

INCARNATION

Reflections on John's Gospel and the Book of Revelation for Advent

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A view of the Christ Pantocrator mosaic depicting Jesus in the dome above the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

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Introduction

Traditionally Advent is the season when we reflect on the Incarnation of Christ and the Second Coming. It can feel hard to hold these two themes together, particularly when we focus our thoughts about the Incarnation just on the stories around Jesus' conception and birth. The Incarnation however did not end at Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, it remained the reality of Jesus' life on earth, as recounted in the Gospels, is fundamental to our understanding of His death and resurrection and is the ongoing permanent reality in the life of the risen ascended Christ. In this way too the nature of Christ should be very much part of how we reflect on the coming of the Kingdom of God.

In this series of four reflections, I take as a starting point passages from John's Gospel and the Book of Revelation, reflecting in turn on Jesus' birth, life on earth, death and resurrection and the reality of our present life now, as we live in, and yet wait for, the Kingdom of God. Our understanding of the Incarnation also informs our understanding of how we engage with God's creation and I have woven reflections on this into each section. Each reflection has some study questions, a simple meditation and an ending prayer, and can be used for personal reflection, or within a group. May God bless you in this season of Advent.

Session I God Entering Creation

Read John I. 1-14

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

There are sentences in Scripture so familiar that they almost stop meaning anything. John’s opening line is one of them. We think we know what it says. We have heard them in dark churches on Christmas Eve, wrapped in candlelight and wonder. Yet if we let them speak again, if we really let them reverberate within us, they tell of something far greater than a story about a baby in a manger. The words tell of God crossing an infinite divide.

Before there was anything, there was God. Not one thing existed that did not depend on that divine Word speaking it into being. Creation itself is the overflowing generosity of God, the music that begins when the Word is spoken. John however goes on to say something that no human imagination could invent: That the same Word who made all things *has entered what he made*.

The Word became flesh. Not as an idea, or a radiant spirit, but as a particular human being in a particular place and time. At that instant, the uncreated enters the created. Eternity touches time. The One who is the source of all being now breathes air, feels gravity, and will one day taste death. Nothing in all of creation could make that happen. Only love could.

This is not God dissolving into the world, nor the world becoming divine. Creator and creation remain distinct, yet now they are joined in one person. That joining does not undo creation; it fulfils it. The Incarnation is the moment when God’s purpose for the world begins to unfold in human form. The Word through whom all things were made comes within them for their healing and redemption.

At the heart of Christian faith is this miracle of union without confusion. The infinite chooses finitude. The maker of galaxies consents to a human heartbeat. The holy presence that once filled the temple now fills a human life. It is the still point where heaven’s light touches earth and does not burn it up.

If we pause long enough, we may feel the shock of it again. God does not enter creation to escape it later, but to reclaim it from within. The Incarnation is not a detour in history, rather it is at the very heart of it. In that moment, the Creator's own life is bound forever to the life of the world. The Word who spoke light into being now shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

To believe this is to stand in awe. The mystery of God entering creation is not something to solve, but to worship. It is the still, blazing truth that the Maker of all things has chosen to dwell among us, and nothing in heaven or earth will ever be the same.

Questions for Reflection

1. The reflection speaks of "God crossing an infinite divide." What does this image reveal about the nature of the Incarnation and the character of God?
2. How does the distinction between Creator and creation and yet their perfect union in Christ, shape our understanding of both divinity and humanity?
3. The reflection says that in the Incarnation "Creator and creation remain distinct, yet now they are joined in one person." How does that distinction protect the mystery of both God and the world he has made?
4. What difference does it make to see the Incarnation not as a rescue plan after human failure, but as the centre and purpose of creation itself?
5. When you contemplate "the Maker of galaxies consenting to a human heartbeat," what response does that evoke in you (wonder, gratitude, humility, something else?) and how might that response shape your prayer or worship this week?

Led Meditation

Be still.

Let your breath settle.

Feel the ground steady beneath your feet.

Hear the Gospel:

“In the beginning was the Word... and the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

Keep a short silence.

The eternal Word enters time.

The Maker chooses a heartbeat.

Hold that moment before God.

Keep a short silence.

Offer what you carry today into that light:

a name to remember,

a place that needs healing,

a small thanks.

Keep a short silence.

Pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, Word made flesh,

draw near to us as you drew near to the world you made.

