



Advent 4 A

People of the Dawn

Signs of Newness in

the Fidelity of Love

December 21<sup>st</sup> 2025

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BREAKING  
OPEN

Scripture Study

A weekly reflection based on the teachings at St Peter's by the Lake, Paynesville, together with a study guide based on the readings, some liturgical resources RCL Lectionary, and a weekly devotion

## INTRODUCTION

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Third Sunday of Advent

Year A

Isaiah 7.10-16

Psalms 80.1-8, 18-20\*

Romans 1.1-7

Matthew 1.18-end



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

**O** Lord, raise up (we pray thee) thy power,  
and come among us,  
and with great might succour us;  
that whereas,  
through our sins and wickedness,  
we are sore let and hindered in running the  
race that is set before us,  
thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily  
help and deliver us;  
through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord,  
to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be  
honour and glory, world without end.

This study guide was put together prior to the terrorist activity afflicting the Jewish Community of Bondi North, Sydney, 14th December. Chanukah, a festival of joy and became a moment in history where ideology masquerading as faithfulness sought to bring as much pain as possible on a day when Christians were also celebrating the Joy of God's presence.

The Advent message remains one of light and hope. Today, we explore the interruption in light of the mourning of the people of faith in Bondi, and our sisters and brothers of all Abrahamic Faiths.

דָּחָא הוּאֵי וּבִהְלָא הוּאֵי לְאַרְשֵׁי עַמָּשׁ

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai  
Echad

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is One, the Lord is  
God.

A photograph of four lit candles (two blue, two red) and a white candle with a cross, surrounded by a green wreath with red berries.

Advent is holy interruption:

- Light interrupts darkness
- Grace interrupting sin
- Peace interrupting fear
- God interrupting history
- Christ interrupting expectations

And Matthew's genealogy proclaims the  
same truth:  
God works in the interruptions.

As we walk lightly on sacred ground,  
teach us Lord to make known your kingdom,  
and let this reflect in all that we do and say.

**People of the Dawn –**  
**Signs of Newness in the Fidelity of Love**

Isaiah 7.10-16  
Psalm 80.1-8, 18-20\*  
Romans 1.1-7  
Matthew 1.18-end

As we gather on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, the season of waiting draws close to its fulfilment. The candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy have been lit, and today we light the candle of Love—the love that is at the heart of the Christmas mystery. And fittingly, we also mark St Thomas’ Day, remembering the Apostle who moved from doubt to courageous love in his confession, “My Lord and my God!”

The prophet Isaiah speaks to King Ahaz in a time of fear and uncertainty: “The Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14) This promise is not just a word of comfort to a hesitant king, but a word of enduring hope to all God’s people: that God’s love will not remain distant or abstract, but will take flesh and dwell with us.

The Psalmist cries out in Psalm 80, “Show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.” This is the heart-cry of all creation waiting for God’s love to break in. Our anticipation in Advent is not passive; it is the longing of hearts that have tasted light and yearn for its fullness.

In the second reading, Paul reminds the Romans—and us—that the Gospel is the fulfilment of all God’s promises, revealing Jesus Christ, descended from David according to

the flesh, and declared to be Son of God in power. Love takes flesh, not in some distant or abstract way, but right here in the midst of our human story.

Matthew’s Gospel places us alongside Joseph, a man caught between law and love, fear and faith. Into his quiet turmoil comes the angel’s message: Do not be afraid... the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit... they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, God with us. In that decisive moment, love becomes more than sentiment—it becomes obedience, courage, and a willingness to embrace the cost of God’s call.

On December 21st, we also recall St Thomas, the Apostle, often labelled “doubting,” yet whose story ends in a profound outpouring of love and faith. In John 20, the risen Christ meets Thomas in his hesitation, and Thomas responds with the words that have echoed through the ages: “My Lord and my God!” His journey reminds us that God’s love meets us in our questions and calls us into deeper trust and service.

Advent love is not passive. It is incarnational. It invites us, like Joseph, like Thomas, to say yes to God’s presence in our lives and to live that love in concrete ways. As love takes flesh in Emmanuel, so we are called to let love take flesh in our actions, in our service, in the way we respond to the needs of the world with compassion and faith.

So, as we await the celebration of Christ’s Nativity, let us take up the Advent call of love: to recognise Emmanuel in our midst, to respond in faith like Thomas, and to let that love shape our lives in service to the Lord.

The final candle of Advent burns violet and tender  
— the flame of Love.

