

- 1 John 3.1-8 New birth in the Spirit
 - 2 1 Peter 1.3-9 New birth into a living hope
 - 3 John 16.20-24 The pains of labour turn into joy
 - 4 Romans 8.22-27 Creation groans in labour with eager longing
 - 5 Luke 2.1-7 The birth of Jesus
 - 6 2 Corinthians 5.1-9 What is mortal is swallowed up by life
 - 7 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11 The Lord will come like a thief in the night
- Gracious God, renew us in your service, that with Mary we may rejoice in your salvation, and in all things embrace your will.**

4. NEW BEGINNING

The Christmas/New Year period is traditionally associated with holidays, celebration, love-joy-peace and a new beginning. Advent ends with Christmas but as we have seen, it's not the end. It's just the beginning. With God it is never too late for a new start. Repentance is a bit like a New Year's resolution in that it allows us to put the past behind us, to pick ourselves up and to take the first step into the rest of our lives. "God is infinite in mercy" we are told as we approach confession. A new beginning is always possible. Now the pregnancy is almost over and the birth will soon be announced, heralding a new way of living and of being and a new relationship with God. Songwriter Elizabeth Smith wrote "we must let God change us, for new life starts now." Advent gives us an opportunity for that change to begin in us, for God's love, joy and peace to take root in us, so that we may be ready to celebrate. And when our lives on earth are over, may we be steadfast in hope, and ready for the next new beginning.

- 1 Isaiah 43.18-21 I am about to do a new thing
 - 2 Ezekiel 36.26-28 A new heart and a new spirit
 - 3 John 1.6-14, 16 The word became flesh and dwelt among us
 - 4 1 Corinthians 11.23-26 A new covenant
 - 5 John 13.31-35 A new commandment
 - 6 2 Corinthians 5.16-21 A new creation
 - 7 Revelation 21.1-7 A new heaven and a new earth
- Gracious God, keep our hearts watchful in holiness, and bring to perfection the good you have begun in us.**



Advent Prayer Leaflet 2016

Dear Friends,

When our first son was born after many hours of labour, I said to my doctor "Thank goodness that's over!" To which he replied, "It's not over. It's just beginning." The same is true for the season of Advent. We spend weeks anticipating and preparing for the birth of the Christ child, and after our Christmas Day celebrations we might be inclined to feel glad that it's all over. But it's not. It's just the beginning. While Easter Day might be the day we traditionally associate with a new beginning, it really all began when God intervened in human history, sending the Angel Gabriel to Mary and announcing that God's Word was to become flesh and dwell among us.

Christmas then leads us into New Year's celebrations a week later, a time when we traditionally resolve to improve ourselves and make a new start. However, the Church's New Year begins on the First Sunday of Advent and it is then that we are offered the opportunity to prepare ourselves, "casting away the works of darkness" and being renewed in faith and hope.

In this Advent Prayer leaflet I will reflect on Conception - the beginning point of new life. We will then consider Pregnancy and the quickening of God's Holy Spirit, followed by Birth which is the day by which our lives are measured. The final week will be New Beginning.

May this Advent see you renewed in body, mind and spirit. Sue



Daily Prayer

Lord our God,
 When we see only endings, show us new beginnings.
 When we see only death, show us new life and new possibilities.
 Renew us in faith and hope as we anticipate the birth of your Son,
 bringing to birth in us your love, joy and peace,
 that we might share in life everlasting. **Amen.**

1. CONCEPTION

While Mary was quite clear about the time when Jesus' conception took place, most women don't know the exact day when they conceive. It could be weeks later before they realize what has happened. Likewise, we often don't know the exact moment God began working in our lives to bring His purposes to bear. It can be weeks, months or even years later that we look back and marvel at what God has been doing and what has been brought to birth in us. God needs a willingness and an openness on our part for God's life to begin in us. Unfortunately, we are not always willing or open. The Scriptures point to our tendency to conceive evil - a conception that is not life-giving but life-denying. God can conceive new life in situations where there seems to be no hope or no possibility - in the virgin, the woman who is barren or past child-bearing years. God can also conceive new life in men. God can conceive new life in all of us, if only we will allow it.

1. *Genesis 17.15-22 God promises that Sarah will conceive*
2. *Hebrews 11.8-12 Sarah conceives by faith*
3. *Deuteronomy 32.15-18 Jacob forgot the God who gave him birth*
4. *Psalms 139.13-16 You knit me together in my mother's womb*
5. *Jeremiah 29.10-14 I will fulfil to you my promise*
6. *1 Corinthians 2.6-10 What God has prepared for those who love him*
7. *Luke 1.26-38 Mary conceives by the Angel Gabriel*

Lord, we praise you that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

May we welcome Christ to rule our thoughts and claim our love.

2. PREGNANCY

Pregnancy, like Advent, is a time of preparation and anticipation. During pregnancy women's bodies are transformed as new life grows within. During Advent we also seek to be transformed - a transformation of heart, mind and will as we prepare to welcome the Christ child. Such transformation is very much God's doing and is as miraculous as the progress of pregnancy. Mary Sumner prayed that every life she touched in each day might be "quickened" by God's Spirit. Quickening refers to the first time a baby's movement is felt in

the womb. The stirring of the Spirit indicates that God is working in our lives. When a woman becomes pregnant it is not only her body that undergoes changes. Her focus changes from herself to her unborn child whose welfare depends upon her own. Relationships also change in that husbands, wives or partners become parents with joint responsibilities. This requires a new spirit of cooperation. During Advent we seek this Spirit of partnership and cooperation with God's purposes as God transforms us spiritually into His holy people.

1. *Genesis 21.1-7 God conceives his purposes in impossible situations*
2. *Psalms 113 God turns the barren woman into a joyous mother*
3. *Ecclesiastes 11.5-6 We do not know the work of God*
4. *Mark 1.1-8 Preparation for Christ's coming*
5. *Ephesians 2.4-10 We were dead but God made us alive again*
6. *Romans 12.1-2 Be transformed by the renewing of your minds*
7. *Luke 1.39-45 Elizabeth's child leaps for joy in her womb*

Lord God, we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, transforming us into your people. May we greet with joy the Christ who comes to us.

3. BIRTH

While our birthday may not mark the beginning of life, it is the day by which our years on earth are counted. In some ways death and birth go together. Sometimes even similar language is used. "Are you still here?" we ask a heavily pregnant friend. "Is he/she still with us?" we ask of one near death. The questions imply a change. The cutting of the umbilical cord - the source of life for an unborn child - signifies a new way of living and of being. Death cuts us off from earthly life and signifies the beginning of life in eternity. The amazing thing is that just as a baby is living life on earth before the actual moment of birth, so we are living eternal life on earth before the actual moment of death. We usually do not know the exact day a baby will arrive or the hour of our death. As we prepare for the coming of Christ during Advent, we are warned that we do not know the day or the hour when we will meet our Lord and we are called to be ready: to repent, to renew hope and trust, to seek justice and to open our eyes to the dawning of God's kingdom and our ears to hear God's will. Then we will be ready.