Teach us reverence,

fill us with your peace,

and let your light shine in our darkness.

Amen.

Final Prayer

Almighty God,

who in love crossed the infinite divide and made your dwelling among us,

grant that as we rejoice in the mystery of the Word made flesh,

we may live with reverence for your creation,

walk in the light that shines in the darkness,

and bear witness to the life of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Session 2 Christ in the World

Read John 1 10-12

If “the Word became flesh” is the doorway, John invites us to walk a little further now and watch how the Word lives among things that do not sparkle. Jars gather dust in a corner. A well waits in the heat. Bread is passed hand to hand. None of these claim divinity. All of these are ready for service. In the company of Jesus, creation keeps its own voice, yet it begins to speak more clearly about the One who made it.

We begin at Cana. Water is drawn, cups are filled, a village wedding is saved from embarrassment. John calls it a sign because it points beyond itself. Glory does not arrive by pulling people out of the feast, it comes by blessing something ordinary, something already on the table. The jars do their humble work. The guests taste goodness they did not expect. Here the world is not God, yet it becomes a faithful carrier of God’s generosity, creation becoming the theatre where the Giver delights to give.

Walk on to the well at noon. Jesus sits, tired and thirsty, and asks a woman for a drink. The one through whom all things were made needs water and then speaks of a spring that rises within those who receive him. The well remains a well and the bucket still creaks on the rope. Yet the woman discovers that the life which sustains creation is the life the Son shares with the Father, offered now to those in creation. The result is a village waking to Grace, and a woman who becomes its first preacher.

On a hillside the hunger of a crowd becomes a lesson in the Father’s care. Bread remains bread, fish remains fish, yet there is more at the end than at the start. Later Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” In this he raises our daily bread to its true meaning. Food becomes the place where dependence turns to gratitude and where sharing becomes the sign that there is enough in God. When bread is honoured, the Giver is honoured. When it is hoarded or wasted, both neighbour and Giver are slighted.

Jesus meets a man born blind. Stretching down to the earth he makes mud with his spit, and sends the man to wash. Soil, spittle, water, touch. Creation is not a backdrop for moral lessons. It is recruited into the work of God. Human life is restored in the one person of the Son, and the elements join the ministry as signs of the Creator’s care. The healing

does not bless suffering, and it does not call blindness good. It shows that this world is where God acts, and that healing can begin with whatever is at hand.

Listen to how Jesus teaches. “I am the light of the world.” “I am the good shepherd.” “I am the true vine.” These are pointers to ordinary experience so that the hearer can understand. Light that makes seeing possible. A shepherd whose care is not hired hands but heart. A vine whose life moves through branches and makes fruit. None of these images erase the difference between Creator and creature. They show how creaturely things can carry news of God without pretending to be God. They shape a people who live by receiving rather than by self-invention, who learn patience from pruning and courage from love that stays.

Finally let us remember a simple basin and towel. Before betrayals unfold, Jesus gets up from the table, ties a towel around himself, and washes his friends’ feet. Here the meaning of Christ’s life washes tired human feet. Power is redefined as service. If this is how the Son lives a human life, then dominion cannot mean squeezing the earth for gain. It means tending what is given, cleansing what is stained, restoring what is worn. The humility of Christ does not belittle creation. It frees creation to flourish under care that reflects the Father’s heart.

Hold these scenes together and a thread appears. In Jesus, the eternal Son unites a complete human nature to himself. Creator and creation remain distinct, yet in the one person of Christ they meet without confusion. That meeting does not turn fields and rivers into divinity, and it does not reduce them to scenery. It reveals a world capable of hosting God’s purposes. Water can carry joy, bread can carry life, touch can carry healing and a towel can carry love.

Jesus is pointing us to a way of living in the world that looks beyond it too. Christ knew the natural desire all creatures have for water; surely then we should value the purity of our rivers and oceans. And given he fed the hungry, it follows we should practise generosity and the discipline of enough. Given he opened the eyes of the blind, we then should set our hands to work that restores bodies and places to their dignity. And given he taught with vines, light, and shepherds, we should attend to land energy, and creatures with reverence that grows from worship.

Christ in the world does not make the world divine, rather He shows us how the world is beloved of God. To follow him is to learn the habit of being creatures who receive, give thanks, and offer back the gifts of creation for the life of our neighbours and to the praise of the Father.

