



Discipleship at
Leicester Cathedral



THE COMMUNITY OF THE
TREE OF LIFE

UPSIDE-DOWN DECEMBER

A SUGGESTED 60-MIN PRAYER GUIDE

Below you will find a centring prayer, scripture, a finger labyrinth and creative prayer activities. Please feel free to use what you want. Permission to dip in and out, follow the suggested timings or go at your own pace.

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You will need to **PRINT OUT** pages **FOUR, SIX & SEVEN** of this resource.

You may also need a pen, scissors, a Bible and journal.

Scroll down to find out more before entering prayer.

INTRO

This month, we join with Leicester Cathedral and shape our prayers around the theme of Upside-Down December.

OPENING THOUGHTS & CENTRING PRAYER [5 min]

Read these opening thoughts from The Revd Emma Davies, Canon Precentor at Leicester Cathedral

For many of us, the last months have been some of the most disruptive in all of our lives and continue to be very uncertain. The experience of living through a pandemic has brought a sense of life turned upside down. Whether it is a change in work or working patterns, the isolation from others, anxiety about the future or the loss of loved ones, it can feel as though we no longer know which way is up.

December is not a time to ignore all of this, but is precisely the time to acknowledge all the upside-down-ness of life together in prayer. God knows this landscape, and the story we tell every Christmas about Jesus, the baby in the manger, promise that God is with us even in the most unpromising of circumstances.

This December, may we be honest about our own upside-down messy lives, and invite God to bring us transformation, so that what appears to be hopeless, lost or frightening can be met with God's new life, possibility and love.

Get into a comfortable posture. Take a moment to reflect on these thoughts. Then pray,

'As we enter prayer now, we pause to be still, slow our breathing, and centre ourselves in the abiding presence of Christ'

Bring your attention to your breath. Treat each breath in as an arrival. Breathe in God's presence. As you breath out, imagine letting go of future worries and responsibilities to God. Become present.

Breathe deeply. You may like to pray this breath prayer,

[AS YOU BREATH IN] *Upside-down God is with me.*

[AS YOU BREATH OUT] *Bring transformation*

OPENING SCRIPTURE [3 min]

Read slowly, aloud or in your head. You may like to read several times.

God almighty came as a helpless baby into a poor and obscure family, seeking their love. Mary's song (Luke 1.46–55) tells of God's upside-down priorities...

Mary responded,

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

*48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.*

*49 For the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.*

*50 He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.*

*51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.*

*52 He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.*

*53 He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands.*

*54 He has helped his servant Israel
and remembered to be merciful.*

*55 For he made this promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children forever.”*

A MONASTIC MYTH

The symbol of the upside-down tree may have begun in 7th century. Folklore around the topic credits a Benedictine monk named Boniface. Saint Boniface, born in 675 in Wessex, England, was an English missionary and reformer, often called the apostle of Germany for his role in the Christianisation of that country.

According to the legend, Boniface saw a group of German pagans worshipping an oak tree, and in response, he cut down the tree and grew a fir in its place. Then, Boniface cut down the fir and turned it upside-down, using its triangular shape as a way of explaining the Holy Trinity to the pagans.

TRINITY TREE FINGER LABYRINTH [17 min]

What is a finger labyrinth? A finger labyrinth is similar to a full-sized labyrinth you would walk except it is on a much smaller scale. The user traces the path to the centre using their finger.

Print a copy of the ‘tree labyrinth’ below

Slowly trace the path of the labyrinth with your finger, three times. Move at your own pace. Each time you reach the centre of the labyrinth, pause to consider a question...

First tracing - what is your image of God in this season?

Second tracing - who is Jesus for you today?

Third tracing - where have noticed the stirrings of the Holy Spirit recently?

You may like to write down, journal or voice record your reflections.

ENTER ↓



MAKING SPACE [15 min]

In recent times, retailers have adopted the tradition of the upside-down Christmas tree for practical reasons. Hanging a Christmas tree from the ceiling greatly reduces the floor space required for display. Homeowners could also consider turning their Christmas tree on its head. It helps those with limited floor space and leaves more room for presents under the tree.

In the busyness of this Christmas season, let us make more space to be present to God.

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This is a holy moment, an opportunity to make space.

To become present to God.

In your own preferred way, become aware of Immanuel.

God is with you now, wherever you are.

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You may like to kneel, or sit, or lie down.

Close your eyes or stare out of the window.

Posture yourself present.

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You may like to sing praise or soak in silence.

Whisper a prayer or shout at God.

Pray in your own upside-down way.

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'And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn' – Luke 2:7

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am' - John 14:1-3

'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me' – Revelation 3:20

You may like to write down and commit to three intentional ways you are going to make space for God this Christmas season:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

PRAY FOR FIVE [15 min]

We encourage you to choose five people or situations you know of, and commit to pray for them throughout the Christmas season.

