

# Advent on the Long Paddock

December 1 – First Sunday of Advent – Year A

*“You too must stand ready.”* Matthew 24:44

## OPENING PRAYER

- Reader: We gather along the long paddock to reflect on this season of Advent as we begin our new church year.
- All: God of all beginnings, help us to make a brand new start.
- Reader: We gather with our brothers and sisters in this dry country to learn what really matters.
- All: God of creation, help us to return to our roots.
- Reader: We gather so that we may live in anticipation of your presence, now and in the destiny of eternity.
- All: God of coming, help us to welcome you in all who suffer.
- All: Amen.

## WATCHING: Wally and Margie’s Story – 14.22 minutes

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=861&v=B6CAVHy\\_-ig](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=861&v=B6CAVHy_-ig)

Take some time to talk together about what you hear/feel/experience in Wally and Margie’s story. What are the comments, observations and questions that you find arising for you?



## SHARING

Take some time to reflect personally on these questions. When you feel ready to share, give everyone the space to share as much or as little as they like on any of their answers.

1. Margie says of her country, “We’ve got the wide open spaces.” What is your reaction to the land shown in this film? How does it make you feel?
2. Simplicity emerges as a theme in this story, in contrast to the hustle and bustle of the city. How does simplicity fit into your life?
3. Wally and Margie both value “quiet time” and the option to connect in to social life or to take some space away from it. What is your experience of silence? Is it important? Scary? Longed-for? What might be the difference between feeling lonely and being alone?

### **LISTENING: Matthew 24:37-44**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

### **SHARING**

This reading presents two kinds of ways to live: as if the future matters or not. Wally and Margie showed a preparedness to accept the pains and joys of life's circumstances, sustained by their faith in God, and in what really matters.

1. Wally says that "we all take a flogging occasionally" and suffering seems to be a part of real life for him. What have the 'floggings' in your life revealed to you?
2. This film demonstrates resilience in the hard times underpinned by a quiet trust in God. "Without faith, there's nothing else." What enables you to get up and keep going? Who supports you in this?
3. Wally was impressed by the commitment of the Missionaries of Charity, whose few possessions fit into a bucket. For them, other things didn't matter and they were "incredibly happy." He also expects that "you inevitably occasionally go broke." In the end, what really matters to you? What would be left if everything was taken from you?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Reader: Patient God, we thank you for this time to reflect on your story, and the stories of Wally, Margie and ourselves.

All: Help us to make space in our lives this Advent.

Reader: Give us humility and trust in your providence.

All: May we always be ready for your coming into our lives.

Reader: Grant us gratitude and prudence with our precious resources.

All: May we know the incredible happiness of sharing with others.

Reader: We ask all this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.

# Advent on the Long Paddock

December 8 – Second Sunday of Advent – Year A

*“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.”* Matthew 3:2

## OPENING PRAYER

- Reader: We gather again to travel the long paddock and deepen our experience of the season of Advent.  
All: God of the word, open our ears to hear your voice.
- Reader: We gather in remembrance of our own baptism and journey through death and resurrection.  
All: God of life, cleanse us through fire and the Holy Spirit.
- Reader: We gather in anticipation of your coming to our world this Christmas.  
All: God of reconciliation, prepare our hearts to prepare for you.  
All: Amen.

**WATCHING: Jonathan’s Story – 13.29 minutes**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bThRLrLgYFA>

Take some time to talk together about your feelings, questions and comments on this story.



## SHARING

Take some time to reflect personally on these questions. When you feel ready to share, give everyone the space to share as much or as little as they like on any of their answers.

1. Jonathan demonstrates a striking attitude as an eternal learner. Even when teaching something he says, “They teach me too.” In taking the men’s group he says, “We counsel each other.” What kind of attitude to life do you have? In what ways do you learn from those you encounter?
2. Some of the values that Jonathan mentions are respect for everybody and really showing care for others. What do you value? How does your faith influence your values?
3. Jonathan created a safe space in the men’s group to share, trust, talk and work through challenges like grief. What spaces or groups do you turn to for such support? Are there other ways you could connect with others outside of your comfort zone?

## LISTENING: Matthew 3:1-12

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

## SHARING

John the Baptist proclaimed the same message as Jesus: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand." Repent, or *metanoete* in Greek, means to change one's mind or heart – to turn towards God once again. Jonathan has made that journey, and in Advent we all renew and deepen that call.

1. Jonathan identifies himself as Barkindji, belonging to the river. For John the Baptist, the Jewish people, the wilderness of Judaea and the River Jordan were significant. Who and what do you belong to? How has your environment influenced you?
2. Once Jonathan was stuck in a cycle of alcohol and drugs, but he eventually came to depend on Jesus Christ as his Saviour. What or who do you turn to for solace or salvation? What in your life calls for you to *metanoete* at this time?
3. Jonathan uses the slow process of making a didgeridoo to reflect the healing and discovery involved in "taking those layers off" ourselves. What is the gem underneath your layers? How can you help to uncover that gem in others? How does the Holy Spirit and the fire of Christ feature in that journey?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Reader: Loving God, we thank you creating our universe and our unique place in it.

All: Help us to always recognise your master craftwork.

Reader: Fire us to turn away from our trespasses and toward you again.

All: May we flourish to produce good fruit in our lives.

