

FROM ADVENT

TO HARVEST

Resources for worship
in a complex world

Mark Geldard



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*To Di
and our family*

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Introduction

This book is a collection of resources for use in worship throughout the year. It incorporates drama, various forms of visual interpretation, reflective readings, stories and music. Some of the items could be used in place of a sermon. Other items offer a programme for a whole service. In terms of the range of themes covered within the book, the Contents pages probably speak for themselves. Thus the primary focus in this introductory section is on practical matters.

The first point that I want to make here is that the resources in the book are all relatively simple to use. If you don't possess some of the skills needed to make use of an individual item – for example, particular IT skills – then it is pretty likely that somebody in your congregation will.

There are a number of specific practical matters that it might be helpful to touch on at this point.

USE OF SPACE

In putting these materials together, I have tried to be conscious of the varied character of church architecture. One or two of the dramas – particularly, perhaps, 'Christmas and Epiphany tableau' and 'Palm Sunday procession' – might require a full creative use of the varied spaces available to you: choir stalls, chancel steps, pulpit, lectern, aisles (or the comparable areas in less traditional or non-Anglican church buildings). However, if you are struggling for space, you will find that these items can accommodate some reduction in scale.

POWERPOINT

Four of the items in this book make use of PowerPoint presentations: 'Advent revisited', 'Upside-down people' Dramas 1 and 2, 'Your kingdom come' and 'The problem of suffering'. You will find the four presentations – fully prepared – on the website that accompanies the book. You just need to go to <www.advent2harvest.co.uk> and download the relevant resource. The website has been developed and will be maintained by the author and a specialist team in order to provide additional material for those using the book.

SIMULTANEOUS TEXT

If you are using 'Christmas: One of us', 'Pentecost: The Spirit of Jesus' or 'Harvest: A twenty-first-century celebration', you might like to consider supporting the *spoken word* through simultaneously displaying the text on a screen. You have the publisher's permission to scan the text for this purpose. However, please note that this permission is restricted to these three items.

HANDOUTS

In some worship contexts, it is, I feel, more appropriate to hand out leaflets containing key elements of a script than to display these on a screen. To facilitate this, you have permission to photocopy:

- the personal stories in 'Good Friday meditation: To the foot of the cross'
- the text of 'Complex lives'.

COPIES

In the case of some items, several people need to have a copy of the script. In this respect, you have the publisher's permission to make a reasonable number of copies of 'Advent revisited', 'The Pharisee and the tax collector', 'Palm Sunday procession', 'Pentecost: The Spirit of Jesus', 'Harvest: A twenty-first-century celebration', 'Upside-down people' Dramas 1 and 2 and 'Gazumped!'

MUSIC: HYMNS, SONGS, BACKGROUND MUSIC ...

I make no claims to be an expert in musical matters. From time to time, I have suggested particular items of music but you might well have better ideas of your own. However, I do believe that we need to be adventurous in making selections of music that are both inspirational and inclusive – embracing the traditional and the contemporary, the classical and the popular.

VOICES

There is sometimes a question about whether it is best to use one voice or more than one in the delivery of Bible readings, reflective readings, narration, etc. There are arguments on both sides here. Using a number of voices certainly helps to maintain freshness. But, equally, the use of a single voice can sometimes facilitate continuity of emphasis and meaning.

I have made occasional specific suggestions in cases where I believe there are particular benefits to be had from deploying more than one 'reader'.

I have greatly enjoyed developing resources of this form in my own ministry – among fairly typical Anglican congregations made up of a broad mix of people.

Perhaps one of the greatest joys of using this type of material is the way in which it provides so many opportunities for members of the congregation to harness their own particular creativity, skills and enthusiasms – in areas such as IT, photography, music, organization and drama.

Part I

SEASONAL MATERIAL

ADVENT REVISITED

INTRODUCTION

'Advent revisited' starts with an exploration of the uniqueness of the human story and proceeds to consider what it means for this story to have *an outcome*. It brings together reflective readings and photographic images; it could be used for a meditation during the early part of Advent – or perhaps as a reflective sermon.

PREPARATION

Photographic images: to complement and interpret the text

This item includes a PowerPoint presentation. To download the fully prepared presentation, please go to <www.advent2harvest.co.uk> (see page 1 above). The contents are set out below.