In the house of David, a child is promised; in Joseph’s anxious dream, an angel speaks:

“Do not be afraid.”



God is doing something unimaginable — Love taking flesh.

Matthew tells of Emmanuel, “God with us.”

John’s Gospel remembers Thomas, who doubts, yet is met by Love made tangible:

“Put your hand here... be not unbelieving but believing.”

Love risks everything to come close — not as an idea, but as heartbeat and breath, as God dwelling among us in vulnerability.

This weekend, we honour that incarnate Love in the lives of faithful servants:

Fr Jim Reeves (60 years of priesthood) and

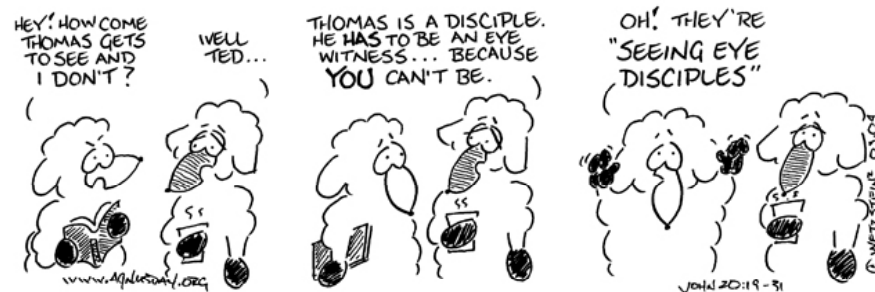
Fr Michael Fox (66 years).

Their long ministry witnesses that divine love is steadfast and embodied —spoken in compassion, in the Eucharist shared, in the care of the community.

Here by the waters of the Gippsland Lakes, where the horizon meets the heart, we glimpse Emmanuel’s promise: God is not distant.

Love has pitched its tent among us

— Love takes flesh still.



The sermon mentions that 'Advent love is not passive.' What does this mean, and how does Joseph's story demonstrate active love? Joseph was caught between law and love, but chose to act on the angel's message despite his fears, showing that love requires action and courage.

- When have you faced a situation where showing love required taking action that made you uncomfortable or afraid?
- How does Thomas's journey from doubt to faith relate to the theme of love in this sermon?

Thomas moved from being the 'doubting' apostle to making a profound declaration of faith: 'My Lord and my God!'

- Have you ever experienced doubts in your faith journey that led to a stronger connection with God's love?
- The prophet Isaiah tells King Ahaz, 'The Lord himself will give you a sign... they shall name him Emmanuel.' How does this ancient promise connect to the sermon's message about God's love becoming tangible?

The sermon emphasises that God's love is not meant to remain distant or abstract but takes flesh and dwells among us.

- In what ways do you see God's love becoming tangible in your daily life?
- The sermon discusses two priests celebrating 60 and 66 years of ministry. How does their long service reflect the sermon's message about incarnational love?

Their ministry is described as witnessing that divine love is steadfast and embodied through compassion, Eucharist, and community care.

- How can you demonstrate long-term commitment to showing God's love in your community?

What is the significance of lighting the Love candle on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, and how does it connect to the overall message about Emmanuel?

- The sermon presents the Love candle as the final step toward Christmas, symbolising God's presence among us through Jesus.
- How does the Advent season help you prepare your heart to receive and share God's love?

In a world often gripped by fear and uncertainty, we illuminate the profound mystery of Advent's fourth candle - Love - weaving together the stories of King Ahaz, Joseph, and the "doubting" Thomas to reveal God's transformative presence among us.

Through Isaiah's ancient prophecy of Emmanuel and Matthew's account of Joseph's faithful response to the divine dream, we witness love taking flesh in the most unexpected ways.

These biblical narratives to our present moment, reminding us that God's love isn't a distant concept but a living reality that continues to manifest in our community, beautifully exemplified through the six decades-long ministry of faithful servants like Fr Jim Reeves and Fr Michael Fox.

By the serene waters of Gippsland Lakes, where horizon meets heart, we're challenged to recognise that Advent love isn't passive but incarnational - calling us, like Joseph and Thomas, to move beyond our doubts and fears to embrace God's presence in tangible ways.

As we approach the celebration of Christ's birth, we're urged to let this divine love take flesh in our own lives, transforming our service, compassion, and faith into living testimonies of Emmanuel - God with us.

