

No place like home



God of all joy and peace, help us to work to bring in your kingdom of joy and peace in our own land and throughout the world. Amen.

Advent is a season of penitence

Part 3 – prayer vigil

by Caroline Hodgson

A vigil (from the Latin *vigilia*, meaning wakefulness) is a period of purposeful sleeplessness. The midnight service many people attend on Christmas Eve is a kind of vigil.

There are no hard-and-fast rules about prayer vigil. In Catholic and some Anglican traditions there is a practice of praying at regular times throughout the day and night. This form of prayer vigil, woven into daily life, is known as

the Liturgy of the Hours, or Divine Office. Another kind of prayer vigil is when people come together to pray in solidarity or remembrance, such as the vigils held each year in America on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

If you want to deepen a spiritual discipline this Advent, you might consider organising a prayer vigil in your church community. This might involve different kinds of prayer focus (such as adoration, confession, intercession, praise and thanksgiving), or meeting for prayer at a regular time each day for a week. 🕯️

“Advent: the time to listen for footsteps – you can’t hear footsteps when you’re running yourself.”

Bill McKibben (born 1960), American environmentalist, author and journalist

Heather Smith *reflects on* Isaiah 35:1-10

Exile from your homeland is hard to bear. Whether for political reasons or because of war or unjust accusations, leaving home for a foreign country is traumatic. Victor Hugo, exiled from France because of his opposition to Napoleon III, said: “Exile has not only detached me from France, it has almost detached me from the earth.”

Sometimes exiles are able to return if circumstances at home have changed, but others face the heartbreak of never seeing their homeland again. If home is suffering under tyrannical rule or civil war, the heartbreak is compounded.

For the ancient Israelites, exile was not only distressing on a personal level, but disrupted their relationship with God. They believed that God had given them their homeland and it was inextricably connected with their relationship with God. They were at a loss to know what to make of their situation. As the psalmist put it: “How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137:4).

This passage from Isaiah envisions a glorious return. It will not be in the form of a long and difficult journey and the exiles will not slip in unnoticed. Everyone and everything will be transformed. “The desert shall rejoice and blossom... and rejoice with joy and singing.”

Whether in exile or not, we all want our home to be a place of joy, peace and prosperity. And that’s exactly what God wants for us. It is God’s plan for the kingdom. “Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads... and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” 🕯️

Animals in the Bible

The lion

by Caroline Fletcher

The lion was well known to biblical writers but became extinct in Israel, possibly around the time of the Crusades.

As lions were admired for their courage and strength, their images adorned King Solomon’s throne and Jesus was named “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”. However, they were also feared as deadly hunters – Peter likened Satan to a lion prowling around seeking someone to devour.

Shepherds knew this well. They had to defend their flocks

from lions with only clubs and slingshots. As a shepherd, David killed lions which gave him courage to face the giant Goliath. However, surviving a lion encounter without weapons required divine intervention – angels delivered Daniel in the lions’ den and Samson killed a lion barehanded using his God-given strength.

Yet descriptions of God’s coming kingdom show lions as no longer dangerous. Images of lions eating straw and resting alongside calves illustrate beautifully this harmonious future. 🕯️