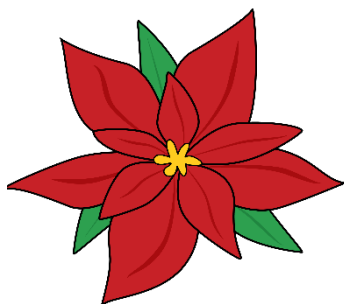


Third week in ADVENT

Give Hope



Hello again! We have been thinking about how everyone – including **you** – is a uniquely created gift from God – and how we are all given the ability to gift to others. Sometimes it is the simplest things that can be the most profound and beautiful. And we are all called to use the gifts we have been gifted ourselves to enrich the lives of those around us.

For our third Advent reflection, we're thinking about the poinsettia, which is our symbol for the gift of hope. It always gives my heart joy when I see the shops full of these beautiful plants. The other day I saw a cream-coloured one – I didn't know they existed! Apparently, according to the RHS website, the coloured part is called a bract – it's not a leaf or a petal. The flowers themselves are the tiny yellow round parts at the top of each stem. Who knew?!

The shops are full of poinsettias, and they are also full of many other things. Lots of encouragement to spend, lots of encouragement to make Advent and Christmas busier and more complex. If we're not careful, December can feel overwhelming. Lists, deadlines, flashing lights everywhere. Focusing on the simpler and more profound gifts of the season can help us restore balance. Hope is one of those gifts.

Sometimes hope can feel like a big, impossible word. It is easy to feel overwhelmed when we read the headlines in our newspapers or on our phones. But actually, hope can be quiet – a simple gift, like just showing up. Like sending a card to someone. Like making time to listen.

In this coming Sunday's Bible reading (Matthew 11:2–11), John the Baptist, stuck in prison, had questions for Jesus. "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?". Jesus didn't send a theological lecture – he just sent good news, telling John all the astonishing things that were happening around him, because of him. He sent the gift of hope.

Hope isn't wishful thinking, or pretending everything's fine. Rather it's a glimpse of God at work, even in the mess.

My colleague and I were chatting the other day about the fact that when our Mums were alive, we both used to buy them a poinsettia at this time of year. Advent and Christmas can be an emotionally difficult time for many. So here's your challenge: give hope this week. Leave a note for a neighbour, or share a mince pie, or call someone who needs to hear your voice. Little gestures. Small lights. They matter.

Because here's the truth: this world needs your gift. When you lift someone, even in tiny ways, you're sharing God's hope. And it changes **everything**.

**Gift-giving God,
may Advent be for us a time of giving
and receiving.**

Heavenly God, you speak to us through
messengers, words and deeds,
the rhythm, the beat of your gift never
ceases, never stops or falters or fails.

Your gift is for life, not limited by time or
space.

**Gift-giving God,
may Advent be for us a time of giving
and receiving.**

Heavenly God, you challenge us to be the
heartbeat of love to our community.
You challenge and call us to be a
constant power for good.

You inspire us to be the bringers of good
news.

**Gift-giving God,
may Advent be for us a time of giving
and receiving.**

Heavenly God, may we be up to the
challenges you set before us.

May we give you time in our busy days, in
our list making and our shopping, so that
we are buzzing with your Spirit as your
gift to all we meet.

**Gift-giving God,
may Advent be for us a time of giving
and receiving. AMEN**



You are a gift. Made with love.