**We pray for those disturbed by acts of terror**

**We pray for those whose life has been taken by others who choose to kill as a sign of fidelity**

**We pray for the person whose ideals are fed by evil and false narratives**

**We pray for the peace that passes all understanding, in our hearts, mind, soul and strength, the very place we are asked to love our Creator and all people.**

This five-day devotional will take a brave step out of darkness and into Adonai's marvellous light. We will explore the themes of hope, peace, joy, and especially love as we anticipate the celebration of Christ's nativity. Join us as we reflect on the significance of God's love becoming flesh and dwelling among us.



**Weekly Practice:** Begin and end each day this week with this quote from the Benedictus, Zechariah's song at the birth of his son, John the Baptist:

*"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.."*

### Day 1 Matthew 1:23

In this opening day of our devotional, we reflect on the profound mystery of "Emmanuel"—God with us. The incarnation is the heart of the Christmas story, a reminder that God's love is not distant but intimately present. As we navigate our daily lives, we are called to recognise this presence and reflect it through our actions.

God chose to dwell among us in vulnerability, showing us that true love takes risks. As we light the candle of love, we are reminded that our journey through Advent is one of active waiting and loving service.

- How can you become aware of God's presence in your day-to-day life?
- In what ways can you reflect God's love to those around you?
- What risks might you take to demonstrate love this week?
- Pray for the courage to embrace God's call.
- Ask God to show you ways to express love in action.

### Day 2 Isaiah 7:14

The promise given through Isaiah reminds us that God's love has always been at work in history. As we think about King Ahaz's situation, we recognise our own moments of fear and uncertainty. Yet, God offers a sign, a promise of Emmanuel—God with us, to reassure and comfort us.

This divine love is enduring and transformative. It invites us to trust

that even in our darkest moments, God's loving presence is near. As we look forward to Christmas, let us cultivate a trust that overcomes fear.

- Reflect on a time when you experienced God's comfort in a difficult situation.
- How can you be a sign of God's love to someone in need?
- What areas of your life do you need to trust God more fully?
- Pray for a trusting heart that overcomes fear.
- Ask God to use you as a comfort to others.
- 

### Day 3 Romans 1:3-4

Paul's message to the Romans emphasises that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of God's promises. The incarnation is a tangible sign of God's faithfulness, showing us that love is active and powerful.

As we reflect on this truth, may we be inspired to let love take form in our lives, impacting our actions and interactions. God's love calls us to be faithful witnesses in a world longing for hope and peace.

- How does knowing Christ is the fulfilment of God's promises impact your faith?
- In what ways can your life reflect divine love in action?
- Think of a practical step you can take to be a bearer of hope.
- Pray for the strength to embody God's love in your community.
- Ask God for guidance in becoming a beacon of hope and peace.

### Day 4 Psalm 80

The cry of the Psalmist, "Show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved," captures the earnest longing of all creation for God's redeeming love. In Advent, we share in this longing as we celebrate the coming of our Saviour.

This anticipation is active; it's a call to live out God's love in practical ways. Just as the Psalmist calls out for salvation, we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus, bringing light to the world around us.

- How does the imagery of light help you understand God's presence?
- Where do you see a need for God's light in your community?
- What specific actions can you take to bring light to others?
- Pray for opportunities to share God's light.
- Ask God to illuminate areas in your life that need His love.

### Day 5 John 20:28

The story of Thomas is one of moving from doubt to faith, reminding us that God's love meets us in our questions and calls us into deeper trust. Thomas's declaration, "My Lord and my God!" is a profound expression of faith spurred by encountering the risen Christ.

As we reflect on Thomas's journey, let us consider how our own doubts can lead us to a deeper understanding of God's love and presence. In embracing faith, we find ourselves propelled into service and the joy of living out Christ's call.

- In what areas do you struggle with doubt?
- How can your questions draw you closer to God?
- What steps can you take to strengthen your faith in action?
- Pray for assurance and guidance in your journey of faith.
- Ask God to turn your doubts into opportunities for growth.

# End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew (St Paul's Press)

Rev Dr Andrew McGowan: Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>

David Adams, Glimpses of Glory, Year A

The following authors as featured at The Worship Cloud

[www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com)

N. T. Wright,

Jane Williams,

P James Woodward,

Paula Gooder

Mark Pryce,

David Perry

Inspired by the many of the Great Abrahamic faiths seeking the indwelling "tabernacled" presence of God-with-us, the Light that shines in the darkness, a light that no darkness can vanquish.

## Brabarlung Totem

This is produced on  
GunaiKurnai Country and  
our respects are made to  
the First Nations people  
everywhere.

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