



**Clifton Parish Churches**  
**Small Group Resources**  
**Advent 2021**

## **Week Four**

### **Readings**

The lectionary readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent are:

Micah 5:2-5a

Luke 1:46-55 (the Magnificat) *or* Psalm 80:1-8

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

## **A 'Powerless' King**

The Sunday before Advent began was the Feast of Christ the King. The Church ends its liturgical year by celebrating Christ enthroned on high, ruling over all of time and space – Christ is King of the whole of creation!

But we must be mindful of the sort of king that Christ is and now we have arrived at the fourth Sunday of Advent, which spells that out for us.

Christ's kingship doesn't follow the normal course of earthly monarchy, nor does Christ play power politics. Christ's place of birth is in the land of 'one of the little clans of Judah' (Micah 5:2); his mother is a 'lowly servant' of God (Luke 1:48). Christ's power is not found in earthly might, in the vast armies he commands, but rather Christ is to be found in the places of powerlessness, alongside those who have no voice, no power of their own.

This might lead us to reflect on the powerlessness of God – perhaps a concept we would be uncomfortable with. We are very familiar with the idea of God being all-powerful, but God as all-powerless might give us pause.

But the Incarnation gives us just such a thing. God, who creates by simply speaking, God, for whom word and deed are the same thing, comes among us as one who is utterly helpless. If we take Christ's full humanity seriously (and we must), then we must confront the fact that, as a child, he was utterly reliant on a girl barely come to

womanhood and the man betrothed to be her husband. Estimates put infant mortality rates in the Roman Empire at anywhere between 30% and 50% – God chose to dwell among us at a time and place where merely reaching the age of seven was significantly less likely than it is in our modern, Western world. When Christ came into the world, he was utterly powerless, and he came to a world significantly less able to ensure safe passage through infancy.

In the Magnificat, Mary declares that God has ‘scattered the proud in their conceit, casting down the mighty from their thrones’ (Luke 1:51-52), but even this is not something brought about by military or political might; it is not the powerful act of a warlike conqueror. Rather it points us to the truth that, ultimately, earthly powers do not have the final say; judgement lies with God and (to jump the story forward to Easter) the resurrection shows us that the judgement God passes is the loving judgement of life, not death.

As we reach the end of our journey through Advent and prepare to celebrate once more the coming among us of the powerless king, we give thanks for Christ’s coming in the Incarnation, we look forward to Christ’s coming again when God makes all things new, and we open our hearts to Christ’s coming to us in each moment of our lives.

## Some Questions

- 1) How do you feel about the idea of God as 'all-powerless'? Is there value in thinking about God in this way? Why do you think this?
- 2) There are those in our modern, liberal democracy who find the idea of Christ's kingship objectionable. How do you feel about this objection? How might you counter it?
- 3) In the Incarnation, God surrenders all power and joins humanity in the most vulnerable way possible. Think about times at work, at home, at church, where you might hold power over others. How easy do you find it to willingly surrender the power that you have?
- 4) There are times when we must use the power that we have, too. How might we use the power that we have to help the powerless? What might be the cost to us in doing this?
- 5) Mary's Magnificat is some of the most beautifully profound poetry found in the Bible. It is also a radical manifesto, stating clearly that God is on the side of the powerless. Often when we read the Magnificat, we read it from Mary's point of view, but what if we were to read it from the point of view of the proud, the mighty and the rich?
- 6) Finally, as Advent reaches its crescendo and we make final preparations for Christmas to burst onto the scene once more, how might we ensure

that we keep the full season of Christmas, rather than getting carried along by a society that has forgotten about it by the evening of Christmas Day and has moved on to Boxing Day sales and adverts for holidays?