- Image 1 teenagers in a classroom
- Image 2 somebody using a microscope in a laboratory
- Image 3 endless rows of books in a major library
- Image 4 a person operating a computer
- Image 5 a colourful embroidery
- Image 6 handmade furniture
- Image 7 composite image – a satellite in orbit and a spectacular bridge
- Image 8 composite image – musician, film star, writer
- Image 9 photographs depicting a range of human emotions
- Image 10 children playing
- Image 11 a couple embracing
- Image 12 work colleagues in a meeting
- Image 13 composite image – Houses of Parliament, the International Red Cross
- Image 14 a slide with the following words arranged on it: truth-telling, bullying, euthanasia, justice, marriage, gossip, taxation . . .
- Image 15 the sea
- Image 16 Stonehenge
- Image 17 worship in a distinctive tradition
- Image 18 firefighters of 9/11

SEASONAL MATERIAL

Image 19 composite image – made up of a selection from Images 1–18

Image 20 composite image – as 19: a further selection

Image 21 a cereal crop ready to be harvested

Image 22 a portrait of a 'lived-in' face.

Reflections

It would probably be helpful to have at least two readers.

You might like to display the passage of Scripture, the meditative prayer and the closing response (all in Reflection 3) on the screen. You have the publisher's permission to do this. These three portions of the text, and the short medley of music that falls halfway through Reflection 1, are all included in the PowerPoint presentation on the website that accompanies the book.

Music

You could also consider providing background music for the two periods of personal reflection.

ADVENT REVISITED

REFLECTION I

Reader 1 Think, for a moment, about people
... about humanity, humankind.
Consider the ways in which we live ... the things we do,
our particular qualities and attributes.
Consider, for example, our capacity to think ... to learn ... to discover
... and to accumulate knowledge.

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

Consider our many forms of creativity ... including our technology.

Image 5

Image 6

Image 7

Image 8

(A very short medley of two or three different styles of music could be played at this point.)

Or, reflect on the character of human emotions ...
their complexity, their range ...
their delicacy ... and their ferocity.

Image 9

Think about the character of human relationships ...
their diversity ...
their depth ... and their subtlety.

Image 10

Image 11

Image 12

Image 13

Think about our capacity for moral life

Image 14

... and for spiritual awareness.

SEASONAL MATERIAL

Image 15

Image 16

Image 17

Or, reflect on our potential for the most extraordinary altruism, self-sacrifice, heroism.

Image 18

Pause for personal reflection (music)

REFLECTION 2

Image 19

Reader 2 When we reflect in all these different ways about people ...
 about the ways in which we think ...
 about the character of our feelings,
 about what we do ... and what we make
 ... we cannot but be struck by the uniqueness of humankind.
 No wonder the psalmist declares that the human being is little less than a god.¹

It is true that we, the members of the human race, often abuse our freedom
 – sometimes in the most terrible of ways.
 It is also true that, for a multitude of reasons, many of us live significantly below our
 full potential.
 And daily life is full of struggles and complications.

Yet there remains something truly compelling about humanity.

Image 20

There is a distinctiveness about the people of the earth.
 We possess qualities and capabilities far, far beyond those possessed by any other creatures.
 Intellectually, emotionally, socially, artistically – we stand apart.
 In respect of our moral and spiritual awareness – we stand apart.
 There are no other species like us.
 None that even come close to us.
 To the eye of faith,
 our distinctiveness reflects a unique gift in creation,
 a unique endowment
 ... the very image of God within us.

Brief pause

Reader 1 In our understanding of the human race, we should not pitch faith against science.
 Faith and science are not enemies.
 Science explains some of the processes that have helped to shape human
 development ...
 whereas faith tells us about God's creative desire.
 Faith tells us *why* there is a creature that has developed such a remarkable life.
 Faith sees a creature capable of sharing in the work of creation.
 Faith sees a creature capable of responding to its Creator.²

Pause for personal reflection (music)

REFLECTION 3

Image 20 (continues)

Reader 2 A key dimension of Christian teaching is that humankind is distinctive ... special ... the crown of creation.³

And thus the story of humankind is a unique story.

It is the story of a creature exercising freedom

– the freedom to choose

... between different ways of living

... between right and wrong.

It is, as we have seen, an unparalleled story of

creativity and skills,

of emotional depth and social development,

and of spirituality.