Reader: We ask all this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.

# Advent on the Long Paddock

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December 15 – Third Sunday of Advent – Year A

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*“Look, I am going to send my messenger before you.”* Matthew 11:10

## OPENING PRAYER

Reader: We gather in solidarity with each along the long paddock this Advent.  
All: God of freedom, help us to follow your healing mission.

Reader: We gather on this precious part of Mother Earth.  
All: God of hope, enable us to see your movement in all of life.

Reader: We gather together with a long line of prophets and God-proclaimers.  
All: God of wisdom, help us to grow and to mature in our Christian faith.  
All: Amen.

## WATCHING: Jason’s Story – 17.39 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swEr9cXkjN0>

Take some time to talk together about what you hear/feel/experience in Jason’s story. What are the comments, observations and questions that you find arising for you?



## SHARING

Take some time to reflect personally on these questions. When you feel ready to share, give everyone the space to share as much or as little as they like on any of their answers.

1. Jason says clearly, “We’ve only got one Earth and we’ve got an obligation to protect and look after that because it affects everybody.” How does your faith and commitment to God motivate you to care for our Mother Earth?
2. Jason overcame lack of opportunities to now empower others to find employment. What is your purpose in life? How does your unique background and situation place you to play your part in the mission of Christ?

### **LISTENING: Matthew 11:2-11**

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

### **SHARING**

John was the messenger, but eventually his followers left him to follow Jesus. The message was more important. And Jesus *was* the message, he was the Word and Wisdom of God. He conveyed that message by healing and giving people hope. And Jason has continued to share the same.

1. Jason is able to draw from his Aboriginal spirituality and also walk in the light of Christ through his baptism. For him, Jesus builds on the tradition of Baiame, the creator. In the gospel, Jesus followed after John the Baptist. Who is Jesus Christ for you? How does his message interact with your culture and traditions?
2. "The Sisters introduced us into the life of Christ." Jason really valued the teaching and spirituality of the Sisters when he was growing up. But now he sees that they need to take this faith and identity on themselves, and pass it on to others. Who has influenced your faith journey? How do you take on that role for those in your family or community?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Reader: God of liberation, we thank you for giving us identity, freedom and salvation in you.  
All: Touch our hearts with praise and gratitude this Advent.

Reader: Empower us to participate in your mission for the whole of creation.  
All: May we always hear and see your Spirit at work in the world.

Reader: Give us faith in you that overcomes all obstacles.  
All: May we proclaim the Good News and walk in your light.

Reader: We ask all this in Jesus' name.  
All: Amen.

# Advent on the Long Paddock

December 22 – Fourth Sunday of Advent – Year A

*“They will call him Emmanuel, a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’.”* Matthew 1:23

## OPENING PRAYER

Reader: We meet one last time along the long paddock to journey towards you in this season of Advent.

All: God of life, may you be born in our lives once again this year.

Reader: We come together across the country to support each other in our life and faith.

All: God of goodness, enable us to be your hands and feet in the world.

Reader: We gather in the hope of your coming this Christmas and in the fulfilment of time.

All: God-with-us, may all share in your ever-abundant life.

All: Amen.

## WATCHING: Possum’s Story – 9.31 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2luM5cl9Y-k>

Take some time to talk together about your feelings, questions and comments on this story.



## SHARING

Take some time to reflect personally on these questions. When you feel ready to share, give everyone the space to share as much or as little as they like on any of their answers.

1. Possum has always believed in God and has faith, but finds it hard to describe and to speak about it. What has faith in God meant to you? How have you been able to share, or not been able to share, that with others?
2. “I do more as a Christian in my day-to-day life.” For Possum, faith is not just going to church, but much more than that: living as a good person. In many little ways she is able to show God’s love and compassion to others. How does your faith influence how you live your day-to-day life?
3. Possum believes that “we are all on earth for a purpose.” Part of her purpose seems to be building community and giving empathy and equal opportunities. What have you discovered so far about your purpose in life?

### **LISTENING: Matthew 1:18-24**

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son  
and they will call him Emmanuel,

a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

### **SHARING**

Here Matthew tells his less-well-known version of the nativity. The angel appears to Joseph in his sleep, and he is called to trust through what must have seemed a very messy situation. Yet it is here we get the great message of the incarnation: that God is with us. As God was quietly with Possum.

1. This story from Matthew describes a challenging time of darkness and shame, and clarity only coming through dreams. What times of darkness and unknowing have you experienced? How did you begin to see and to understand again?
2. In Possum's time of darkness, when her son had a brain injury, "It was the scariest time in my life." However what got her through was the unexpected: the prayers of the people in Bourke. So she asked people to go to Mass instead of giving her money. Where have you discovered faith in the unexpected? Who can you support through your prayers at this time?
3. What does it mean that God-is-with-us? What does it mean that, in Jesus, God has a human face? Where do you see God among us that has never been named before?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Reader: God of the unexpected, we thank you for this time together, for coming to know you better and the lives of the people on the long paddock.

All: Call us out of darkness into the light of your life.

Reader: Do not let us be afraid, and let us trust in your presence.

All: May we be open to receive you and see your face in all creation.

Reader: Give us courage and joy as we welcome you this Christmas.

All: May we delight in our earthly and spiritual families, and share that love with all.

Reader: We ask all this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.