

**THE
BUMPER
BOOK OF
RESOURCES**

**ADVENT
CHRISTMAS
EPIPHANY**

EDITED BY JOHN COX

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FOREWORD

This Bumper Book (together with its two companion volumes) draws together material from a wide range of sources and a number of top authors to create an invaluable resource for anyone seeking help with prayers, services, sermon ideas and illustrative material both for general and all-age worship.

The three volumes cover the major festivals of the Christian year:

Volume 1: Harvest, All Saints, All Souls and Remembrance

Volume 2: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

Volume 3: Holy Week, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost

Each volume is accompanied by a CD-ROM providing activity sheets and illustrations that can be reproduced to enliven learning and interactive worship.

ADVENT

PRAYERS

From the Lectionary

Matthew 25:1-13

Lord Jesus Christ,
prepare our hearts to meet you in this time of worship
and when you return in glory to establish your kingdom.
Confront, instruct and enable us by your Spirit,
so that we will be awake and alert,
equipped to live each moment
as though the day of your coming has dawned,
and ready to welcome you whenever it might be.

Nick Fawcett

Luke 1:39-55

Gracious God,
reminded at this season of your awesome gift in Christ,
we want to respond,
to offer something in return
as a sign of our gratitude for all you have done and continue to do.
We would bring you our worship –
not just well-intentioned thoughts and words
but our wholehearted adoration and joyful thanksgiving.
We would bring you our lives –
not just token deeds or outward show,
but hearts consecrated to your service,
embodying your love for all,
your care and compassion for everything you have made.
Receive, then, this time set aside for you
as a small yet sincere way of acknowledging your goodness,
and through it equip us to live as your people
this and every day.

Nick Fawcett

Mark 1:1-8

Redeemer God,
as we prepare to celebrate the birth of your Son,
speak through all we share together now:
the singing of hymns,

the reading of Scripture,
the preaching of your word,
the offering of prayers –
these and so much more.
Break through all that separates us from you and him:
over-familiarity,
indifference,
self-will,
disobedience, narrowness of vision, weakness of resolve.
Move among us through your Spirit – inspiring,
instructing,
revealing,
renewing –
so that we may be equipped now
to worship and always to serve.

Nick Fawcett

Luke 1:26-38

Almighty God,
we recall at this joyful season how,
through her willingness to hear your word
and commit herself to your service,
you were able to use Mary to fulfil your purpose,
entering our world,
inaugurating your kingdom
and bringing closer that day when sorrow and suffering,
darkness and death
will be no more.
Help us, then, as we gather now to worship,
to hear your word
and to respond with similar obedience,
prepared to be used as you see fit.
Through our discipleship,
weak and feeble though it might be,
may your grace be revealed,
your love made known
and your world enriched.

Nick Fawcett

We Come to Worship

Lord Jesus Christ,
we have come to worship you in this glad season of Advent,
a season of expectation,
of celebration,
and, above all, of preparation.
We come now, because we want to be ready –
ready to give thanks for your coming,
to recognise the ways you come to us now,

and to welcome you when you come again.
 Open our hearts as we worship you,
 so that all we share may give us a deeper understanding of this season
 and a fuller experience of your love.
 In your name we ask it.

Nick Fawcett

Advent 1

Lord Jesus Christ,
 we come today yearning to welcome, worship, meet and greet you,
 but conscious also that,
 just as many were not ready to receive you
 when first you entered our world,
 so we too can be less prepared than we think,
 our narrow expectations or misplaced assumptions
 closing our minds to your presence among us.
 So we ask that, as we draw near to you,
 you will draw near to us,
 stirring our hearts and capturing our imagination.
 Prepare us to recognise you afresh at work in our lives and our world,
 and so make us ready to serve you,
 today and always.

Nick Fawcett

Advent 2

Father God,
 just as you sent your servant John into the wilderness
 to prepare the way of the Lord
 and make ready your people to receive him,
 so prepare us now to respond afresh to the gift of Christ
 to all that you offer us through him.
 Give us a readiness truly to listen, learn, worship and respond,
 receiving the forgiveness he extends
 and the renewal he makes possible,
 and giving back in return our heartfelt gratitude
 expressed in true commitment and faithful service.
 In his name we pray.