But it is also a story with

its shame ... and destructiveness

... and God hung on a human cross.

Brief pause

Image 21

The Christian faith also teaches us that this story has an outcome.

The writers of the New Testament actually use a variety of images and concepts to portray the outcome of the human story. But one of the themes that weaves its way through these various strands is that of completion.⁴

Christ's work will come to fruition ...

God will bring an order of fulfilment and wholeness out of the fractures, highs and lows, strivings and fragilities of this present life.

There is much in this aspect of Christian teaching that is not easy to understand and interpret.

And our imaginations strain and struggle to cope with ideas that are, by their very nature, beyond anything that we have ever experienced.

Image 22

But Christian faith invites us to live in confident hope ...

including the hope that our own lives will ultimately come to completeness.

This vision of 'life beyond this life' is expressed in these verses from the book of Jude in the New Testament. You might like to reflect on them for a moment.⁵

Display verses on screen – see Introduction.

Reader 1 To him who is able to keep us from falling,
and to present us
faultless ...
and joyful
to the one God, our Saviour;
be glory and majesty,
now and for ever.
Amen.

Brief pause for thought

Consider also the words of this meditative prayer:

Display prayer on screen:

Reader 2 And then, Lord,
all that I truly am ...
all that makes me the real me ...
all that you have already wrought in me ...
all that is the best in me
will be brought to fulfilment
and I will, at last, be whole.

Brief pause for thought

We draw towards a conclusion with a centuries-old prayer that is based on words of St Augustine.

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in you.
Teach us to offer ourselves to your service,
that here we may have your peace,
and in the world to come may see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.⁶

Closing response (screen)

Yours, Lord, is the power to create
... and to complete.

All Praise to you, O Lord.

CHRISTMAS AND EPIPHANY TABLEAU

INTRODUCTION

The first objective of the tableau is to show how the love of Jesus embraced people of every kind – whatever their social, political or racial background and whatever their personal circumstances. In order to achieve this objective, the tableau utilizes two dramatic devices.

- 1 The tableau scene ultimately takes us beyond the visits of the shepherds and the wise men to incorporate other individuals who came face to face with Jesus during his earthly life.
- 2 It highlights the social diversity of the people with whom Jesus engaged by putting them into contemporary dress.

The second objective of the tableau is to encourage members of the congregation to consider the different ways in which God still comes to us today.

The tableau can stand alone but here I have set it in the context of a simple service.

PREPARATION

Music

The occasion provides a number of opportunities for inspirational music: congregational carols, choir, music group, organ, CD ...

I have made one or two suggestions in the text.

The tableau

The scene for the tableau is a contemporary space of a functional character – for example, a storeroom or an outhouse. Some simple artefacts should suffice to create this impression – stacked boxes or crates, bucket and mops ...

The following characters are suggested:

Mary: a young woman, looking pale and tired

Joseph: mid twenties, wearing, for example, a BT bib

A local woman: helping Mary

A middle-aged man looking on: perhaps the owner of the building where Jesus has been born.

First visitors: four or five low-paid shift workers – rough and ready in both appearance and demeanour. The group could include men and women.

Scholars: suggestions –

An elderly man – a dusty academic carrying a briefcase

A young woman – elegant, modern, carrying a laptop or a tablet

An older woman (power-dresser) or dapper middle-aged man.

Characters from Jesus' adult life:

A soldier in uniform, and with an air of composure, authority

A clergyman or clergywoman – wearing suit and clerical collar

The 'woman of ill repute' in Luke 7.36ff. Her appearance (clothing, hairstyle ...) obviously needs to be thought through with both imagination and sensitivity.

An ill or frail person – poor, dishevelled

An entrepreneur – wealthy, confident.

Two people who will enter the tableau from their seats in the congregation. They will represent the congregation in the tableau.

You will also need a reader/narrator.

Use of space

If you are working in the context of traditional architecture, you will obviously need to make creative use of the choir stalls, chancel steps and areas around the pulpit and lectern. However, if space is very limited, it is possible to make a small reduction in the number of characters.

Joseph, the local woman and the owner enter the tableau from the front of the church. All the other participants enter through the congregation.

Once within the tableau, the characters focus on the Christ Child and maintain a standing or sitting position. The one exception is at the very outset when some actions are quite a useful way of setting the scene.

