



I Was a Stranger, and You Welcomed Me **An Advent Prayer Vigil for All Seeking Refuge and Home**

A prayer vigil offered by Episcopal Migration Ministries
episcopalmigrationministries.org/advent

OFFICIANT: Jesus said: “Come, you that are blessed by God, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” (*Matthew 25:34-35*)

ALL: **We hold up in prayer the eighty million forcibly displaced persons in the world today.**

OFFICIANT: Jesus said: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (*Matthew 11:28-30*)

ALL: **We hold up in prayer all of those who suffer due to the pandemic and its effects. We hold up in prayer our families, friends, and neighbors, our communities, healthcare workers, frontline workers, and decisionmakers, and all those whom we do not know but who are beloved by God.**

OFFICIANT: We gather during a pandemic time. Millions have lost livelihoods and loved ones. Social safety nets have stretched beyond breaking and have been shown to be woefully inadequate. Millions have been left hungry and homeless, anxious and insecure. For these our kindred, for our families, for our communities, and for ourselves, let us pray to the Lord.

INTERCESSIONS DURING THIS PANDEMIC TIME¹

OFFICIANT: For all who are affected by coronavirus, through illness or isolation or anxiety,

¹ Adapted from The Church of England, <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-parishes/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer>

that they may find relief and recovery:
Lord, hear us,

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.

OFFICIANT: For those who are guiding our nation at this time,
and shaping national policies,
that they may make wise decisions:
Lord, hear us,

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.

OFFICIANT: For doctors, nurses, and medical researchers,
that through their skill and insights
many will be restored to health:
Lord, hear us,

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.

OFFICIANT: For the vulnerable and the fearful,
for the gravely ill and the dying,
that they may know your comfort and peace:
Lord, hear us,

ALL: Lord, graciously hear us.

OFFICIANT: We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.
Merciful Father,

**ALL: Accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

OFFICIANT: We know that the extreme societal and economic stresses caused by the pandemic
have most gravely impacted those on the margins, including those fleeing for their lives,
those seeking protection and safety. It is for those siblings that we gather and pray to-
day. We know that our own salvation story is the narrative of a refugee family who was
refused shelter, a babe born to family without a home, forced to flee to another coun-
try.

**ALL: With God's help may we welcome the stranger, that all people
may know the comfort of a home, the benefit of an education, the
dignity of a job, safety, security, and the love of community.**

A MEDITATION²

- READER 1:** When the world was dark and the city was quiet, - you came. You crept in beside us. And no one knew. Only the few who dared to believe that God might do something different. Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?
- READER 2:** Will you come into the darkness of tonight's world; not the friendly darkness as when sleep rescues us from tiredness, but the fearful darkness, in which people have stopped believing - that violence will end - or that food will come - or that depression will cease - or that anyone cares. Will you come into that darkness and do something different to relieve your people of the heaviness of death and despair?
- READER 3:** Will you come into the quietness of this city, not the friendly quietness as when lovers hold hands, but the fearful silence - when the phone has not rung, - or it has, and brought tragic news, - the letter has not come, - or it has and said what was most feared, - the test results are in and the doctor's face says it all?
- READER 4:** Will you come into that darkness and do something different, not to distract, but to embrace your people? And will you come into the dark corners and the quiet places of our lives?
- READER 5:** We ask this not because we are guilt-ridden or, maybe we are, but we seek some kind of relief, impossible during the raw and brutal depths of despair and grief. We ask this because the peace that our lives long for depends on us, once again, being as open and vulnerable to you as you were to us, when you came, wearing no more than diapers, and trusting human hands to hold their maker.
- READER 6:** When the world was dark, and the city was quiet - you came. You crept in beside us. Do the same this season, Lord.

CONFESSION

- OFFICIANT:** Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.
- ALL:** **Loving and all-knowing God, we humbly ask mercy for the times we fail to offer hospitality to those in our world who suffer injustice, oppression, and poverty, and for the times we lack courage to address the root causes of these systems; for the times we give in to despair and resignation when confronted with the injustice of our world; for the times we allow our fears to triumph over the call to solidarity. We confess these sins and ask for your forgiveness. Open our hearts to hear the cries of your suffering people that we may be your hands, your heart, and the means by which your healing love is made manifest in the world. Amen.**
- OFFICIANT:** May God hear our plea, embrace our remorse, soften our stiff hearts, forgive us with God's unending mercy, and help us to love as God loves.

READINGS

² The Meditation is adapted from *Cloth for the Cradle*, © 1997 WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G51 3UU, Scotland. During the coronavirus pandemic, the Iona Community is allowing churches to use its liturgies for online streaming with proper attribution. Credit the source and include "Used with permission." More information: <https://iona.org.uk/2020/03/24/use-of-iona-community-liturgic-material-during-the-corona-virus-out-break/>

READER 7: *A reading from the prophet Isaiah. (40:28-31)*

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

OFFICIANT & PEOPLE: *A Song of Our True Nature (Julian of Norwich)*

Christ revealed our frailty and our falling,
our trespasses and our humiliations.
Christ also revealed his blessed power,
his blessed wisdom and love.
He protects us as tenderly and
as sweetly when we are in greatest need;
he raises us in spirit and turns everything
to glory and joy without ending.
God is the ground and the substance,
the very essence of nature;
God is the true father and mother of natures.
We are all bound to God by nature,
and we are all bound to God by grace.
And this grace is for all the world,
because it is our precious mother, Christ.
For this fair nature was prepared by Christ
for the honor and nobility of all,
and for the joy and bliss of salvation.