Nick Fawcett

Advent 3

Lord,
 as you spoke through John the Baptist,
 and through the prophets before him,
 speak now through this time of worship,
 and through all who will share in leading it.
 Behind the voices we hear,
 the words we read and the message we listen to
 may we hear your voice,
 calling, confronting,

leading, loving,
enthusing and enabling.
Open our ears, our minds and our souls to your word of truth,
the Word made flesh,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Nick Fawcett

Advent 4

Lord Jesus Christ,
born to Mary,
coming to our world through her,
be born afresh in us
that we might be born again through you.
Touch now this time of worship
that the message of your birth,
so familiar and well loved,
will speak afresh with new power and clarity,
thrilling our hearts
and filling us with joy and gratitude.
Draw close to us now,
that through welcoming you into our lives
and opening ourselves once more to your renewing power
you may reach out through us to the world,
bringing hope and healing,
light and life,
to the glory of your name.

Nick Fawcett

Advent Praise

Gracious God,
we praise you for this season of Advent,
this time for rejoicing and celebration,
praise and worship,
exulting in your goodness.

We praise you for coming in Christ,
bringing in a new kingdom
and anticipating an era of peace and justice
when the poor will have plenty,
the hungry be fed,
and the lowly be lifted up.

We praise you that you want us to be a part of that,
not just to share in it
but also to play a part
in bringing it to pass.
Forgive us that we sometimes lose sight of your purpose
and underestimate your greatness.

Open our eyes to the breadth of your love,
 the wonder of your mercy
 and the extent of your goodness,
 and so may we give you the worship
 and adoration that is due to you,
 this and every day,
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Nick Fawcett

The assurance of Advent

Loving God,
 we rejoice in this season of good news and good will,
 we celebrate once more the birth of your Son,
 our Saviour Jesus Christ,
 the Prince of Peace
 the Lord of lords,
 the Word made flesh,
 and we praise you for the assurance of his final triumph.
 As you came through him,
so you shall come again.

For coming among us through Jesus,
 for bearing our flesh and blood,
 for living our life and sharing our humanity,
 for entering our world,
 loving God, we praise you!
 As you came through him,
so you shall come again.

For suffering and dying among us,
 for your victory over death,
 your triumph over evil,
 and your promise that the kingdom will come,
 loving God, we praise you!
 As you came through him,
so you shall come again.

For the wonder of this season,
 for its message of love and forgiveness,
 its promise of peace and justice,
 and the gift of life everlasting of which it speaks,
 loving God, we praise you!
 As you came through him,
so you shall come again.

Loving God,
 we rejoice again in this season of good news and good will,
 and we look forward to that day
 when the Jesus of Bethlehem will be the Lord of all.
 As you came through him,
so you shall come again.

In Christ's name we praise you!

Nick Fawcett

Receiving the word

Gracious God,
we praise you today for the power of your word,
the way you have spoken to so many people throughout history.
You called the universe into being – heaven and earth,
night and day,
the sea and the dry land,
life in its multitude of manifestations.
You spoke,
and it was done,
our world and our very existence owing to you.
For your word of life,
we praise you.

You called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
Moses and Joshua,
judges, kings and prophets,
Apostles, disciples, preachers and teachers –
a great company of saints,
each testifying to your sovereign purpose,
your awesome power
and your merciful love;
each hearing your voice and responding in faith.
For your word of life,
we praise you.

You came in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
identifying yourself with our humanity,
sharing our joy and sorrow,
experiencing our life and death.
You came in fulfilment of your promises of old,
revealing the extent of your love
through everything he said and did,
demonstrating your gracious purpose for all.
For your word of life,
we praise you.

You speak still through the pages of Scripture;
through their record of your involvement in history
and their testimony to your will for the world.
You speak through dialogue between Christians,
through the witness of your Church and personal testimony,
through study and reflection,
and through the sharing of fellowship.
You speak through the grandeur of the universe
and the wonder of life,
your still small voice breaking into our experience
to challenge and inspire.
For your word of life,
we praise you.