Questions for Reflection

1. In the scenes from Cana, the well, the hillside and the basin and towel, what do you notice about the way creation is treated in the ministry of Jesus?
2. The reflection suggests that creation becomes “a faithful carrier of God’s generosity.” What examples from your own life or community show creation serving in this way?
3. Jesus often teaches using images from land and labour: light, shepherd, vine. How might these images shape the way we think about our responsibility toward the world God has made?
4. In the story of the man born blind, creation (soil, water, touch) becomes part of the healing. How might this change the way we understand God’s action in the everyday material world?
5. The reflection says that Christ’s humility “frees creation to flourish.” What might it look like for us to take up this pattern of humility in our homes, churches or local environment?
6. The reflection suggests that honouring daily bread honours God. How might this challenge modern habits of consumption, waste, or overuse of resources?
7. “Water can carry joy, bread can carry life, touch can carry healing and a towel can carry love.” Which of these resonates most with you, and why?
8. The reflection ends with a call to live “with reverence that grows from worship.” What practices or habits might help nurture that reverence in daily life?

Led Meditation

Be still.

Let your breathing settle.

Notice the world around you, the simple gifts that hold your life.

Think on Jesus' words:

"I am the light of the world... I am the bread of life... I am the true vine."

Keep a short silence.

Remember Christ standing among ordinary things
water drawn from a well,
bread shared on a hillside,
a towel wrapped around his waist.

Keep a short silence.

Offer to God one place in your life or community
where you long to see healing, and renewal,
or greater gentleness toward creation.

Keep a short silence.

Pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,

You walked the earth with grace;
teach us to honour the world you love.

Make our hands ready for service,
our hearts open to your light,
and our lives signs of your care for all you have made.
Amen.

Final Prayer

Almighty God,

whose Son Jesus Christ lived among us
and revealed your glory through the gifts of your creation,
grant that as we follow his way of compassion and service
we may honour the world you have made,
share generously the gifts we receive,
and walk in the light of the true Vine and Shepherd,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever. Amen.

Session 3

Of Cross, Empty Tomb and the Life of the World

Read John 19.16–30; John 20.1–18

By the time we reach the cross in John's Gospel, we have walked a long way with Jesus. We have seen him at weddings and wells, on hillsides and in homes. We have watched him touch and value water, bread and soil and speak of a life that does not end. Then the story narrows to a hill outside the city, to rough hewn wood and a carpenter's body nailed to it.

The Word through whom all things were made now hangs exposed under the sky He called into being. The hands that blessed children and broke bread for the hungry are pinned open. The feet that walked dusty roads in Galilee are held to the earth by rough nails hammered into a splintered stake. John tells us that Jesus is thirsty, that he gives his mother into the care of a friend, that he bows his head and gives up his spirit. Here is the Creator living the weakness of a creature, the Son who holds all things together entering the full weight of their breaking.

Countless people over the centuries have suffered terrible deaths, as those in the early church knew only too well. However with this man there is a difference. The one who suffers here is both fully human and fully divine. In his humanity he feels every stab of pain, tastes fear and abandonment, and truly dies. In his divinity he remains the eternal Son, the source of the life that sustains the very world in which he is killed. The cross is the meeting place where mortal flesh and eternal life are joined in one person, and death is allowed to do its worst to a life that God has made his own.

This scene is desolate and yet God's creation is still present. The cross is planted in the ground, wood bears the weight of the crucified, iron bites through skin and into bone and the air is thick with dust and sour wine. A garden lies nearby with a new tomb cut from rock and this will be the place where the redeeming drama takes place. The world God made is the crucible in which the Son goes to the depths, for the sake of all who share this fragile life.

Then comes the garden at dawn and whilst it is still dark, Mary comes with a heart full of sorrow and despair...and finds the stone moved. In that dark womb wrought from living rock, something has happened that no human being could have achieved. The body that was wrapped and laid out is no longer there. The same Jesus who was crucified stands and

speaks her name. He is still human, still bearing the marks of his death, yet he is no longer subject to it.

The risen Christ is not a ghost escaping the material world as if it were beneath him. He is the Word made flesh, now alive beyond the reach of decay. He speaks, He walks, He is mistaken for a gardener, He shows his wounds. He invites Thomas to touch and He eats. The human life he received from Mary is not cast aside but rather raised and made new. Yet it remains the life of this same Jesus. The union of divinity and humanity is not undone by death. It is revealed as stronger than death.

