's glory, surely we will shine bright no matter our circumstances? During difficult times it can be challenging to ensure our hearts aren't darkened, but the discipline of prayer ensures that we open the doors to let the light flood in.

Pray

Lord God, wherever my heart will lead me today I pray that it will be open to your light and love. Bring a new and deeper knowledge of your glory as I seek the face of Christ your son. Amen.

Friday 8 December

Read

'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' John 8:12

Reflect

Here are some snippets from Psalm 23 on what it's like to follow in the footsteps of Jesus:

He leads me by the still, still waters.

He restores my soul.

He guides my ways in righteousness.

And though I walk the darkest path, I will not fear the evil one. For you are with me, your rod and staff are the comfort I need to know.

Your goodness will lead me home.

Pray

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world. I believe it and I worship you. To follow you is to be free from fear. I will trust in you alone. Amen.

Saturday 9 December

Read

'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.' Ephesians 5:8

Reflect

Young children can beam the biggest smile when they're sitting on a parent's knee. They sit there, and feel happy, because they know that they are loved. As God's children we, too, can find such joy. From uncertainty to certainty. From fear to trust. From darkness to light.

Pray

Heavenly Father, I thank you for bringing me out of the darkness into your glorious light. Bring me a new understanding that I am your beloved child. Help me to live in a way that shines your light to others around me, every day. Amen.

Being light to those in need

Sun 10 Dec – Sat 16 Dec

'Don't shine so others can see you, shine so that through you, others can see Him' C.S. Lewis

Bad sanitation is one of the world's biggest killers: it hits women, children, old and sick people hardest. Every two minutes, a child under the age of five dies because of dirty water and poor sanitation.

Women and girls suffer most. In Africa, half of young girls who drop out of school do so because they need to collect water – often from many miles away – or because the school hasn't got separate toilets for boys and girls. Not having a loo puts people at risk of being bitten by snakes as they squat in the grass and makes women and girls a target for sexual assault as they go to the toilet in the open.

As we focus this week on being light to others, we think of our brothers and sisters around the world who are in need. Each day tells a story. They are an inspiration as we prepare to welcome Jesus at Christmas.

Read

'If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.' Isaiah 58:10

Sunday church congregation story to read out:

Bridget is 14 years old and she lives in an extremely poor village in Uganda. With funds raised through Toilet Twinning, Bridget's school now has a toilet block with changing rooms for boys and girls. In just a few months, 65 girls who had dropped out of school re-enrolled because of the new block. A tapstand was installed so pupils no longer have to miss class to collect water. And the children are learning about the importance of handwashing.



Sunday church congregation prayer to read out:

Heavenly Father, we pray for Bridget and her friends and family in Uganda – that they would be healthy, and live life to the full. We pray for the church projects that are helping communities to have clean water and hygienic toilets – that you would show them where to work, and how to reach the people in greatest need. And we pray that you would open our eyes to the brokenness of our world and convict our hearts to respond with generous love. Amen.

Monday 11 December

Read

'If it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.' Romans 12:8

Reflect

It's all too easy to look at what is required of us as followers of Jesus and make the excuse that we're not good enough. But there is always, always something we can do to shine God's light in a dark world.

In Malawi, Tearfund's partner knows this well. Toilets used to be rare in the villages. Local materials such as wood were scarce and people had little incentive to build because they didn't understand that poor sanitation causes disease. With Toilet Twinning funds, Tearfund's partner explained why latrines are so important, and trained the villagers to make concrete slabs to cover their pits. One of the villagers, Margret, says, 'People build their toilets really quickly now because they're so keen to have one!'

Pray

Heavenly Father, I thank you that with my brothers and sisters we are one body in Christ. Thank you for the passion and gifting of Tearfund's partner in Malawi. And thank you that I too have unique gifts, and a role to play in being a bringer of hope. I offer you my gifts today. Amen.

Tuesday 12 December

Read

'Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.' Galatians 6:2

Reflect

There's a fable by Aesop about a horse and a donkey. They are carrying heavy loads and the donkey asks for help but is ignored. Eventually the donkey can't carry on any longer and the horse realises he will have to carry both loads after all. Aesop's last words? Help one another.

In Pakistan, a local Tearfund partner is helping to address gender inequalities through its work in schools. Lata never used to go to school, but when her brother started learning about handwashing and other hygiene principles, Lata's mother was keen for her to attend. The partner says, "A girl who's educated is more likely to educate her children. Lata is now a role model for many other girls." This project is supported by funds from Toilet Twinning, and is an example of the transformation that is possible when we reach out in love through our giving.

