5. Reflection Questions for Matthew 24:37-44
1. ‘Trust the future to the Lord.’
   Comment.
2. What is something you really want to do or see happening, this Advent?

6. Prayers
   *Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.*

7. Closing Prayer
   Surprise us, O God
   for we so often expect so little.
   Come to us in ways we cannot predict
   and come to us in familiar people,
   experiences and words.

   Keep us from living as if life is repetitive -
   but instead fire us with expectation,
   knowing that you move towards us
   with life far in excess,
   far more abundant than we dare to hope
   or dream.
   In Christ’s name, for the sake of the world.
   Doris Donnelly

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**Flax Plant**
*(Linum usitatissimum)*, plant of the family Linaceae, cultivated both for its fibre, from which linen yarn and fabric are made, and for its nutritious seeds, called flaxseed or linseed, from which linseed oil is obtained.

*Biblical Reference, Proverbs 31:13*

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Making Space for Light
First Sunday of Advent 2019

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**Partners in Faith**
C/o Sophia Housing Association,
25 Cork Street, Dublin 8.
Tel: 453 5348
Email: info@partnersinfaith.ie
Website: www.partnersinfaith.ie
1. Welcome and opening prayer
Circle us, Lord,
Circle us with the light of your presence,
bright within this dark world.
Enable us to be overcomers of fear and hesitation
Enable us to free ourselves from despair
Enable us to become what you dream for us.
R. Circle us with the light of your presence.

Circle us, Lord
Circle our family within the circle of your outstretched arms
Protect us in each moment of our daily lives
Protect us in the decisions we face
Protect our homes and relationships.
R. Circle our families with the light of your presence.

Circle us, Lord
Circle this nation with Advent love and hope
Create a desire to listen to the Advent message
Create a willingness to understand and respond
R. Circle our nation with the light of your presence.

Circle us, Lord
Circle this world with the joy of salvation where there is sickness and disease bring healing
where there is hunger and conflict bring hope
where there is fear and oppression bring release
R. Circle this world with the light of your presence.

2. Gospel text: Matthew 24:37-44
‘As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the days Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.’

‘Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you must also be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.’

3. Quiet time...
People can read over the gospel text again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society/world.
Then some sharing.
NB This is not time for argument.

4. Background notes for Matthew 24:36-44
Since chapter 21 of Matthew, Jesus is in Jerusalem. He has entered the city on a donkey while people shouted ‘Hosanna’, spread their cloaks before him and strewed his path with branches. He went up to the Temple and expelled the dealers; he exposed the hypocrisy of the Scribe and Pharisees who were supposed to be leading the people in the way of God. He lamented over Jerusalem’s closing itself to the Good News of his message. Jesus knew his days were numbered because the religious leaders were plotting against him.

He is communicating a strong message to his disciples. In the face of coming disasters over which they have no control, he urges them to trust in God, not to wait passively overcome by fear or the longing for a comfortable past. They need to trust the future to the Lord.

When Matthew wrote his Gospel between 70 and 80 AD, he wrote in Greek for Christians living in Syria. These Christian communities were surrounded by the vast Roman Empire; they were caught up in conflict and persecutions.

Jesus’ teaching and promise will be the only sure, stable port of call. Through his victory over death, disaster, suffering and lamentation will not be the last word.
5. Reflection Questions for
Matthew 3:1-12
1. ‘Repenting’ means seeing things in a
different way. How are you ‘repenting’
about nature and recycling?

2. What are the signs of God’s dream being
lived around you?

6. Prayers
Mentioning the people and situations we
want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer
Father in heaven,
Mother of all,
Guardian of the universe,
Thank you for the gift of light and the
morning sunrise that stirs our hearts
and awakens our spirit to the
possibilities of each new day.

Thank you, Lord, for bringing light
into our darkness
and for the gifts of hope, love and
happiness.
Please help us to recover love, wisdom
humility, patience, quiet and slower
tempos.

May we see beauty
be gentle,
do justice.
May we listen to your voice that rests
within us.

Walter Brueggemann:
Prayers for a Privileged people.

Gloriosa
(Gloriosa superba) is a species of flowering
plant in the family Colchicaceae.
Common names include flame lily, climbing
lily, creeping lily, glory lily, gloriosa lily,
tiger claw, and fire lily.