For us, this means that God has gone as far as it is possible to go into the depths of creaturely existence. In Christ, God has known from the inside what it is to be vulnerable, to suffer and to die. None of this changes who God is, but it changes how we see the God who meets us. We do not have a distant Maker watching the world unravel from above. We have a crucified and risen Lord who has carried our mortal life into the very heart of God's life.

This has meaning not just for human beings but for all creation. The one who dies and rises is the one through whom all things came to be. When he submits to death in his humanity, he enters the fate that hangs over every living thing, be that plant or bird, mountain or even the earth itself. When he stands alive in the garden, wounds still visible, he shows that death is no longer the final word over the world that the Father loves.

How this touches every stone and star remains Holy Mystery but through the Gospel story we catch glimpses of the deeper meaning. Through reflecting on that story we are invited to see our own lives, and the life of the earth, differently. Our sufferings are not trivial to God. The wounds of the world are not outside the concern of the One who bore wounds in his own flesh.

To live in these days since the cross and empty tomb is to live in a world where God has shared our mortality and overcome it in Christ. We still see graves, we still watch rivers polluted and forests felled, we still feel our own bodies fail. Yet we also know that the Son of God has taken human nature into death and brought it through to new life. That knowledge does not make sorrow disappear, but it does give us courage to stand in sorrow *without despair*, and to care for this aching creation as people who believe that *nothing in it is beyond the reach of Christ's love*.

Between the hill of crucifixion and the garden of resurrection, we are invited to stand with Mary in the half light, holding grief and wonder together. We listen for our own name spoken by the risen Lord, and we learn to recognise him in the most ordinary places: at a table, on a shoreline, in the breaking of bread, in the tending of a patch of ground. The one who passed through death for the life of the world and then ascended to be with the Father is still present in the world through His Spirit, and calls us to follow him with our bodies, our choices and our care for all that his Father has made.

Questions for Reflection

1. The reflection describes Jesus' death as the place where "mortal flesh and eternal life are joined in one person." What does this reveal about the depth of God's involvement in the world?
2. Notice how creation is present at every moment of the crucifixion and resurrection story. How does this shape the way we think about the world God has made?
3. In the garden at dawn, Mary recognises Jesus when he speaks her name. How might this moment help us recognise Christ's presence in our own ordinary surroundings?
4. The risen Jesus still bears his wounds. What significance do you find in the fact that resurrection does not erase them?
5. The reflection says that Christ has carried our mortal life "into the very heart of God's life." How might this affect the way we face suffering, grief or the limits of our own bodies?
6. The Risen Jesus does not reject the material world but meets it again, in a garden, on a shoreline, at a table. What practices could help us live with this same reverence for the world around us?
7. Where do you notice "the half light" in your own life, places where grief and hope exist together, and how might this session encourage you in those places?

Led Meditation

Be still.

Let your breathing slow.

Rest in the God who knows the fragility of our life.

Hear the Gospel:

“Mary... turned and saw Jesus standing there...

He said to her, ‘Mary.’”

Keep a short silence.

Picture the garden at dawn.

The stone moved.

The Risen Christ alive, speaking a name in the half light.

Keep a short silence.

Bring to God a place of sorrow, longing or tenderness,
something that needs the touch of risen life.

Keep a short silence.

Pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
crucified and risen,

meet us in the places where our hearts are heavy
and speak our names with your living voice.

Give us courage, give us hope,
and lead us to care for this world you love.

Amen.

Final Prayer

Almighty God,

whose Son Jesus Christ entered our mortal life
and passed through death to rise again in glory,
grant that as we behold his wounds and hear his living voice
we may trust in his redeeming love,

stand firm in hope,

and serve the world for which he died and rose,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.

Amen.

Session Four:

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

Reflections on John, Revelation, and the Christian life in creation

The Kingdom of God is not just something we hope for in the future. It is a reality that threads through the ordinary hours of our days, in the soil under our feet, in the air we breathe and in the communities we inhabit. Christ is glorified and ascended, yet his presence shapes everything around us, as real as sunlight on water, as intimate as the grain we eat, as enduring as the trees that sway in the wind. Living within the Kingdom of God is learning to orient our hearts and hands toward that reality, so that our lives echo the goodness and resilience of the world God intends to flourish.