Gracious God,
 we rejoice at the ways you have spoken to us in the past
 and the way you continue to speak today.
 We receive your word with joyful thanksgiving,
 and we pray for strength to make it so much a part of us
 that your voice may be heard through all we are and do,
 to the glory of your name.
 For your word of life,
we praise you.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Nick Fawcett

Thanksgiving

Loving God,
 we thank you for this glad time of year,
 this Advent season which reminds us of so much,
 and which reveals so wonderfully the extent of your love.
 For your coming and coming again in Christ,
we thank you.

This is a time for looking back
 and remembering the birth of your Son,
 light into our darkness;
 a time for looking forward and anticipating his coming again,
 as he returns to establish your kingdom and rule in your name;
 but above all a time for the present moment,
 for examining our lives, searching our hearts,
 exploring your word, and renewing our faith;
 a time for recognising more fully
 that Jesus is with us each moment of every day,
 now and always.
 For your coming and coming again in Christ,
we thank you.

Loving God,
 you came to our world in humility,
 born of Mary in a stable.
 You will come once more in glory,
 through the risen and ascended Christ.
 You are with us now even as we speak,
 here through your Holy Spirit making Jesus real!
 We praise you, the great truth of Advent.
 For your coming and coming again in Christ,
**we thank you,
 in his name.**

Nick Fawcett

Heavenly Father,
 during this Advent season
 we thank you for feeding us
 in body, mind and spirit.

Susan Sayers

The world moves round into the light of the day
and we thank you, Father, that we are alive in it.
In this Advent season of watching and waiting,
keep us attentive to you, throughout the day,
ready to listen, ready to learn and ready to love.

Susan Sayers

John the Baptist

God, we thank you for Zechariah and Elizabeth
and for the birth of their son, John the Baptist.
We give thanks that he prepared the way
for the coming of Jesus.
Grant that we who are baptised
may be ready for the coming of our Lord.
You are their God and our God:
you are their Father and our Father.
Help us to know that as you came to them you come to us.

David Adam

Your presence

Lord our God, we give you thanks
and rejoice in the great love that you have for us:
we rejoice in your presence and in your peace.
We pray for your whole Church
as it prepares for the Christmas season.
May it encourage people to come before you
in joy and in celebration.
Bless all who preach and all who teach the faith:
may they show the joy of knowing you and your love.

David Adam

Joseph

Lord God, we give you thanks for Joseph
and for his courage to do your will.
Help us to bring in your kingdom
by our obedience to you this day and always.
May we show that we dwell in you and you in us.

David Adam

Mary

God, we thank you for the obedience of Mary
and for all who help to bring in your kingdom
by seeking to do your will.
We give thanks
for your faithful people throughout all ages.
Lord, guide your Church
that it may know your will and serve you faithfully.

David Adam

Confession

Rediscovering the word

Sovereign God,
 we thank you for your word –
 recorded in Scripture
 and handed down over countless generations;
 heard through reading, preaching, fellowship and worship;
 glimpsed in the beauty of our world and the mysteries of life;
 brought to life through prayer and meditation,
 embodied through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Speak again now,
and give us ears to hear.

Forgive us that we are sometimes slow to listen.
 We do not make time to read the Scriptures as we should,
 allowing instead the pressures and responsibilities of life,
 our many interests, pleasures and concerns,
 to crowd out the time we spend with you.

Speak again now,
and give us ears to hear.

We become casual or complacent in our worship,
 no longer expecting you to challenge us,
 no longer moved to a sense of awe,
 no longer hungry for spiritual food.

Speak again now,
and give us ears to hear.

We neglect the opportunity for fellowship,
 turning in on ourselves,
 imagining we know all there is to know of you,
 more concerned with our own insights
 than those we can gain from others.

Speak again now,
and give us ears to hear.

We grow deaf to your voice in creation,
 our senses dulled by over-familiarity;
 no time to pause and ponder,
 to reflect on deeper, eternal realities.

Speak again now,
and give us ears to hear.