Pray

Lord, we pray for girls across the world who are missing out on education. Lord would you help us to be a voice for change, that all people, regardless of gender, would have the same opportunities to shine and fulfil their true potential. Amen.

Wednesday 13 December

Read

'In everything I did I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."' Acts 20:35

Reflect

Reina lost her first child to sickness and diarrhoea. At the time, only a few people in her village in Guatemala had toilets – and the sewage pipes from their loos went directly into the river. Many people bathed in the river, and some drank the water. "At the time I didn't know what caused my baby to die. But now I understand," she says. Local families have learnt how to build proper toilets and disconnect the old ones. They've also received water filters for drinking water.

Pray

Lord, there are many in the world who are burdened and bowed down. Sadness, worry, grief, and fear are heavy indeed. Lord would you bring emotional and spiritual healing, and also show us how we can reach people in need in practical ways too. Amen.

Thursday 14 December

Read

'Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.'
Luke 6:38

Reflect

Are you a glass half full or a glass half empty person? Imagine that glass overflowing! That's what happens when we reach out to others, even if our glass doesn't seem full enough to give.

In Guatemala, Mateo earns very little as a day labourer. So he's incredibly thankful for the work of Tearfund's partner: for the training and materials they gave him so he could built his own toilet. Before, his two children were often sick because they were going to the loo outside. "Nearly all my money went on medicine," he says, "but now we're building toilets, our village will prosper."

Pray

Pour out your love, God. Pour out your grace into my heart until I am overflowing. Use that abundance to bless others. Amen.

Friday 15 December

Read

'You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.' Matthew 5:14

Reflect

In Pakistan, Radha has built her first-ever toilet. So she's hugely proud. In Radha's village, people used to go to the toilet in the open and diseases spread fast. Culture dictated that the women had to wait until dark to venture out, so they also risked being attacked. Now, families are building toilets and Radha knows how to keep her family healthy and safe. "We're not making as many visits to the doctor, saving us time and money," she says.

Pray

Lord God, we want to shine bright for you. Help us to be salt and light as we come alongside people in need, so they would be able to tell their neighbours about your goodness. Amen.

Saturday 16 December

Read

'Freely you have received, freely give.' Matthew 10:8

Reflect

Everything around us tell us to put ourselves first, get what we can from what we give. Turning this on its head is life-changing.

In Malawi, village chief Brighton used to despair of his village ever being able to move forward. There were no toilets in Kalu, so diarrhoea and cholera were rife, and many people died. With Toilet Twinning funds, a local Tearfund partner trained up local volunteers to teach the community how to treat water, build toilets and keep themselves clean... with dramatic results. 'Now I live in a community free of disease! We can start to develop,' says Brighton.

Pray

Lord God, I praise you that your gifts are freely given. I don't need to do anything to receive them. Thank you for the grace that fills my life no matter what. Help me to give as I have received. Amen.

The light has come

Sun 17 Dec – Sat 23 Dec

'Jesus was God's gift to the world, not just for Christmas, but for every single day – your whole life through – and even beyond for all eternity' C.S. Lewis

With Toilet Twinning's support, Tearfund partners are shining a light in many dark corners of the world. Over decades of learning, it's become clear that sanitation projects work best when local people see the need for improved sanitation – and make that change happen themselves.

That's why our partners start spend a long time gaining villagers' trust, before they ever talk about sanitation. They arrange workshops and encourage men and women to have a voice in decisions.

We strongly believe that the best way to bring transformation in poor communities is to work with them, rather than doing things for them. It's all about dignity and self-respect: following Jesus' example by reaching out in humility and being light in the darkness.

Let's celebrate the birth of Jesus. The light has come.

Sunday 17 December

Read

'The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'" Luke 2:10

Sunday church congregation story to read out:

In Ethiopia, Tadelech used to watch in despair as her children frequently fell sick. Any money the family had went on medicines. They couldn't afford for the children to go to school. But everything changed when Toilet Twinning helped to support a local church project. Workers taught Tadelech how to build a toilet using local materials. They also showed her how to keep her house and compound clean. And they explained that washing hands with soap would protect their health. "Before we were very sick and thought we would die," says Tadelech. "Now we believe we will live a long life."



Sunday congregation prayer to read out:

Father God, you are the light of the world. We pray for Tadelech and those in her community in Ethiopia. We pray that people across the UK would continue to twin their toilets, and that the funds raised would enable Tearfund to reach out to more people in great need, to keep them safe from disease. Amen.