READER 8: *A reading from the first chapter of the Gospel according to John.*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through God, and without God not one thing came into being. What has come into being in God was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. She was in the world, and the world came into being through her; yet the world did not know her. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only child, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

REFLECTION

READER 1: It's the most wonderful time of the year!

READER 2: Only it's not.
Not for everyone.
Not for those for whom violence has destroyed their home.
Not when you have had to flee with only the clothes on your back.
Not when you have had to leave your country and live on the run.
Not when your body is deprived of food and clean water.
Not when you feel all alone even in a crowd.

Not when you are not sure where you will sleep this night.
Not when you are racked with fear for your safety, when the risk of rape or theft or death reside in every moment of life.

- READER 3:** It's the most wonderful time of the year?
- READER 4:** No, it's not. For many the effort to smile and say Merry Christmas holds a grief that surpasses all grief, the loss of family, home, friends and country.
- READER 5:** It's the most wonderful time of the year.
- READER 6:** Only it's not.
Not for families separated.
Not for people caged in detention where COVID-19 rages.
Not for asylum seekers turned away at the border.
Not for refugees seeing another year pass without hope.
Not for those living in fear in our country – of xenophobic violence, of deportation, of their Temporary Protected Status being terminated, of their asylum claim being denied, of their family never being able to join them.
- READER 7:** In truth, it has never been the most wonderful time of the year. Certainly not in the days surrounding that first Christmas so long ago. The story of the birth of Jesus is not to be told with a jolly voice and a merry ho-ho-ho. It is the story of a teenage girl, pregnant with a child that is not her husband's.
- READER 8:** It is the story of a child born in a dirty animal stall.
- READER 1:** It is the story of a family of refugees who had to flee their homeland so that their child would not be killed.
- READER 2:** It is the story of one sent into the world in peace who was condemned to death.
- READER 3:** It is the story of a light sent to shine in the darkness, which the world snuffed out.
- READER 4:** It is the story of God's never-ending, self-giving mercy which was rejected and condemned.
- READER 5:** In the great work the Messiah, Handel quotes the prophet Isaiah, proclaiming that Jesus was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." One great theologian reminds us that we cannot come to the manger without acknowledging that it lies in the shadow of the cross.
- READER 6:** It is not the most wonderful time of the year.
- READER 7:** Only it is!.....It is:
If we forget about the tinsel and the trees.
If we forget about the holly jolly tidings.
- READER 8:** If we forget about the presents and the ornaments and the trappings.
And remember.

READER 1: Remember the story. Mary was alone and afraid.
But God was with her and exalted her among women.

READER 2: Joseph was disgraced. But God revealed in Joseph's cause for disgrace
God's plan to save the world.

READER 3: The world was in darkness. But God sent the light of life to shine.

READER 4: The lowly were imprisoned. But Jesus set them free.

READER 5: The blind wandered aimlessly. But Christ gave them eyes to see.

READER 6: The lame were rejected. But through the Holy One they were made to
leap and dance.

READER 7: The deaf were confined to the silence. But the song of life unstopped
their ears.

READER 8: The sorrowful grieved. But God wipes away our tears.

ALL: **We were alone. But in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God is with us.**

OFFICIANT: The people rejected God.

ALL: **But God embraces us.**

OFFICIANT: The world crucified Christ.

ALL: **But God would not allow that to be the last word, and gave us the sure hope
of the resurrection. With God's help we can welcome the stranger and be a
sign of new life to the broken and suffering.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

OFFICIANT: In the spirit of this season let us ask God for the wisdom to hear, the courage to
respond, and compassion to help displaced persons around the world...God, hear our
prayer,

ALL: **And in your mercy, answer.**

OFFICIANT: For those who are victims of violence, terrorism, famine, poverty, and
abuse...God, hear our prayer.

ALL: **And in your mercy, answer.**

OFFICIANT: For those who have died...God, hear our prayer.

ALL: **And in your mercy, answer.**

OFFICIANT: For those who are homeless, may they find housing, for those who are without food or
clothing, may they be tended to, for those who have lost everything, may they
find solace in your presence...God, hear our prayer.

ALL: **And in your mercy, answer.**

OFFICIANT: For the peace proclaimed by Christ, for our willingness and our ability to be the hands of Christ healing the brokenness of this world...God, hear our prayer.

ALL: **And in your mercy, answer.**

OFFICIANT: God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Advent season, the blessing we ask in your holy name, saying:

ALL: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

CANDLE LIGHTING

Here all are invited to pause and observe a moment of silence. During this time, individual prayers and petitions may be offered, and all gathered are invited to light a candle either at home in their own spaces or in the shared space where the group may be gathered. After a time of silence is observed, the officiant continues.

CLOSING PRAYERS

OFFICIANT: Let us pray.

Loving God, open our eyes that we may see the face of the infant Jesus in the face of refugees; open our ears that we may hear people's cries for justice and offer food, clothing, and shelter to those who have nothing; open our hearts that we may welcome the stranger as Emmanuel, as God come near. Help us to bring love, hope and faith where they are needed. Let us not be afraid to protect the weak or to defend the poor. May we do all this with your help.

ALL: **Amen.**

OFFICIANT: Go forth into the world to spread the light and peace of Christ.

ALL: **Thanks be to God.**

Episcopal Migration Ministries is the refugee and immigration ministry of The Episcopal Church, and is one of nine national agencies responsible for resettling refugees in the United States in partnership with the U.S. government. In addition to its long-standing work in refugee resettlement ministry, Episcopal Migration Ministries is The Episcopal Church's convening place for collaboration, education, and information-sharing on migration. To directly support EMM and its life-changing work, visit www.episcopalmigrationministries.org/give or text 'EMMADVENT' to 41444 (standard messaging and data may rates apply).