

The reference to 'cloud' refers to the unseen, mysterious but real presence of God, a sign of hope. He assures them they will not be left desolate but experience the liberating, saving power of God. The sign of the figtree furthers reinforces hope: It was the deadest tree in winter but with the first sign of spring suddenly blossomed; people saw it as a sign of God's blessing. They are to face the future with courage, trust and hope, not giving up to despair. God's transforming power will dispel old tyrannies and create communities of peace, justice, safety and solidarity. The new world to come will be a different one, a better one, one in which we will be changed.

## 7. Closing Prayer

Come close to us, Lord,  
come very close.  
Come Alpha and Omega  
who is from before the ages.  
Come, Son of Joseph, Son of Mary  
Come Morning Star-maker who named the stars  
Come carpenter of Nazareth  
who knows the smell of planed wood.  
Come beloved of God  
who knows the heart of God,  
Come, Son of Man  
who knows the hearts of people.  
Come Lord of Life and Prince of Peace.  
Come Dayspring and Rising Sun,  
Come wonderful Counsellor.  
Come, Emmanuel, God with us.  
God very close to us.  
Amen

Ged Johnson

### Protea

A genus of South African flowering plants, also called sugarbushes. Found also in the Golan Heights and Mediterranean countries.  
(Afrikaans:suikerbos)



Protea  
Symbol of Transformation

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Making Space for Change  
First Sunday of Advent 2021

## 1. Welcome and opening prayer

Jesus, you are the hope in our messy world.

Help us slow down, listen to your voice and focus on what's really important. We want to become the-best-version-of ourselves.

Fill us with a deep, strong peace.

May we stay aware of the joy you bring into our lives.

May the light of your love always shine in our hearts.

Dispel the darkness of our world with the light of your love and let us find ways we can bring light.

Through the journeys of our lives  
bless us with healing and hope,  
and through your blessings  
may we know your joy with us:

Star-maker,  
Light of the world,  
Fire of holiness,  
Love without end. Amen

Carole Birley and Philippa Pearson (adapted)

## 2. Texts

### Gospel text: Luke 21:25-36

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of

Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your hearts, because your redemption is drawing near.”

He told them this parable: “Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you will know that the kingdom of God is near.

“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

## 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 or the world. Then some sharing.*

**NB** This is not time for argument.

## 4. Reflection Questions for

### Luke 21:25-36

1. Covid caused many changes; what ones are you glad about?
2. 'Something that will not acknowledge conclusion insists that we forever begin.'  
Comment

Brendan Kennelly, 'Begin'

## 5. Prayers

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

## 6. Background notes for

### Luke 21:25-36

Luke wrote his Gospel for people born gentile living in Greek territory. He himself was a doctor, an educated, cultivated man, born in Antioch (Syria) and either of pagan or Greek origin. In this chapter he situates Jesus in Jerusalem for the last time before his trial and execution. People coming to him in the temple have been remarking on its magnificence but he foretells its destruction - which happened in AD 70. Scholars disagree about whether Luke, in describing the whole structure of the world showing signs of collapse, is referring to the fall of Jerusalem or to the 'end time'. But the signs he mentions are such as to produce profound anxiety, confusion and fear in the hearts of his followers. In Jewish tradition the 'sea' was taken as a great reservoir of evil bound by God at creation.

Even with the stark, unrelenting description of coming terror, Jesus is more concerned with preparing his followers for the evils of persecution and for holding on to faith in

## 7. Closing Prayer

Lord God,  
In Jesus, you came in the body;  
flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone,  
one with us in searing pain and delirious  
laughter.

By your love  
change our ideas,  
especially our religious ideas  
into living signs of your worth and dreams.

We believe that your power to heal  
is still present.

We call on your help,  
remembering  
those whose minds are menaced by thoughts  
which worry or wound them,  
those whose hearts are broken  
because love has gone,  
those whose feet walk in circles  
stopping only when they are tired  
resting only to walk in circles again,  
those who feel discarded or disposable.

