

## An Advent journey

### Acknowledging doubt and despair by Gill Page



#### Reflection

When I spend time with the Taizé, a community in France, we often sing a song that speaks of Jesus as our 'interior light' and asks that he won't let our doubts and our darkness speak to us. It is so easy dwell on doubts, darkness and despair, especially when we are awake in the night and finding sleep elusive. How comforting it is, then, to find that we are not alone at such times. Even the great saints of God, including John the Baptist, could be – and were – assailed by doubts and times of despair.

The prophet Isaiah understood these feelings. He recognised that there are times when our hearts feel like barren deserts and are waiting for the chance to blossom again. Sometimes our circumstances make us feel dark and cold and barren. For example, bereavement can make us feel like this – as can other kinds of loss, such as loss of friends, of familiar surroundings, of a job, or possessions or a sense of identity. It is easy to misunderstand these normal and natural feelings and to let even more darkness creep in, perhaps in the form of guilt. We tell ourselves that 'Christians shouldn't feel like this', so we must be a poor Christian – or perhaps not even a Christian at all.

Look what Jesus suggests as a remedy for John's attack of doubt. He asks him to see what the disciples have seen, all the good things that have been happening. He wants John to extend his vision beyond the confines of his present prison, and he wants his followers to share all the good news that they can.

Advent is all about the coming of the Light of Christ. It is that light which enables us to see things as they really are. It is that light which can enter our darkness and dispel it to the margins. We pray for that light to illuminate our hearts and minds.

#### Activities

- Light a candle or tealight in a darkened room. Watch how it flickers and falters, but doesn't go out. Think about your faith. Does it seem almost to go out at times, and at other times feels as if it is burning strongly? Remember that this variation is natural and normal – it was also the experience of John the Baptist!
- Light a few more candles/tealights alongside the first one. Notice how much brighter the light is now, and how much greater the warmth. And how much more steady – when one candle stutters, another will be burning strong

and clear. This is a lovely image of how we can support one another to overcome the darkness in us all. When you feel unable to pray, others will be praying for you – and you will have your turn to pray for them.

#### Thoughts and prayer points

- Do I recognise when my faith is fluctuating? What can I do to rekindle the delight I once had in it?
- What can I do to encourage others when they are struggling in their Christian experience?
- Think about your local community: where is light shining? (Consider both church and non-church settings.)
- Look for light in the darkest of news item – e.g. when people come together to help each other.
- Give thanks for the Advent light, and for the promise that Jesus is always with us.
- When you open the curtains and it's light outside, thank God for the light which comes again and again, in the mornings and in our souls.

#### Listen

**Music to help you reflect on this week's Advent theme.**

Paris (Refuge), All Sons & Daughters on *Paris*

**WEB** [bit.ly/youtube-paris](http://bit.ly/youtube-paris)

#### Questions for reflection

- ▶ What do you see when you look in the mirror?
- ▶ When do you experience doubt and despair?
- ▶ What good things would you like to share?



#### A prayer

*Lord Jesus, light of the world, flood our hearts with your light, warmth and love this Advent. Help us to pass that light on to others so that, together, we may conquer all darkness. Amen.*