

'Taste and see that the Lord is good'

Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, both for the celebration of Jesus' first coming in humility and for His second coming in glory. We look back to the child, the 'bread from heaven' ([John 6:22-59](#)), born in Bethlehem, the 'house of bread' (bit.ly/sigbirth). But we also look forward to His coming again to gather His people and to judge the world. The King who came as a lamb, will return as a lion.

But Advent is not just an annual season in the church calendar. It is our present long season of history, when we await the last arrival of the King of kings and Lord of lords. The words of prophecy and an army of angels heralded His first arrival, and prophecy and angels will herald His return. In the meantime, it is up to the saints of God, the followers of Jesus, who have already 'tasted and seen that the Lord is good' ([Psalm 34:8](#)) to be His heralds to our communities, nation and world, urging them to be reconciled to the King before His return ([2 Corinthians 5:20](#)), and so escape His wrath and gain His mercy ([1 Thessalonians 5:9](#)) (bit.ly/witg).

Across our nation (and world) hearts are sick because their true home is absent from their lives. Land and creation are subjected to futility and decay, crying for the revealing of the children of God, to obtain freedom and glory ([Romans 8:20-22](#)).

As we celebrate His first advent, through which we have tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord, and await His return, pray that we will be His faithful heralds and that many will taste the true bread from heaven and so obtain eternal life ([John 6:51-54](#)).

'Arise, O Lord'

Many Advent readings, hymns and prayers use the entreaties of ancient Israel to call on the Lord to come and deliver His people from oppression, darkness, captivity and exile. This is especially evident in that most popular of Advent hymns, 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel', which draws on a series of Old Testament motifs to call on the Lord to ransom, free, enlighten and bring home His people.

A lesser-known Advent hymn, 'The Lord will come and not be slow' (by 17th century poet, John Milton), two verses of which are below, echoes biblical themes of the Lord's sovereignty and intended salvation of the nations ([Isaiah 42:1](#), [49:6](#), [52:10](#); [Luke 2:30-32](#)), calling on Him to "Arise and judge the earth" ([Psalm 82:8](#)) and declaring His rule over all the nations of the earth ([Psalms 82:8](#), [86:8](#)). There are at least eleven other invocations to the Lord to 'Arise' in the Psalms.

This Advent, as the "nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing" and "the kings of the earth set themselves ... against the Lord and His anointed" ([Psalm 2:1-2](#)), seemingly with ever greater intensity, give thanks that the Lord has already arisen "with the ark of His strength" ([Psalm 132:8](#)) and come and dwelt among us ([John 1:14](#)), and call on Him to arise and redeem His people ([Psalms 44:26](#)), scatter His enemies ([Psalm 68:1](#)) and judge the nations ([Psalm 9:19](#)).

*Rise, God, judge all the Earth in might,
This wicked Earth redress;
For you are he who shall by right
The nations all possess.*

-
*The nations, all whom you have made,
Shall come, and all shall frame
To bow them low before you, Lord,
And glorify your name*

Future events

Below are some Hope Countryside dates for your diary (details to follow next year).

Wednesday, **12 February 2025**, 7.30 - 9.00 PM, 'A movement of hope', Online prayer and sharing.

Saturday, **5 April 2025**, 9.00 - 10.30 AM, Themed online prayer.

Thursday, **29 May 2025**, 7.30 - 9.00 PM, 'A movement of hope', Online prayer and sharing.

Saturday, **28 June 2025**, 9.30 - 16.00, 'A day on the farm', Coleshill.

Wednesday, **17 September 2025**, 7.30 - 9.00 PM, 'A movement of hope', Online prayer and sharing.

Saturday, **8 November 2025**, 9.00 - 10.30 AM, Themed online prayer.

Hope Countryside is a partnership including Village Hope, Agricultural Christian Fellowship, the World Prayer Centre and others. 'Hope Countryside' expresses our growing vision of beacons of prayer lighting up across rural Britain, bringing hope both to the countryside and from the countryside to the whole of the nation. Our aim is to promote understanding of, and prayer for, rural life and communities, church and mission, and farming and the land.

The hope of the gospel

These next three months, with their short days and coldest temperatures, can be especially challenging for rural communities. But, as we celebrate Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, the season also prompts us to remember what God has done in fulfilling the promise of His Kingdom coming. The birth of Jesus inaugurated a 'new exodus', defeating evil and bringing freedom and the hope of eternal life to all who receive Him ([John 1:12](#); [Titus 1:1-3](#); [1 Peter 1:3](#)).