We believe we have listened and responded,
 but our focus is on the written word
 rather than the Word made flesh,
 the letter rather than the spirit of your revelation in Christ.

Speak again now,
and give us ears to hear.

Sovereign God,
speak afresh through the pages of Scripture,
through the worship that we share,
the experience and insight of other Christians,
and, above all, through the inner presence
of the living Christ in our hearts.
Teach us, when your voice seems silent,
to listen again more carefully,
and to rediscover your word.

Speak again now,
and give us ears to hear.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Nick Fawcett

Advent omission

Loving God,
the great festival of Christmas is drawing nearer
and we are busy preparing for it –
choosing presents,
writing cards,
planning get-togethers,
buying food –
so much that has become an accepted
and expected part of this season.
Yet, in all the bustle, we so easily forget
the most important thing of all:
responding to the wonderful gift of your Son.

You have come to us in Christ:
forgive us when we fail to receive him.

We tell ourselves that we are different –
that we will be worshipping you Sunday by Sunday,
sharing in services of lessons and carols,
hearing again familiar and well-loved verses of Scripture,
but we know that this isn't enough in itself,
for these too can become
just another part of our traditional celebrations,
washing over us
rather than communicating
the great message of the Gospel.
We become so concerned with the wrapping
that we fail to recognise the gift concealed underneath.

You have come to us in Christ:
forgive us when we fail to receive him.

Forgive us for relegating Jesus
to the periphery of our celebrations,
rather than placing him at the centre where he belongs;
for turning this season into a time for material extravagance,
rather than an opportunity for spiritual fulfilment;
for doing so much to prepare for Christmas on the surface,
yet so little to make ourselves ready within.

You have come to us in Christ:
forgive us when we fail to receive him.

Loving God,
open our hearts now to hear again your word,
to welcome the living Christ,
and to reflect on our response to his call.
May this Advent season teach us
to welcome him afresh into our lives
and to rejoice in his love not just at Christmas but always.

You have come to us in Christ:
forgive us when we fail to receive him.
We ask it for his name's sake.

Nick Fawcett

Intercessions

The hope of Advent

Lord Jesus Christ,
we remember today
how so many looked forward to your coming,
but we remember also
how it became harder to go on believing
as the years went by;
how hope started to splutter and dreams began to die until, finally, you came –
the fulfilment of prophecy,
the culmination of God's purpose,
the definitive expression of his love.
Lord of all,
the Word made flesh,
bring hope to your world today.

We remember with gladness
how you brought hope throughout your ministry,
a sense of purpose to those for whom life seemed pointless –
the poor, sick, outcasts and broken-hearted –
light shining in their darkness,
joy breaking into their sorrow,
new beginnings in what had seemed like the end.
Lord of all,
the Word made flesh,
bring hope to your world today.

Hear now our prayer for those caught today in the grip of despair –
those for whom the future seems bleak,
optimism seems foolish,
and trust seems futile.
Reach out in love,
and may light shine into their darkness.
Lord of all,
the Word made flesh,
bring hope to your world today.

Hear our prayer for those whose goals in life have been thwarted,
whose dreams have been shattered,
who have grown weary, cynical and disillusioned.
Reach out in love,
and rekindle their faith in the future.
Lord of all,
the Word made flesh,
bring hope to your world today.

Hear our prayer for those who mourn,
or who wrestle with illness,
or who watch loved ones suffer.
Reach out in love,
and grant them your strength and comfort.
Lord of all,
the Word made flesh,
bring hope to your world today.

Hear our prayer for those whose lives are blighted by injustice,
crushed by oppression, poverty, hunger,
and encourage all who work against the odds
to build a better world.
Reach out in love,
and grant the assurance of your coming kingdom.
Lord of all,
the Word made flesh,
bring hope to your world today.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we remember your promise to come again in glory,
the culmination of God's purpose,
the ultimate victory of love.
May that conviction bring new faith,
new vision,
and new purpose wherever life seems hopeless.
Lord of all,
the Word made flesh,
bring hope to your world today.
In your name we pray.

Nick Fawcett

Come, Lord Jesus

As we begin another Church Year
let us give thanks to God that he has made us,
that he loves us and that he comes to us.

