

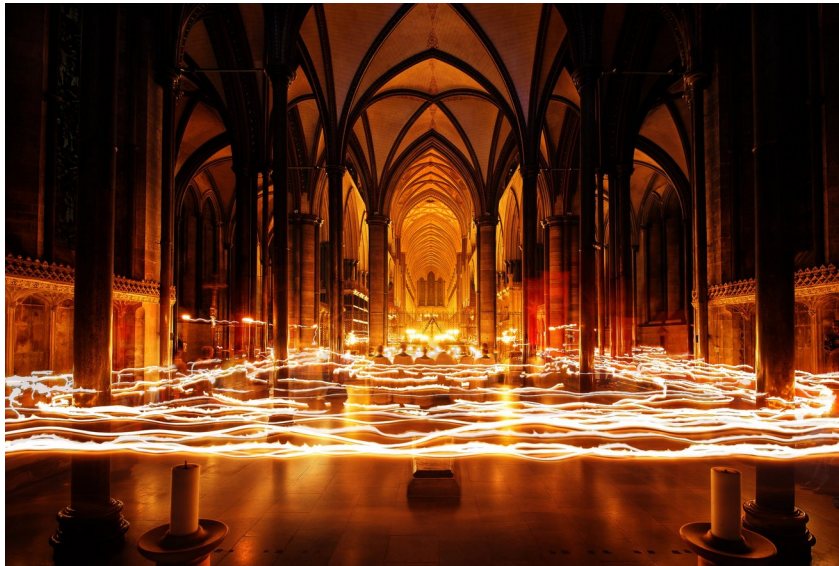
Silent Reflections

25th Nov 2025

Hope against Hope

From Darkness to light

Salisbury Cathedral (and other churches and cathedrals) begin Advent with a service that marks many of the themes of Advent and particularly, moves from darkness into light. The introduction to the service reminds us that: "The light that shines as a single flickering candle at the west end of the cathedral at the beginning and from which all other lights in the cathedral are lit, represents both Judgement and Hope."



Psalm 39

4 Show me, Lord, my life's end
and the number of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.

5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth;
the span of my years is as nothing before you.
Everyone is but a breath,
even those who seem secure

6 Surely everyone goes around like a mere
phantom;
in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth
without knowing whose it will finally be.

7 But now, Lord, what do I look for?
My hope is in you.

This year, so much of our news from around the world is of destruction, of the loss of life, of the dashing of hopes and loss of home

This Christmas crib from a church in Bethlehem in 2023, asks questions of how we can speak of hope in the midst of so much loss.



Hope beyond all Hope - from the Letter from Taizé 2025

Every year, the Prior of Taizé writes a letter given to everyone who comes to Taizé and it is sent to others. It forms the basis for discussion and study each week in Taizé. This year the focus was “hope” and some of it is below - you may choose to read it all (or even look up the whole letter on Taizé’s website) or let one or two phrases form the basis for your time with God.

From Hope beyond all hope Brother Matthew

Listening to young people in Taizé and elsewhere, many of whom are confronted with harsh realities in their everyday life, I ask myself how they find the strength to carry on. The question becomes even more pressing when they are living in war zones.

Trust in the Resurrection gives hope that the weariness of life is not the final point. We are called to something more. It is this hope that young people wanted to share with me, a hope that is beyond all hope because it counts on new life to arise when all seems lost.

When we long to trust in God’s love, what we see and sense around us so often seems to contradict that love. We are caught between what is already given and what is still to come. This space is not always very comfortable. But when it

opens out towards a hope of fulfilment, then something is set free within us.****

During my visit to Ukraine with two of my brothers, a church leader told us: “Prayer opens up a space that allows healing”. I was very struck by his remark. Constantly confronted with the pain of his people, he sees that it is in their inner life that believers can stay open to welcome what is new.

A Palestinian woman living in France, but whose family is in Gaza, wrote to us: “The love that carries the wounded, the fragile, gives new strength. It makes me think of the paralysed man in the Gospel, carried by his friends and their faith.”

To remain in hope, we need each other. Hope flourishes when we are attentive to the needs of others.

Faith in the Resurrection has enabled many people to cling on to hope in the midst of distress. It is a source that leads us beyond our own impossibilities, so as to let our heart go out towards others and to act. That new life helps us to stand up, it leads us to journey together with others. We become pilgrims of the hope that we carry within us

Are we ready to hope beyond all hope?

Link to letter :

<https://www.taize.fr/en/esperer-au-dela-de-toute-esperance>



A pendant from Taizé with the Chinese character for "hope"

For reflection and prayer:

Have you found hope within communities and among other people or when we are attentive to the needs of others?

Hope in God is one of the themes of Advent as we look forward to the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Hope is at the centre of our faith. Hope in God's love stretching beyond this world and into eternity is central to Christian faith, and to many of the Jewish scriptures, the psalms etc before Christianity

The song of Zechariah

is a song looking forward to the hope of what God is about to do in the world

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon[a] us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

Luke 1:76-79

Romans 8:22-25

We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labour, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved.

Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Hope is the thing with feathers

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

By Emily Dickinson

Source: The Poems of Emily

Dickinson Edited by R. W. Franklin (Harvard University Press, 1999)

from prayers at the Advent wreath

People of God be glad!
Your God delights in you, giving you joy for sadness,
And turning the dark to light.
Be strong in hope therefore; for your God comes to save.
You are God's children.

How might we pray with these thoughts and words and images?

- This may be an occasion to find a phrase or short passage that speaks to you and rest with it in the silence; or possibly walk the labyrinth with that phrase.
- As we approach the longest night, you might spend time becoming aware of darkness outside and the candle (or other light) within.
- Or you might choose to pray with your imagination – choose one of the pictures, or situations described, and imagine yourself in the scene. Where are you? Is anyone speaking to you? Do you have anything to say to anyone else who is there? What words of prayer come to you?