O Jesus, put your hands where our prayers  
beckon.

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Protea  
Symbol of Courage

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Making Space for Change  
Second Sunday of Advent 2021



## 1. Welcome and opening prayer

Wake us up Lord!  
Wake us up Lord!  
The night is nearly over.  
Let us begin our Advent journey.  
Move us from our lives  
of greed and selfishness,  
from our globalised world  
of inequality and exploitation  
to your kingdom  
of righteousness and mercy.  
To a transformed world,  
where peace is built on understanding  
not weapons  
where struggling people can  
fulfill their dreams,  
where businesses are built on need not greed  
and your Creation is nurtured not abused.  
Wake us up, Lord.  
Let us live as people of light.

Sue Cooper

## 2. Texts

### Gospel text: Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar - when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip Tetrarch of Iturea and Tracōnitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene - during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
Make straight paths for him.

Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall be made straight,  
the rough ways smooth.  
And all people will see God’s salvation.”

## 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 or the world. Then some sharing.*

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## 4. Reflection Questions for Luke 3:1-6

Think of a significant change you have made.  
What inspired you?

Baruch speaks of 'God's cloak of integrity' shielding and the 'forests and fragrant trees' lending shade (Baruch 5: 1 and 8):  
How /when have you experienced God's protection?

## 5. Prayers

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

## 6. Background notes for

### Luke 3:1-6

Luke places John the Baptist on a wide political stage of imperial Rome, top Jewish rulers and the Jewish high priestly families. His coming out of the wilderness is in total contrast to their panoply of power. He parted company with the temple and its system of ritual purification and forgiveness. The temple was corrupt, no longer a holy place. He chooses to go to land east of the Jordan, outside the boundaries of Israel.

A form of baptism had been used with gentiles converting to the Jewish faith. And Jews also used water in tanks and wells for purifying themselves. But John's baptism is different :he plunges the people in water that is flowing fast and furious. To be baptized by him meant a readiness for a wholehearted transformation, opening themselves to a radical change of values and life-style.

The vivid images from Isaiah 40:3-5: uprooting the dying tree, filling holes, levelling, straightening, sifting and sorting out, pruning and weeding emphasize how radical is the change needed. It's about letting God hold sway again in their hearts and trusting God's gracious power lead them forward.





## 7. Closing Prayer

Lord God,  
In Jesus, you came in the body;  
flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone,  
one with us in searing pain and delirious  
laughter.

By your love  
change our ideas,  
especially our religious ideas  
into living signs of your worth and dreams.

We believe that your power to heal  
is still present.

We call on your help,  
remembering  
those whose minds are menaced by thoughts  
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those whose hearts are broken  
because love has gone,  
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O Jesus, put your hands where our prayers  
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Making Space for Change  
Third Sunday of Advent 2021

## 1. Welcome and opening prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the Daystar  
of our lives:  
dispel darkness, awaken our  
sleeping faith;  
turn our jealousies into love;  
give us hope when we doubt  
that life is a treasure.  
Smile on us through the beauty and  
wonder of all you have made;  
bring justice to those bowed down  
with suffering;  
refresh us with wisdom, understanding,  
new vision,  
and let us never lose hope in you.  
God of our lives, you are always  
calling us to follow you into the future,  
inviting us to new ventures, new  
challenges, new ways to care  
and new ways to touch hearts.  
When we are fearful of the unknown  
give us courage,  
you who can bring change and hope  
out of all situations.

## 2. Texts

### Gospel text: Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming of wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise children up 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."

"What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

Even tax collectors came to be baptised. "Teacher," they said, "what should we do?" "Don't collect anymore than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely - be content with your pay."

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

## 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 or the world. Then some sharing.*

**NB** This is not time for argument.

## 4. Reflection Questions for

### Luke 3:7-18

Zephaniah (3:14) describes God as 'dancing with joy over us'. How does that resonate with you?

What would you like to be 'sifting' and 'sorting' this Advent?

