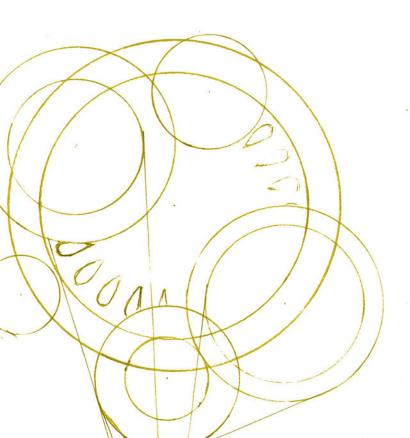
## 7. Closing Prayer

God of Presence, with us here and now through your abiding Spirit, open our minds and hearts to learn from the times we are living through.

May the hard lessons of these days teach us how to prepare for a better tomorrow in which the people of the earth share their gifts for the well-being of all.

Enlighten us as we search for truth amidst the clamour of war.

May we have the courage to proclaim peace act justly and open our hearts to people distressed.



#### Flax Plant

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Biblical Reference,

Proverbs 31:13

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## **Partners in Faith**



Holy God, in this quiet season of the earth, the season of waiting, we rest in the shelter of your love.

In this season of darkness, of guiding stars, we trust in the light of your promise.

In this season of solitude, when we listen for our own hearts' rhythm, we find warmth in the signs of your presence.

In this season when nature cradles seeds in gentle readiness we look forward to the dawn of your loving-kindness.

## 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 our Lord will come; if the owner of the house had known at what time 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 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. Background notes for Matthew 24:37-44

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

The future was uncertain. Bearing up courageously, enduring and encouraging each other was greatly needed. They must not lose heart.

Matthew portrays Jesus communicating a tough message in the face of the coming disasters over which they have no control: trusting God, not waiting passively overcome by fear or lingering in a more comfortable past. They need to trust the future to God and believe that Jesus' words will have validity in the midst of cosmic disturbances.

Jesus' teaching and promise will be the only sure, stable port of call. Through his victory over death, disaster, suffering and lamentation will never be the last word.

## 5. Reflection Question for Matthew 24:37-44

1. When you light a candle, what's in your mind?

#### 6. Prayers

Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.



## 6. Prayers

Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.

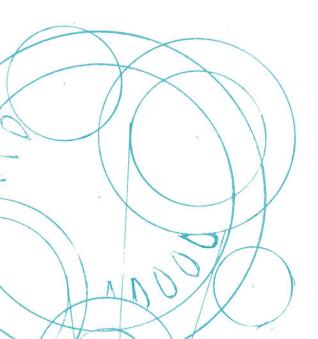
## 7. Closing Prayer

Blessing of Hope

May we know the hope that is not just for some daybut for this dayhere and now in this moment that opens to us:

Hope not made of wishes but of substance, hope made of sinew and bone, hope that has breath and a beating heart,

hope that knows how to shout out when it is called for hope that raises us from the dead not someday but this very day, every day and again, again and again.



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O God of love, 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.

God over all
Christ within us
Spirit around us
hear our prayer
and send your messenger
of peace to us and
to our troubled world.

Cafod and Iona

## 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 is spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

'A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way of 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.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadduccees 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 yourselves, "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 put 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.'

#### 3. Quiet time...

People can read over the 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. Background notes for Matthew 3:1-12

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 Sadduccees presenting a unite front of opposition against Jesus. The picture of John the Baptist is sombre, and grim. Living in the Judean desert, of not owning anything, not eating the common food of bread, surviving by his wits.

John had a dream of change but based on dire punishment by God and wrathful vengeance. But the God of Jesus will be far from that. The wildly compassionate God of Jesus is symbolised by fire, an element far more refined 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. He will usher in a new era of compassion, forgiveness, healing and joy in the certainty of being loved and cherished by God.