O God, you are our Maker:
you give us life, you give us love,
you give us yourself.
Help us to give our lives,
our love and ourselves to you.
Keep us alert and aware of your presence,
that we may meet you each day
and know that you come to us in grace and in love.

Lord, as you come to your Church,
help us to reveal your glory.
Grant that we may show your grace
and your goodness in our lives.
We thank you for the grace and goodness
revealed in Jesus Christ
and that we are enriched in him.

We remember churches that are struggling
against the darkness of evil, of opposition, of apathy.
We remember especially
Christians who are being persecuted for their faith.

Silence

Come, Lord Jesus;
come, our Saviour and our God.

As we pray for your world,
we remember those who are seeking
to bring peace and goodwill among all.
We pray for those involved in war or the threat of war.
We think of those caught up in earthquakes, famine or flood.

Silence

Come, Lord Jesus;
come, our Saviour and our God.

Lord, let your presence be known in our homes and our actions.
May people be thankful for us
and our care of all that is around us.
We pray that you will show yourself to us
through our loved ones and friends.

Silence

Come, Lord Jesus;
come, our Saviour and our God.

We remember all whose lives are darkened by pain and distress;
all who are struggling with doubt and despair;
all whose faith is shaken by what is happening around them.
We pray for members of our community and friends
who are ill at this time.

Silence

Come, Lord Jesus;
come, our Saviour and our God.

God our Father, your grace has been given to us,
in the gift of eternal life and in your abiding presence.
We pray for all who are departed from us,
for friends and loved ones
in the fullness of your eternal kingdom.
We rejoice with them in the gift of life and your love.

Silence

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

David Adam

Keep alert

Keep alert, because much is demanded of those to whom much is entrusted.

When the pressures of the day fragment our peace,
keep us watchful and alert,
both for ourselves and for the world.

Silence for prayer

For who is God but the Lord:
who is our rock but our God?

When false values are paraded among the true,
keep us watchful and alert,
both for ourselves and for our young.

Silence for prayer

For who is God but the Lord:
who is our rock but our God?

When our tight schedules leave no time for being merely available,
keep us watchful and alert,
both for ourselves and for those who need a listener.

Silence for prayer

For who is God but the Lord:
who is our rock but our God?

When the injustice of the world laughs at our insignificance,
keep us watchful and alert,
both for ourselves and for all who rely on our solidarity with them.

Silence for prayer

For who is God but the Lord:
who is our rock but our God?

When we begin to take the wonder of your creation for granted,
keep us watchful and alert,
both for ourselves and for every person you cherish.

Silence for prayer

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Susan Sayers

Be prepared

Be prepared for the coming of the Lord. John the Baptist was the promised forerunner to Christ, and his teaching inspired many to turn back to God's ways, making them receptive when Jesus began his ministry. We, too, need to renounce sin and prepare for the time when Christ will come again in glory.

Let us bring to God our loving Father
all the cares that weigh on our hearts,
knowing that he understands us better
than we understand ourselves.

Father, we bring the daily work
of those who labour
to spread the good news of Christ
amid apathy, ridicule or prejudice;
may they be encouraged and strengthened.

Silence for prayer

Father, hear us:
and prepare us to meet you.

Father, we bring our daily work,
with all the pressures, monotony,
enjoyment and mistakes;

help your world
to recognise your presence
and trust in your love.

Silence for prayer

Father, hear us:
and prepare us to meet you.

Father, we bring all our loved ones
with their hopes and disappointments,
their struggles and their successes;
may they be guided and nurtured by your love.

Silence for prayer

Father, hear us:
and prepare us to meet you.

Father, we bring all those
whose lives seem to them bleak,
painful or empty of meaning;
please release them,
unburden them,
and fill them with your gift of joy.

Silence for prayer

Father, hear us:
and prepare us to meet you.

Father, we commend to your unfailing love
all who have died,
especially . . .

Silence for prayer

Father, hear us:
and prepare us to meet you.

Filled with thankfulness for all
your many blessings to us,
we offer you our praise.
May we never forget your generosity.

