

## Opening Prayer

God of tender care and unfailing love, on this New Year's Day in the story of Jesus, we come to you in great need:

In a world held ransom to contending and malignant forces,  
riven by countless divisions and defiled in so many places by the clash of war,  
or disgraced by the cries of the hungry,  
where kindness and decency are too often trampled by shamelessness and greed,  
where truth drowns in torrents of manufactured lies,  
where not even a death-dealing plague that takes *five million* of our fellow human beings,  
nor the threat of the death of our planet itself,  
seem enough to remind us that we are one family in all the earth ...

in such a world we grasp desperately for hope,  
and like the Psalmist of old we wait all day long for the coming of your goodness,  
pleading to be reminded of who you are,  
so that we can remember who we are  
and whose world this is.

And today, you answer our pleading strangely and wondrously by giving us Advent,  
Reminding us of the calendar we really live by  
and whose timetable it is that really governs our lives.

You remind us how it all began:  
When your angel spoke into the lives of ordinary people like us,  
and said

'WAIT.'

That is what you said,  
and that is what your angels – your messengers – still tell us to do  
at this time.

'WAIT.'

WE pray now that you will quieten the noises in our heads and the storms in our hearts so that,  
in a world that claims to have elbowed you out,  
we may be given that spirit of true attentiveness, of anticipation, of expectation,  
of *waiting*,  
that opens us to the coming of *Emmanuel – God-with-us*.

And as we wait, your story will begin again inside us:  
It will enter us as quietly as you entered this rebel world,  
As God-bearer, love bearer, truth bearer, bearer of meaning, and of surprise, and of life itself,  
And we will know it as 'good news of great joy.'  
*Emmanuel, God-With-Us*.

Come, Lord Jesus, Come!