## 5. Reflection Question for Matthew 3:1-12

When things are really bad and so slow to change, where do you go to snatch a glimmer of hope:

- talking with a good friend?
- listening to people of hope?
- a place that inspires you?
- meditation/prayer?
- poetry?
- music/song?
- other ..?

## 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

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Our world waits in darkness longing for your light. In the midst of darkness brighten our hopes. You are present in the whole universe

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 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 may 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 Pope Francis' writings

## 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 their 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 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. Background notes for Matthew 11:2-11

Jesus has been moving among his own people in Galilee telling the Good News of God's tremendous love and hope for the future. He has communicated it through telling stories and parables that challenge and overcome their inherited beliefs about God. Also by healing people in the community who were not regarded as worthy of God's attention. He has been talking to everyone who came to him and has chosen the company of despised tax-collectors and prostitutes.

John the Baptist is languishing in prison, searching for a glimmer of hope. But he is confused by news of the humble, healing, inclusive, compassionate approach of Jesus. Jesus' reply is uncompromising: people being cured, walking again, seeing again, hearing again, learning to hope again, flourishing in community, is what the kingdom is all about, what God's dream is about.

The wilderness is changing, the wasteland is blooming. The sign of God's presence is no longer violence but the gentle blessings of relief, peace, freedom, even joy.

And anyone who can accept that is really on the road to happiness.

#### NB

Matthew uses the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' rather than 'kingdom of God' out of respect for his Jewish audience.

## Reflection Question for Matthew 11:2-11

'The Lord comes that we may find him in this world'

Laudate Si #236



## 7. Closing Prayer

#### Christmas Eve Remembered

I see them going to the chapel
To confess their sins, Christmas Eve
In a parish in Monaghan.
Poor parish!, And yet memory does weave
For me about these folk
A romantic cloak.

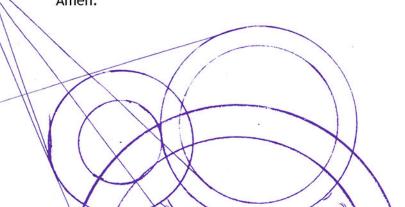
No snow, but in their minds
The fields and roads are white.
They may be talking of the turkey markets
Or foreign politics but tonight
Their plain, hard country words
Are Christ's singing birds.

Bicycles scoot by, old women Cling to the grass margin, Their thoughts are earthy but their minds move In dreams of the the Blessed Virgin For one in Bethlehem Has kept their dreams safe for them

Patrick Kavanagh

Jesus, you came to be light in our darkness. Jesus, you came to be peace in our conflicts. Jesus, you came to be joy in our sadness, And to bring your love in our fears.

Today we celebrate your birth.
Thank you for your saving grace.
Amen.



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With expectant waiting we anticipate your coming Come close to us, Lord. Come very close.

Come, Alpha and Omega
who is from before the ages.
Come, morning star who named the stars,
Come, carpenter of Nazareth
who knows the smell of planed wood
Come, beloved Son of God
who knows the heart of God
Come, Son of man
who knows the hearts of God's 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

Ged Johnson Cafod

## 2. Gospel text: Matthew 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus came about. His mother, Mary, was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found 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 of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to

give him the name Jesus, because he will save 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 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. Background notes for Matthew 1:18-24

Betrothal was a serious stage in the Jewish marriage process. The fiance was already called 'husband' and could release himself from going forward to marriage only by an act of repudiation - disavowing the engagement promise. Matthew portrays Joseph as wanting 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 in the dream turns everything on its head. Something new, undreamed of is beginning and Joseph is caught up in it. The Holy Spirit, God's life-giving power, is taking over. The law and systems no longer hold sway.

All that his people longed for is beginning to dawn.

Matthew is careful to refer to Joseph as a son of David in this way inserting Mary into the Davidic line, giving these events a proper place in salvation history, familiar to Jews. He will be father to this new human being but naming the child with the name God has chosen.

## Reflection Question for Matthew 1:18-24

'God comes to us disguised as our life'
Paula D'Arcy
Comment.

## 6. Prayers

Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.

