**Winter Light Lectionary** for use on Sundays in churches from Advent Sunday to Candlemas

**Introduction** During this season of winter we take a few moments in our worship to reflect on the impact of winter on our lives – relating the changes in light and temperature, mood and activity to the liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany and Candlemas. There is additional material available if you would like to follow up these reflections during the week in various ways, including images, stories, activities, poetry and music.

**Week 1: Sunday 3rd December 2023 – Mist and Mystery**

Leader: As we enter the season of Advent the hours of daylight are short.

**All: Amidst the darkness we look for the coming of the Light of the World.**

Leader: As a sign of the coming Light of Christ, we light our first Advent candle.

**All: Come, Lord Jesus, come.**

*The first Advent candle is lit.*

*Reflection:*

* Let’s travel for a few weeks with Winter Light, a special light that accompanies us through these days when there are many more hours without the sun than with the sun.
* We are holding the letter to the Hebrews close to our thoughts as we make this journey – and the images that will stay with us come from the Highlands of Scotland.
* The first week in Advent carries with it **Mist and Mystery**. So much uncertainty in these days, so much that we cannot fathom in the lives of human beings and in the purposes of God. The mist is very real on the mountainside and above the loch: swirling and disorientating.
* Keep going though, for you will come through the mist and catch a glimpse of light. We are above the mist now . . . there is hope – for God is coming . . .
* *Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son (Hebrews 1:1-2a)*
* The mist is filled with mystery. As we take courage for the adventure with Winter Light, first through the ever-darkening days of Advent, we discover God is coming with us in the One who is a Son. Let’s press on, singing together.

*Hymn: 101 v1*:

Before the world began one Word was there;

grounded in God he was, rooted in care;

by him all things were made, in him was love displayed,

through him God spoke, and said, ‘I am for you’.

*Prayer:*

God of mystery, we approach you with wonder and awe in this season of winter light.

We offer our worship to you, the source of all light, of all love, of all meaning.

As we peer through the mist of a confusing world into an uncertain future, thank you that you are the One who draws alongside us, taking our hand, walking with us through these short days and long nights.

God of mystery, thank you for revealing yourself to us in the coming of Christ. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

**Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.**

**Week 2: Sunday 10th December 2023 – Who and what are we?**

Leader: The hours of daylight are short; we are finding a way through the season

**All: Amidst the darkness we look for the coming of the Light of the World.**

Leader: As a sign of the coming Light of Christ, we light our first two Advent candles

**All: Come, Lord Jesus, come.**

*The first two Advent candles are lit.*

*Reflection:*

* Winter light can be dazzling – the sun low in the sky, blinding us with piercing rays, showing up the dust in our homes and the marks on our windows! On a vast expanse of snow, the sun’s rays pick out crystals of ice with clarity and precision, perhaps even with ruthlessness.
* Sometimes we feel that the spotlight is on our lives, our souls, and in this searchlight which finds all our dusty, marred spaces, we may ask, “Who are we? What are we?”. We are not the first to ask that question; the writer to the Hebrews calls to mind a verse remembered from psalm 8:
* *But someone has testified somewhere, ‘What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? (Hebrews 2:6)*
* So in the vast landscapes of the Scottish Highlands – or wherever we are today – we focus on that question, **“Who and what are we?”** In the wideness and variety of creation, there is something remarkable, precious and unfathomable about being human, with all the joy and pain, laughter and lament of our lives.
* May the long dark nights of winter give us space to reflect on our humanity and God’s care, whilst the cool splendour of the moon speaks of cleansing, giving us courage to walk, singing, into the radiance of December sunshine.

*Hymn: 101 v2:*

Life found in him its source, death found its end;

light found in him its course, darkness its friend.

For neither death nor doubt nor darkness can put out

the glow of God, the shout, ‘I am for you’.

*Prayer:*

Who are we, God of this astounding universe? We are formed from the dust of the earth and you have breathed life into us. We are jewels in the wonder of creation. We are children of the Living God. We need you at the start of this week. As we stumble through these challenging days, we hear you whisper to us,” I am coming.”

