

## **St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall**

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[St Magnus Cathedral Facebook page](#)

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Welcome to St Magnus Cathedral this morning. It was founded in 1137 by St Rognvald, in honour of Magnus, his uncle. The Cathedral belongs to the people of Orkney and its doors are open to all. If you are a visitor, we hope this order of service will help you feel part of our worship together.

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You can find our Sunday worship

[here on Facebook](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or [on YouTube here](#)

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

[stmagnuszoom@gmail.com](mailto:stmagnuszoom@gmail.com)

### **Lighting of the First Advent candle and meditation**

#### **Hope**

As this season of "sparkle and bright" unfolds before us, the glimmering promises of hope lie like boxed jewels awaiting an adoring light.

May we hold fast to hope's patient possibilities. May we lift them high that they might catch the light of our dreams and shine bright in our broken world. And may we instil hope's challenge in the hearts of our children that they, too, will live it into meaning-pouring their lives, as we do ours, into making it real-for themselves, for each other, for the world.

May Hope light the world this Christmas.

*Why do we think that constant activity is our mode of being?  
Why are we restless in the waiting times?  
Our God is not a distant god  
far removed from our reality,  
but, written clear in the outpouring of nature  
God waits for us to notice  
that today, on this winter morning, there is a message,  
surprisingly, not a message of growth, of greenery.  
Rather, of waiting.*

*The waiting of fallen leaves, of twigs,  
of a great tree torn up by its roots,  
pebbles, bones, dead moss.  
All are waiting in their different time spans  
for regeneration.  
All they can do is wait and be, just as they are.  
But a time will come for each in its season.  
Recycled atoms will burgeon into a new phase of being,  
to be followed by more waiting - on into eternity.  
May the Spirit this Advent, teach us the necessity and patience of  
waiting.*

### Reading **Matthew 13**

Jesus presented another parable to the crowds: "The kingdom of heaven is like the mustard seed which a farmer sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest shrub of all—it becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come to perch in its branches." Jesus offered them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a baker took and mixed in with three measures of flour until it was leavened all through." Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables. He spoke to them in parables only, to fulfil what had been said through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce things hidden since the creation of the world."

### Reflection

Almost everyone would contend that the mustard seed parable is about faith. Is that not an easy route to take? When you read the parable, on the surface it's about something tiny growing into a large tree or bush, and it seems to make sense why someone may think it's about faith. For me the power in Jesus' teachings is that he posited the NOT SO OBVIOUS, in order to short-circuit and dismantle our conventional ways of thinking and being.

Jesus wanted to wake us up and make us alert, attentive and alive as never before. We are invited into a journey of discovering what matters most in life, and to BE that which matters most..

Jesus gave us a highly, counterintuitive message so we might continue to evolve, to be more divine through being more human. His message, regardless of your religion, is to live courageously, to be in relationship with the darkness and challenges of life.

Which brings me back to Advent. The word means "to come" or "arriving."

We sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." The word "Emmanuel" means "God with us." Is that not what Advent is really all about? God with us NOW?

Instead, over the centuries it has become a time of waiting for baby Jesus to arrive. It has become a sentimental month, almost a nostalgic path to December 25th. And in some cases, almost too cognitive, rather than a practice for us to irrevocably changed at depth.

Advent is preached about as a time to focus our expectations on the birth of the "Christ" in each of us -

This is a time of an inward journey of self-reflection and self-awareness - how else can we know our own blindspots to becoming an ever-expanding expression of God consciousness, of being that "Emmanuel?" Thomas Merton says, "Be still. Listen to the stones of the wall. Be silent, they try to speak your name. Listen to the living walls. Who are you? Who are you? Whose silence are you?"

Considering Thomas Merton's directive, what concrete ways are we not demonstrating how powerful it is to be human? Is that not what Jesus birth is about - telling us it's good to be human and to glorify humanity? It's pretty easy to be spiritual in a cave, so in what concrete ways will we carve out time for our own contemplation which leads us to be "Emmanuel?" There is entirely too much suffering, devastation, injustice,

desolation, loneliness, violence and poverty on our planet to continue seeing and practicing Advent as a sentimental season about an infantile Jesus or infantile gospel

Advent is, above all else, a call to really be awake, moving out of our comfort zone in order to be in full consciousness - and paying the price that comes with being that alive and aware. Yes, there is a price to Advent. There is a price to embracing our humanity, in all its glory and all its suffering. There is a price to pay for engaging with our suffering, for "listening to the stones of the wall." It takes struggles for our light to fully form, to be Emmanuel, "God with us." Jesus' one sermon about the "kingdom" says the kingdom is always here and always not yet here. One of our greatest paradoxes of the spiritual journey.

The kingdom is always here because we can imagine and affirm what "God with us" looks like through us- as moving toward what is most uncomfortable, AND most importantly we can BE it. We can be God with us - kindness, peace, service, support, faithful and open with those unlike us. We can be the active "Emmanuel" among those whom we feel most challenged by - family, friends, colleagues, people of different religions, creeds, colours and politics. We can practice compassion, We can do unto others as they would like to have done unto them. That is the kingdom that is always here.

And the kingdom that is always not yet here encompasses all whom we have yet to love as our neighbour - those who have harmed us, enemies, those who actively seek to be racist, who assault the helpless, who seek to wage war and dismantle the glory of being human, who work to tell groups of people they are not created with sacred worth because of their age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion, lack of religion, or gender identity. It also begs u to ask ourselves, "Am we willing to be 'Emmanuel,' to create a world through a consciousness of compassion and wisdom knowing we may never see the fruits of my labour? Also knowing we may be hurt in the process?"

The next time we hear the song "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," how about hearing it as our rallying cry to be the light shining the way for the world. It is the symphony of US gladly paying the price to restore ourselves and all of humanity to our original goodness. We are God with us.

Prayer

We remember Jesus' words "Stay awake praying at all times." Let us pray  
for our needs and the needs of our world:  
For the leaders of the Christian community.  
That they will know Christ's coming by their showing the way to unity  
among Christians.  
may we be upholders of the faithful, for we are Christ's hands here  
For the leaders of the nations.  
that they may know Christ's coming  
by their working to end injustice & violence.  
may we be liberators of the oppressed for we are Christ's hands here  
For the sick.  
That they may know Christ's coming by their receiving kindness from us -  
their brothers and sisters!  
may we be healers of the sick for we are Christ's hands here  
Let us pray,  
in the silence of our hearts for our own personal intentions:...  
For ourselves.  
That we may know Christ's coming in one another as we receive Christ in  
our worship together.  
may we be the Bread of Life: for we are Christ's hands here

### Blessing

Let us go in peace  
into this Advent season.  
Follow a star that's twinkling with courage,  
blazing with possibility  
to the space, the essence that is God.  
And may the celestial brightness—source, spirit, sun—  
be with us to  
enlighten, heal and empower us .

May you stay safe in the Way of Christ, and may you be blessed by his  
Spirit this day and always.