This begins with noticing: The ordinary, the mundane, the familiar, these are not distractions from God's work; they are the work itself. A morning cup of coffee, a loaf of bread, the hum of the city, the murmur of a river, these are threads in the vast tapestry of God's creation, blessed and claimed in Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. To live in the Kingdom is to recognize that the world is neither disposable nor divine in itself, but graced by the Creator who entered it and will renew it. When we touch it, care for it, or marvel at it, we participate in the ongoing story of redemption.

There is also the tension of waiting. The Kingdom is present, yet not fully revealed. We live in the interval between Christ's ascension and his promised return, aware that the groaning of creation continues. Rivers run low, forests fall, species vanish; communities suffer, injustices persist. And yet the hope of the Second Coming of Christ casts a steady light into the darkness. It reminds us that the present imperfection is temporary, that God's restoration is inevitable, and that the work we do now matters because it participates in that coming renewal. The Kingdom calls us to act as if the world matters, which, in truth, it does, because every act of care, justice, and mercy is part of the life Christ won for all creation.

To live in the Kingdom of God is also to embrace responsibility. We are not mere spectators. Christ's ascension does not remove him from our world; it empowers through the Holy Spirit to be co-workers in God's redemptive work. To care for the earth, to cultivate communities marked by justice, to feed the hungry, to protect vulnerable species, to repair

what has been broken, these are not optional extras. They are the living out of what the glorified Christ has made possible. Each choice we make, each small act of stewardship, is a note in a symphony that echoes through the cosmos, joining our efforts with the eternal purposes of God.

And yet living in the Kingdom requires patience and humility. We cannot rush God's new creation, nor can we assume we control it. We live with uncertainty, knowing that our work is fragile and that creation will continue to groan until the final redemption. But in that fragility is Grace: we are invited to align ourselves with the pattern of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. We are called to steward what is entrusted to us, to rejoice in the beauty that remains and to work toward a future that Christ has already inaugurated and will complete.

This Kingdom-shaped life transforms the way we see time, relationships and the material world. The future promised in the Second Coming of Christ is not a distant abstraction; it informs our present actions. We recognize that every tree we plant, every stream we protect, every act of reconciliation and care reflects the reality of a God who has entered creation, has glorified it in Christ, and will bring it to fullness. Living within the Kingdom is about faithful participation in the renewal already begun and keeping hope alive while our hands and hearts meet the world in its beauty, vulnerability, and promise.

To live in this way is to experience the tension of now and not yet, the joy of what has been made and the anticipation of what will be. It is to carry the world tenderly in our hands, to honour its worth and to live as citizens of a kingdom whose ruler has already claimed victory over death and decay. Every act of care, every moment of attention, every gesture of love, however small, is a way of inhabiting the Kingdom that Christ has revealed and glorified, a foretaste of the new creation toward which all things move.

Questions for Reflection

1. The reflection speaks of the Kingdom of God as something already woven into "the ordinary hours of our days." Where do you most readily notice signs of God's Kingdom in your own daily life?
2. How does understanding creation as "graced but not divine" help clarify our role in caring for the world God loves?

3. The reflection describes the Christian life as living in the tension of “now and not yet.” What helps you hold hope and realism together without falling into despair on one side or distraction on the other?
4. In what ways does the promised return of Christ shape how you think about what matters today, how you use time, energy, or resources?
5. The reflection suggests that every act of justice, mercy or care “participates in the coming renewal.” Which practices or habits in your own life feel most aligned with that vision?
6. Where do you find yourself needing patience or humility as you seek to live as a citizen of God’s Kingdom?
7. The reflection speaks of carrying the world “tenderly in our hands.” What might that tenderness look like in your household, community or church?

Led Meditation

Be still.

Let your breathing settle.

Rest in the God whose kingdom is already near.

Hear the promise:

“See, I am making all things new.”

Keep a short silence.

Imagine the places where you long for renewal,
your home,
your community,
the land you walk,
the world you love.

Keep a short silence.

Offer one of these places to God now,
holding it with hope
and trusting the One who has already begun his work.

Keep a short silence.

Pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
whose Kingdom is among us
and whose coming renews all things,
guide our steps in your way.

Give us patience, courage, and joy
as we care for the world you love
and wait for the fullness of your light.
Amen.

Final Prayer

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is exalted in glory
and who will bring all things to completion in him,
grant that as we walk by his light in this present world
we may serve with hope,
care for creation with reverence,
and live as citizens of his coming kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.
Amen.