

## **An Evening Visit**

It was a cold December evening and my meeting was due to begin at six o'clock. In order to avoid the rush hour traffic, I arrived in the busy shopping town an hour earlier. Finding a little coffee shop, I had my usual cup of tea, and then, nicely relaxed, I set out to visit the church, which was adjacent to where the meeting was to be held.

It was a big church but it felt warm and I was glad of the shelter and the familiar sense of welcome. At that time of evening, it was in semi-darkness, with only one light at the back and the gentle flicker from the candelabra at the shrine. I sat up near the front and probably closed my eyes as I settled down to pray. I started to allow the names of people for whom I wanted to pray, to come to my mind. I was only a brief time in this quietness, when a whole orchestra of sounds reached me as people came in to the church to pray.

### **Circle of Love**

Being easily distracted and wanting also to observe what was happening. I opened my eyes. For the following twenty minutes, I witnessed simple but wonderful rituals of people at prayer. I saw and heard and felt people taking a few moments to allow God's touch upon their busy lives. I felt connected to these "strangers", because the One God was encircling me, them and all for whom we were praying, with love. I left the church, grateful for the faith that had been passed onto us and that enables us to reach out to others through our prayer and care. A few days later I wrote this poem because the experience stayed with me and it comes back to me now in these Advent days.

### **Candle Prayers**

The hurried steps echo round  
The darkening church  
As the women process forward  
Carrying their busy lives  
In hope-filled hearts.

Rustle of shopping bags,  
Zitch of zips, clunk of keys,  
Plink of coin on coins,  
Then, that moment,  
That silent fervent moment,  
When heart speaks to heart,  
Unburdened, enflamed.

The women leave again  
But their prayer burns on  
Brilliant red and blazing blue,  
From the self-consuming candles.

## **Advent is an invitation**

In spite of coinciding with a very busy time of the year, Advent is an invitation, an opportunity, to take a few moments each day and turn them into welcoming spaces in our hearts where God dwells. Perhaps it is not possible for us to visit a church, but can we not create a quiet space at home? Candles are in plentiful supply at this time of year, so as well as using them decoratively, let one candle be your special prayer candle for the next few weeks. Have a silent moment of prayer in the candle- light as you lift your mind and heart to God. As the candle kindles into life allow the bright hope of God's love to fill up the tired, anxious or sad places of your day, and gently repeat the prayer "Come Lord Jesus."

You could also have a family ritual before the younger children go to bed: turn down the lights and gather around the candle. Children could take turns each evening to thank God for good moments of that day. You might sing one of the lovely songs from the religion programme that the children are learning at school. Finish the ritual with the children's night prayer or The Lord's Prayer. (Remember to blow out the candle!)

Such prayer might seem too simple for some people, but it's the heart that matters to God, not the words or the amount of words in the prayer.



## **Hope and Prayer**

Because of the economic crisis in our country this year, many people feel helpless, and almost want to cancel Christmas! but we need Christmas to remind us that God is with us, among us. We can all do something in these days, we can all pray. This Advent, may our candle prayer be a source of hope, light and blessing for ourselves, our families, our friends and our country.

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