## 5. Prayers

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

## 6. Background notes for

### Luke 3:1-6

When people heard about John they began to have hope again. They rushed to be cleansed, touched, like vipers leaving escaping a bush fire. John warns them that it's useless to depend on 'good roots' from the past John can give advice, mend, patch up, repair, warn, recommend but Luke is very careful to present him as the one preparing the way for Jesus. Probably John himself did not have a clear idea of who 'the more powerful one' would be.

Fire in Old Testament imagery often represented the presence of a saving God. John saw Israel as needing a radical cleansing: time to clear out all the rubbish and burn away useless brush.

Luke, writing post resurrection, speaks of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit changing mindsets and opening closed hearts. It is this transformation that leads to a transformed world where justice and peace will reign.



Luke refers to Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary - presenting two elderly people and a young woman as key players in the fulfilling of God's dream.

## 7. Closing Prayer

A poem of thanksgiving for the Visitation

Here is a meeting made of hidden joys  
of lightnings cloistered in a narrow place  
From quiet hearts the sudden flame of praise  
and in the womb the quickening kick of grace.

Two women on the very edge of things  
unnoticed and unknown to men of power  
but in their flesh the hidden Spirit sings  
and in their lives the buds of blessing flower,  
and Mary stands with all we call 'too young',  
Elizabeth with all called 'past their prime'  
They sing today for all the great unsung  
women who turned eternity to time  
favoured of heaven, outcast on the earth:  
prophets who bring the best to birth

Malcolm Guite

**End your time together with a favourite carol.**

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Making Space for Change  
Fourth Sunday of Advent 2021



## 1. Welcome and opening prayer

May the Spirit touch our lives  
May we open ourselves to God's breathing  
May we honour the flame of love  
that burns inside us.

May our voices this day  
be voices of encouragement  
May our lives be an answer to someone's  
prayer  
May we own grateful hearts.

May we have enough joy to give us hope  
Enough pain to make us wise  
May there be no room in our hearts for  
hatred  
May we search every day for peace

When we look into the window of our souls  
May we see the face of God.  
May the lamps of our lives shine on all  
we meet this day.  
May our lives become a song for the Beloved.

Adapted from Seven Sacred Pauses- Macrina Wiederkehr

## 2. Texts

### Gospel text: Luke 1:39-45

At that time Mary got ready and hurried into a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has

believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!"

## 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 or the world. Then some sharing.*

**NB** This is not time for argument.

## 4. Reflection Questions for Luke 1:39-45

1. Mary and Elizabeth sing for "all the great unsung women who turned eternity to time, favoured of heaven, outcast on the earth: prophets who bring the best to birth."

Comment

Malcolm Guite

2. How will you celebrate Christmas differently this year?

## 5. Prayers

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



## 6. Background notes for Luke 1:39-45

Luke has Zachariah, father of John the Baptist foretell that 'the loving kindness of the heart of our God' would visit us 'like the dawn from on high.' (Luke 1:78). Jesus' coming into the world is the definitive sign of God's love and tenderness for humanity.

Luke is careful to attribute this event as the 'overshadowing by the Holy Spirit', God's love out-poured, active and transforming. Nazareth is a small, unimportant village, away from the trading routes and cities. Mary is an ordinary young village girl. But it in this place and through this girl that the 'more powerful one' comes. Mary, from that moment carries the saviour of the world within her.

But there is no great interruption to ordinary life. Mary sets off to do an ordinary thing - common to all local women in her village. She sets off for Ain Karim 5 miles west of Jerusalem, in hilly country between the flat coastal plain and the Jordan valley. She goes to help Elizabeth by fetching water, washing, cooking, comforting, cleaning, chatting.

But Elizabeth recognizes more. Luke describes her as 'filled with the Holy Spirit' and seeing the real truth of the situation. The phrase 'jump for joy' in the O.T. often signalled that something prophetic was about to be spoken.

This 'ordinary' occasion of two women rejoicing in each other becomes a moment for Elizabeth to acknowledge and celebrate God's powerful intervention.