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Making Space for Light
Second Sunday of Advent 2019

Partners in Faith
C/o Sophia Housing Association,
25 Cork Street, Dublin 8.
Tel: 453 5348
Email: info@partnersinfaith.ie
Website: www.partnersinfaith.ie
1. Welcome and opening prayer

God of our longing
hear our prayers:
protect our dreams
and listen to our silent hopes.

Deal gently with our pain
Speak to our sadness
and remove the barriers
that imprison our spirits.

Shed your light
where shadows are cast
that we may feel your warmth
and know your presence.

Give us courage
to hold fast to our vision
that we may build our world
and create our future.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was
baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the
coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to
your selves: “We have Abraham as our father.” I tell you that out of these stones
God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees and
every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I
baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful
than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and
with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand
and he will clear his threshing floor,
gathering his wheat into the barn and burning
up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

John the Baptist had a dream for change but
what is coming will be totally different and
unimaginable from his vision. Jesus will speak
of God as not wrathful, but being like
a father driven to distraction by the loss of
his son, a shepherd facing danger to find a
lost sheep, and one who will especially seek
out the sick and outcasts and poor to give
respect, healing and hope.

This wildly compassionate God is symbolised
by ‘fire’ an element far more refined and ef-
cient than water. Jesus will prune John’s
image of God of its violence and retribution;
he will live an ordinary life, eat bread and
drink wine. Above all he will usher in a new
era of compassion, healing, forgiveness, new
beginnings, joy in the certainty of being
loved and cherished by God.

By the time Matthew was writing the Jewish
leaders had rejected Jesus and so in
addressing Christians who had been Jews
Matthew depicts the Pharisees and
Sadducees as presenting a united front of
opposition against Jesus.

2. Gospel text: Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came,
preaching in the desert of Judea and
saying: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven
is near. This is he who was spoken of
through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,
prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.”

John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair,
He had a leather belt around his waist.
His food was locusts and wild honey.
People went out to him from Jerusalem
and all Judea and the whole region of the
Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were
baptized by him in the Jordan River.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the gospel text again
and pick out a word or short phrase that
strikes them and say it out loud. When
everyone has had a chance to speak, people
can silently listen to what God is saying to
them in their hearts linking it with
themselves, their community, society/world.
Then some sharing.

NB This is not time for argument.

4. Background notes for
Matthew 3:1-12

Matthew here presents a graphic picture of
John the Baptist, sombre, grim, heavy, living
in the forbidding Judean desert, surviving by
his wits, with no home, not working, not
owning anything, not eating the common
food of bread, not using textiles. He thunders
out warnings to the Jewish religious leaders
of the dire punishment that will befall them.
He insults the way they live and preach to
the ordinary people. He exposes their
foolishness relying on their religious status
and pedigree to justify themselves.
5. Reflection Questions for Matthew 11: 2-11

1. ‘And it is a holy thing, and it is a precious thing, and it is the only way. Forget-me-nots among the snow, It's always been and so it goes to ponder his life and his death eternally.'
   
   Bright Blue Rose

Comment on these lines of Jimmy McCarthy's song.

2. Mention someone who inspires you that you'd love to 'go out and meet'.

6. Prayers
   
   Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer
   
   God, sometimes this world is hard to understand, and even when we trust you, our hearts still ache. so we come to you, asking for the hope we need.
   
   Hope that sees past the here-and-now, Hope that believes what we cannot yet glimpse, Hope that holds our hearts up when life brings us to our knees.
   
   You are the only one who can sustain us. Be the rescuer of our souls the deliverer of our dreams, the holder of our hearts We believe that even the darkest night must lead to dawn.
   
   Holleygerth.com

Iris Palaestina
   
Iris palaestina is a species in the genus Iris; it is also in the subgenus of Scorpiris. It is a bulbous perennial from Asia, within Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. It has long, narrow, strap-like leaves, and a short stem. The early blooming, fragrant flowers are greenish-grey/white or yellow-white.

   Biblical reference, 1 Kings 7:22

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Making Space for Light
Third Sunday of Advent 2019

Partners in Faith
C/o Sophia Housing Association, 25 Cork Street, Dublin 8.
Tel: 453 5348
Email: info@partnersinfaith.ie
Website: www.partnersinfaith.ie
1. Welcome and opening prayer

Our world waits in darkness longing for your light.
In the midst of darkness brighten our hopes.
You are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of creatures, you embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out on us the power of your love that we may protect all living things and beauty.
Fill us with peace that we may harm no-one.