Pray for the gospel of hope to be shared in every carol and Christmas service in village halls, barns, churches, schools and in the open air. Pray that every church and every Christian will be emboldened to reach out in every way possible to allow His light to shine into dark places and hearts, and into the dark situations that face so many in the countryside today. Hope is daring, courageous; it has the audacity to reach a hand into the darkness and come out with a handful of light. Pray for each of us to have the courage to reach out in prayer and practical ways to those we know who need a fresh glimpse of hope in their situations.

Farmers are dismayed

In November, the government announced radical changes in Agricultural Property Relief, prompting a surge of anxiety and anger in the farming community. "From 6 April 2026, the [current] full 100% relief from inheritance tax will be restricted to the first £1 million of combined agricultural and business property" (bit.ly/defraapr). There is profound disagreement between the government and farming organisations as to how deeply and widely this will affect farm businesses (bit.ly/fufaft); many farming people believe it signals the impending end of their businesses and family farming as we have known it, with implications for the nation's food security. The government has been accused of pushing elderly farmers into a 'suicide window' (bit.ly/msnswin), which sadly some have already gone through (bit.ly/expsui). On 19 November, thousands of farmers gathered in London to protest against the changes (bit.ly/bbcfrpr; bit.ly/ffot). There is another protest planned for 11 December (bit.ly/fptrac).

Pray for the clear voice of truth to be heard above the many conflicting voices speaking about this matter. Pray for Christians concerned with or about farming and food to be given a clear understanding, not only of the surface phenomena, but also of the ideological and spiritual issues behind them, and to know how to pray and act. Pray for all those in farming fearful for the future and for those people and organisations that reach out to them with practical and pastoral support.

Light, liberation and dedication

This year the eight-day Jewish festival of Hannukah coincides exactly with Christmas, starting on 25 December and ending on 1 January. It commemorates the cleansing and reconsecration of the desecrated Temple in 165 BC, following the liberation of Jerusalem from the tyrannical rule of the Hellenist king, Antiochus Epiphanes. Hanukkah is a festival of light, liberation and dedication, of the overcoming of evil and falsehood and of returning to true faith. Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world" during the festival of Hannukah ([John 9:1-10:39](#)) (<https://bit.ly/vlohan>).

As many Christian leaders, churches and denominations seem to be departing from scripture and tradition to accommodate the 'spirit of the age', pray that the Lord will raise up those who, like the Maccabees, will seek to restore right worship and true faith among God's people. As war continues to rage in Israel and the Middle East, with the constant threat of even greater escalation, "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" ([Psalm 122:6-9](#)) and for all caught up in the conflict, especially those of the household of faith ([Galatians 6:10](#)).

'Like a pent-up flood'

Rare red weather warnings heralded the advent of Storm Darragh. Festivities, sporting events and travel plans were cancelled. The hurricane-force wind, evocative of the "storm of the Lord" in judgement ([Jeremiah 30:23](#)), brought down large trees and power lines, reminiscent of the authority given to Jeremiah "over nations and kingdoms to pluck up and pull down, to destroy and overthrow" before "building and planting" ([Jeremiah 1:10](#)). The sound of a 'mighty wind' ([Acts 2:2](#)) and 'many waters' ([Revelation 1:15](#)), was heard across the land: "apocalyptic winds surge along the coast", reported the BBC (bit.ly/bbcapc).

Isaiah 59 is a sad indictment of the state of ancient Israel and a tragically accurate description of our nation today. In response, the Lord comes "like a pent-up flood that the breath of the Lord drives on". But this is followed with the hope that "He will come to Zion as redeemer to those in Jacob who turn from transgression" ([Isaiah 59:18-20](#), NIV/NRSV).

Pray for eyes to see and ears to hear what the Lord is saying through these events, and that these catastrophes (bit.ly/vlospclion) will cause people not to rail against Him nor to give further obeisance to the ideology of 'Net Zero', but to turn to Him in godly fear and repentance, come to know Him as their Redeemer, and that, as a nation, we will "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God" ([Micah 6:8](#)).

'Do not harden your hearts'

Psalm 95 begins with an invitation to worship the Lord who made and maintains all creation: "for He is our God and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand". But the Psalm continues with a warning not to harden our hearts to God's voice. Weather related crop failures and livestock losses have been accompanied by rising input costs, and radical changes in government directives with the erosion of financial support for food production. All of this has affected morale in the industry.

Pray that farmers and all who work in the agricultural sector do not become hardened by the pressures and the apparent onslaught against small businesses and family farms, but rather come joyfully into God's presence with thanksgiving and worship, for He is our God.