Monday 18 December

Read

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.' Romans 15:13

Reflect

Advent is the perfect time to reflect on joy and peace and hope. The coming of Jesus into the world has brought innumerable blessings that are new every morning. Trust leads to hope. Trust leads to joy and peace. Our cup overflows. The generosity of God is uncontainable.

Pray

Heavenly Father, I thank you that your gifts are unending, more than I could imagine. Help me accept them with open arms in the knowledge that your grace is sufficient. Amen.

Tuesday 19 December

Read

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' John 3:16

Reflect

Perhaps the most-quoted Bible verse ever? And for good reason. They say familiarity breeds contempt. Often we see the same image on the same billboard day after day until it no longer reaches our conscious thoughts. Let's meditate on this well-known verse today.

Pray

Father God, you sent your only Son into the world. I praise you. You took away the fear of death. I praise you. Amen.

Wednesday 20 December

Read

'The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.' Isaiah 60:19

Reflect

In the Chronicles of Narnia, the characters all long for the end of winter, for the sun to shine once again. When the snow finally melts, it is an amazing image. When the light of Jesus comes, it is never-ending and beyond time or seasons. That first Christmas ensured that darkness would no longer prevail. The light had won. And today we live in that light, both day and night.

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for your shining light that is all I need day or night. Help me to see beyond human understanding and rest in the light of your love and your glory. Amen.

Thursday 21 December

Read

'Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!' 2 Corinthians 9:15

Reflect

Christmas gifts. Thank you letters. Sending unwanted gifts to the charity shop. Tidying up after lunch. Keeping the family happy. The list is endless at this time of year. This simple sentence says it all. Accepting a gift (without guilt or expectation) and saying thank you (without qualification) is simple yet profound. And what a gift! It can't even be described. Just rest in that knowledge today. And say thank you.

Pray

Thank you God for your indescribable gift. Amen.

Friday 22 December

Read

'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.' Isaiah 60:1

Reflect

At the end of Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol, Scrooge has learnt the meaning of Christmas and exclaims, "I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year." It's a great statement. To keep the heart centred on the truth day after day will lead to moments of joy and peace throughout the year. Darkness can only be beaten by turning on the light: it disappears. We are transformed and strengthened and can stand and shine in the light of God's glory. Find somewhere peaceful today to stand up and reach your arms heavenwards as acceptance of God's glory in your life.

Pray

Lord God, your light has come and lives in my heart. Let me never take it for granted. Lift me up to stand in your glory and be light for others in the world. Amen.

Saturday 23 December

Read

'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!' Revelation 5:13

Reflect

Yesterday we stood in God's glory. Today we kneel in his presence. Close your eyes and see the throne of God. Picture Jesus at his right hand. See the light that shines. No earthly monarch can compare with the glory and majesty of this sight. King of kings and Lord of lords. Hallelujah!

Pray

Lord you reign on high. The lamb came to this world to save it. I praise your name and worship you as King and Lord of all. Amen.

Sunday 24 December

Advent draws to a close as we stop and watch as the figures gather in the stable.

Read

'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace.' Luke 2:14

Sunday story for your church to reflect on:

Ericaine lives in Central African Republic. Her story has a moving symmetry with Mary's story – being away from home and trying to find somewhere safe to give birth.

You can show your church the film of her story:

<https://vimeo.com/224646740>

Ericaine and her children fled when militias destroyed their community. Ericaine was pregnant and, later, she gave birth in the bush, alone and terrified. For three years, their home has been a displacement camp. Initially, conditions were terrible and disease spread fast. But then Toilet Twinning supported a Tearfund project that has provided proper toilets and clean water and taught camp residents about hygiene. Ericaine and her friends have been trained to keep the toilets safe and clean.

She says, "I want to make the camp a healthier place – not just for my family but for everyone."

As we welcome Jesus into the world with songs of praise and celebration, we invite you to think too about Ericaine and her new baby, sheltering in a local church before making it to the camp. Jesus came as good news for all people. His light shines not only in our hearts but in the darkest corners of the world.

Sunday congregation prayer to read out:

How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that he would give his only son for us! Lord Jesus, we welcome you. Thank you that your love shines, not only in our hearts, but in the darkest corners of the world. We sing with the angels, 'Glory to the Newborn King'. We celebrate your peace on earth – that you have reconciled us to God. We worship you. Amen.



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