Silence for prayer

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Susan Sayers

Your will be done

After years of waiting, the Lord is very near.

Father, we thank you
for raising up leaders and ministers in your church,
and we pray for them now.

Silence for prayer

In your way, Lord:
let your will be done in us.

Father, we thank you
for all that is good in our society
and pray now for all in positions of authority.

Silence for prayer

In your way, Lord:
let your will be done in us.

Father, we thank you
for our homes and families,
for our friends and neighbours.

Silence for prayer

In your way, Lord:
let your will be done in us.

Father, we thank you
for those who care for the sick,
the distressed and the dying.

Silence for prayer

In your way, Lord:
let your will be done in us.

Father, we thank you
for all those who worked with you,
in your plan of salvation for us.
Work also in us for the good of your world.

Silence for prayer

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Susan Sayers

Open our eyes and our hearts

Blessed are you, Lord God of Israel,
for you come to your people and set them free.
Through the light of Christ
you deliver us from darkness and the shadow of death
and guide us into the way of peace.

As we remember John the Baptist and all the prophets,
we give thanks for men and women of vision through the ages.
We ask you to guide and bless
all preachers of the word and ministers of the sacraments,
all who teach the faith and all who influence our daily lives.
We pray for all who are struggling for freedom in their faith
and for those who are imprisoned because of their beliefs.

Silence

Lord, open our eyes to your presence
and our hearts to your coming among us.

We give thanks for those who do research,
all scientists and biologists,
for all responsible for our health and well-being.
We ask your blessing upon all doctors and nurses.
We pray for the World Health Organisation
and for all who strive to free us from disease and illness.

Silence

Lord, open our eyes to your presence
and our hearts to your coming among us.

Lord, help us to know your presence in our homes.
We ask you to protect and guide our loved ones
into the ways of peace.
We remember before you all who suffer
from oppression or violence in their homes.

Silence

Lord, open our eyes to your presence
and our hearts to your coming among us.

We give thanks for your love and healing power
and ask your blessing upon all who are suffering,
who long for freedom
and all who are caught up in debt.
We pray for any who have lost their homes
or their work at this time,
especially any who have been separated from loved ones.

Silence

Lord, open our eyes to your presence
and our hearts to your coming among us.

We give thanks
that you have delivered us from the darkness of death
and offered us the light of life eternal.
We rejoice in the fellowship of all your saints
and we pray for friends and loved ones
who are departed from us.

Silence

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

David Adam

The coming Christ

My brothers and sisters in Christ,
as we watch together for his coming,
let us pray together for the Church and for the world.

Lord, strengthen and guide your Church
in its mission to the world;
that sinners may be alerted to repentance
and many may be brought to the joy
of living in your love.

Silence for prayer

Lord, come to us:
live in us now.

Lord, we pray for the whole created world
and its peoples;
that no evil may thwart your will,
but that rather your kingdom may be established
and your will done.

Silence for prayer

Lord, come to us:
live in us now.

Lord, bless this community
and all who serve it;
that we may strive each day
to align our lives with the life of Christ
who saves us from sin.

Silence for prayer

Lord, come to us:
live in us now.

Lord, we pray for all who suffer –
mentally, physically and spiritually;
for those who see no comforts,
and do not realise their spiritual poverty.

Silence for prayer

Lord, come to us:
live in us now.

We commend to your love
all who have completed their life on earth,
that they may rest in your peace
and share your risen life.

Silence for prayer

Lord, come to us:
live in us now.

Thank you, Lord,
for the richness of your companionship;
for the joy and peace
your constant presence gives.

Silence for prayer

**Lord, we bring these prayers
in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son.**

Susan Sayers

Proclaiming God's word

Loving God,
we thank you today for the Scriptures,
and the opportunity we have each day
of reading and studying them for ourselves.
Hear now our prayer for all those denied that privilege.
We pray for those who have not heard the challenge of the Bible,
who do not possess a copy of it in their own language,
or who are denied the right to own a Bible or study it freely.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for those who have heard but closed their minds,
for those who read but do not understand,
and for those who have read the Bible so often
that it fails to challenge as it used to.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.