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

**Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.**

**Week 3: Sunday 17th December 2023 – Where are we?**

Leader: We are finding a way, noticing where God has placed us in the broken world

**All: Amidst the darkness we look for the coming of the Light of the World.**

Leader: As a sign of the coming Light of Christ, we light our first three Advent candles

**All: Come, Lord Jesus, come.**

*The first three Advent candles are lit.*

*Reflection*:

* Remember that ancient story – the Lord God coming into the garden in the cool of the evening and calling to the man and woman, **“Where are you?”.** That is our question on this third Sunday in Advent. The people of God spend forty years in the wilderness; we are spending winter in the Scottish Highlands; God is coming in Christ to Palestine – Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, Jericho, Jerusalem. He will indeed know the cost of obedience in these places. There will be possibilities and trials wherever we find ourselves.
* The writer to the Hebrews indicates how the wilderness was a place of failure for Moses’ people and records God’s declaration:
* *Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, “They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.”* (*Hebrews 3:10)*
* What will we do with these winter days in which we find ourselves? Where Moses’ people failed, we are invited to turn to God and learn to trust this God wherever we find ourselves. Jill and I came to winter in need and we have found healing, space, courage in our wintering. In the cool of this winter, we may all hear God calling to us, “Where are you?”
* Some winter words I have read come to me now, “Winter is the anvil on which nature hammers out next spring; its furnace is cold fire”. God’s love was proved on an anvil in Palestine. We are preparing a manger to welcome the Christ-child into our lives. We sing in expectation of his coming to us:

*Hymn: 101 v3*

The Word was in the world which from him came;

unrecognised he was, unknown by name;

one with all humankind, with the unloved aligned,

convincing sight and mind, ‘I am for you’.

*Prayer:*

With-us-God, we worship you as the One who always knows where we are, even when we feel confused. You know how some of us this winter wish we were somewhere else; we feel disappointment or unease in our surroundings, we recognise that we have gone astray, we are wandering in the wilderness, we are searching for peace. Thank you that you are the One who finds us and the One who comes to us in love.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

**Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.**

**Week 4: Sunday 24th December 2023 – ‘Are we ready?’**

Leader: Noticing where God has placed us, we discover God coming to us in the frailty of a newborn child

**All: Amidst the darkness we look for the coming of the Light of the World.**

Leader: As a sign of the coming Light of Christ, we light all four of our Advent candles.

**All: Come, Lord Jesus, come.**

*The four Advent candles are lit.*

*Reflection:*

* Winter brings its own challenges – what will the weather do to our Christmas plans? In earlier centuries people feared the ravages of the winter weather and began preparing early, bottling fruit and storing up candles. Still today food costs and heating bills cause anxiety; can we “do” Christmas this year?
* With Advent almost over, the time for shopping and cooking, writing cards and wrapping presents has run out. We may be unsure about planned gatherings – there are empty seats, there are tensions in the family; can we truly celebrate Christmas this year? **“Are we ready?”**
* Did Mary wonder whether she would make it through the coming childbirth? What about Joseph? What fears and responsibilities did he have on the first Christmas Eve?
* The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the promised time of “rest” and counsels us to make sure we don’t miss it: *(Andrew)*: Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. (Hebrews 4:1)
* This promised “rest” may not mean putting our feet up so much as finding peace in our hearts and minds and spirits. Can the candles of Christmas bring us a gift of stillness, the fairy lights convey wonder, the firelight offer mystery? These gifts of winter light help us to be ready, they take us beyond our selfish preoccupations with material things into the promised rest, as God’s beloved guests at the manger. We rejoice and sing…

*Hymn: 101 v4*

All who received the Word by God were blessed;

sisters and brothers they of earth’s fond guest.

So did the Word of grace proclaim in time and space

and with a human face, ‘I am for you’.

*Prayer:*

O God, there are gifts for us: stillness, wonder, mystery. We have come to worship you, the Giver of the gift of Love coming to us in Jesus. We want to be ready for your coming, learning to trust you as we respond to your gift. We want to be ready for your coming, laid in the Christmas manger; ready for your coming as we share with those special people in our lives; ready for your coming as you come as Lord and Judge. Surprise the world once again with your coming, Lord God – let peace break out!

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

**Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.**