O God of the poor help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
Bring healing into our lives that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we sow tenderness, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing
As we journey towards your infinite light. encourage us in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

Adapted from Laudate Si by Pope Francis

2. Gospel text: Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him: ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’

Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the person who takes no offence at me.’

As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John. ‘What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

“I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”

I tell the truth: among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.’

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the gospel text again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society/world. Then some sharing.

NB This is not time for argument.

4. Background notes for Matthew 11:2-11

Jesus has been moving among his own people in Galilee and the surrounding countryside telling them the good news of God’s tremendous love and hope for the future. He has communicated it through telling stories (parables) and through healing people in the community who were not regarded as worthy of God’s attention. He has been talking with everyone who came to him and has chosen to be in the company of despised tax collectors and prostitutes. The only condition he has requested from people is to have faith in him. Life is thriving and flourishing around him.

John the Baptist is languishing in prison searching for a glimmer of hope. But Jesus’ lifestyle puzzles John. He is confused by the humble, healing approach of Jesus. In his reply to John, Jesus points him in another direction: people have been cured, they are walking again, talking again, seeing, hearing; learning to hope again. The wilderness is changing, the wasteland is blooming. Jesus blesses and heals – he does not resort to violence. The signs of God’s presence are of life no longer stunted, of life blooming again, relief, freedom, peace of mind, sadness lifted.
6. Prayers
Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer
May the warmth of the Christmas candle radiate
a ray of hope
a spark of joy
a glow of love
to everyone on earth
to the lonely, grieving or homeless.

Come, Emmanuel
God-with-us and beyond us.
Come as love leaping in the heart of the cosmos.
Come as peace singing in earth’s cradle.
Come as joy dancing through each doorway.

May the angels bless all with the song of rejoicing
May the stars bless all with the sparkle of eternity.
May the shepherds bless us with simplicity of lifestyle.
May Mary bless us with faith in the impossible
the infant confound our arrogance
and may we open our hearts to the mystery of it all.

Adapted from ‘Heartbeat of the Seasons’
by Kathleen Glennon

Saffron
(Crocus sativus) commonly known as saffron crocus, or autumn crocus, is a species of flowering plant of the Crocus genus in the iris family Iridaceae. It is best known for producing the spice saffron from the filaments that grow inside the flower.

Biblical reference,
Song of Solomon 4:14

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Making Space for Light
Fourth Sunday of Advent 2019
1. Welcome and opening prayer
My soul magnifies the Lord and I dance with God who liberates me, for she has remembered with love the whispered song of her shadow. Surely from now on my story will be handed down to all generations.

For the One who is Love has cradled my life in her arms and beautiful is her name. Her tenderness enfolds our brokenness through all generations.

Her voice clamours in shouts of justice, wrenching free the grip of the abuser. She gathers the sorrowing to her breast consoling all who seek her. According to the promise given to our grand mothers, our ancestors and and their children forever.

Adapted from Clare Mc Beath

2. Gospel text: Matthew 1:18-24
This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said: ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save the people from their sins.’

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel” - which means, “God with us”.

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

3. Quiet time...
People can read over the gospel text again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society/world. Then some sharing.

NB This is not time for argument.

4. Background notes for Matthew 11:2-11
Betrothal was a serious stage in the marriage process. The fiancé was already called husband and could release himself from going forward to marry only by an act of repudiation - disavowing the engagement promise. Joseph wants to satisfy the Law by giving Mary the prescribed document privately. He plans to play safe within the rules but treat Mary as gently as possible, protecting her from public shame and punishment.

But the angel’s dream turns everything on its head. Something new, undreamed of is beginning. The Holy Spirit - God’s life-giving power is taking over; and Joseph is caught up in it. The law and systems can hold no sway. A new chapter is opening in God’s unstoppable love for humankind.

Again, writing for Christians who had been Jews, Matthew is careful to refer to Joseph as son of David, in this way inserting Mary into the Davidic line and giving these events a proper place in salvation history. Joseph’s key role will be to be a father to this new human being: he will initiate this role by naming the child with the name God had chosen.

According to scholars the words: ‘and took Mary home as his wife’ do not tell us anything about Mary’s life as Joseph’s wife after the birth of Jesus. We don’t know how it was.

5. Reflection Questions for Matthew 1:18-24
1. Joseph was tempted to ‘close in’, following his culture/tradition. Recall a time when you went against culture/tradition in favour of yourself or someone else.

2. For you, what’s at the heart of Christmas?