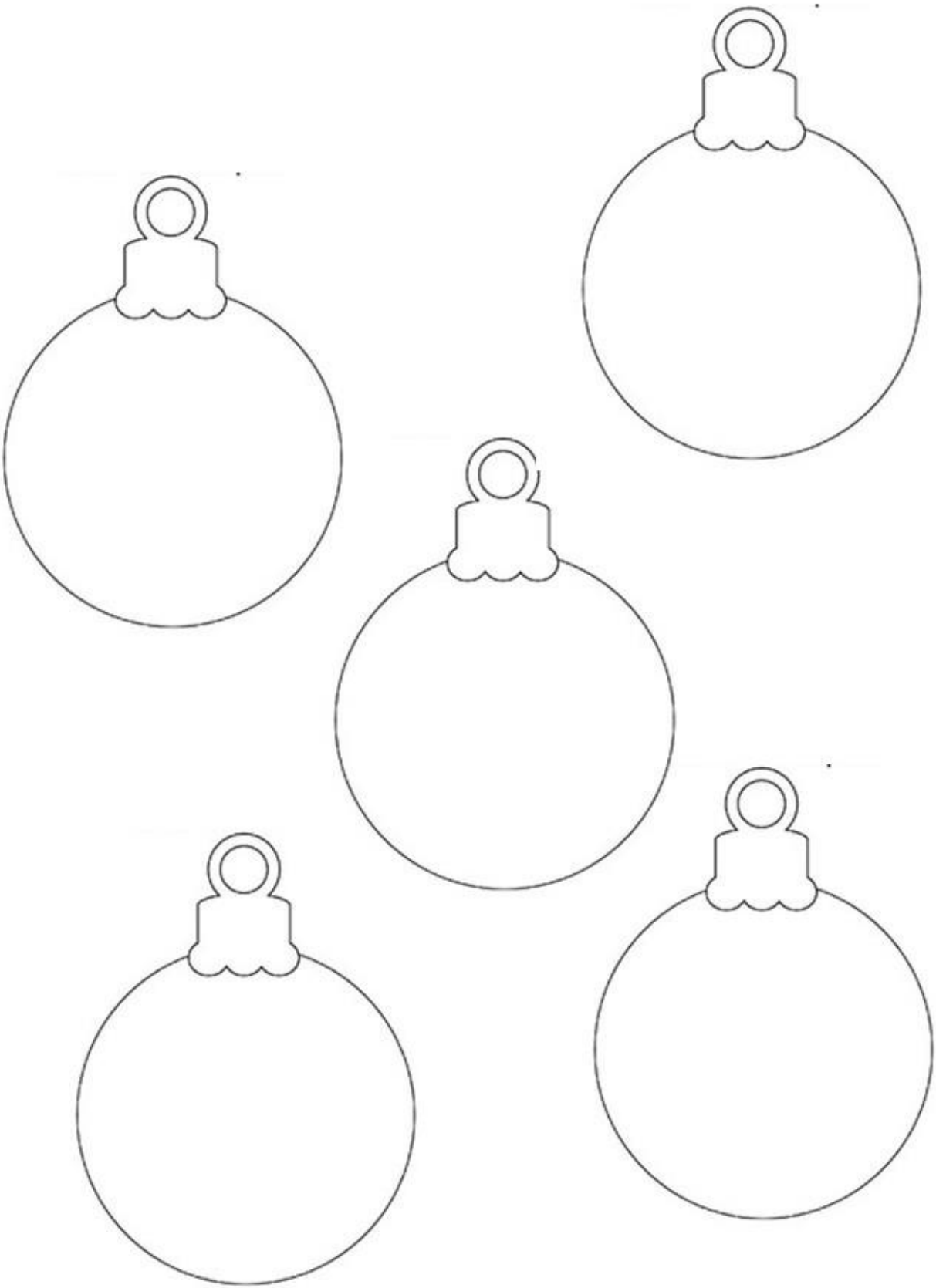
Write each name or situation on one of the Christmas ornaments below.

You may like to decorate, cut out the ornaments and hang them on your Christmas tree as a prompt to pray.

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Spend a few minutes now, praying for each of these people or situations.

Ask God to bring transformation.



CLOSING PRAYER

I AM with you, ready to be born
(Luke 2:1-19 & Matthew 2:1-12)
A prayer-poem by Matt Long.

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About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah for the census.

We walk along the roadside with Joseph
Ticking all the 'right' boxes
And jumping through all the 'right' hoops
Trying desperately to hold ourselves together
As everything around us spirals out of our control
Overwhelmed by circumstance, we ask...

Where is God in all of this?

In response to our situations
Something deep inside gently whispers
I AM with you

He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

We wait expectantly with Mary
Ticking time tempering our hopes and dreams
Whilst giving fear fertile ground to foster
Trying to keep on keeping on despite ourselves
Afraid of failure, we ask...

Why is God not doing anything?

In response to our fear
Something deep inside gently whispers
I AM with you

There were sheep-herders camping in the neighbourhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with the shepherds
Diligently do our duties
And clocking up nine to fives

Trying our best to navigate the normal
With no time or space to recognise the supernatural
Terrified by change, we ask...

What would it actually look like if God's glory broke in?

In response to the unknown
Something deep inside gently whispers
I AM with you

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory— this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. The star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child.

We journey with the scholars from the east
Hearing rumours of restoration
We lift our eyes to the treetops and see star-signs
Trying to figure out who we are and how we play are part
Desperate to find answers, we ask...

Where can we actually find Jesus?
In response to our questions
Something deep inside gently whispers
I AM with you

I AM with you
And I've been here all along
Hidden in plain sight
Bound up in beauty and brokenness
Found in our fallings and failures
In the depths of everything and everyone
Immanuel resides
Ready to be born
Amen

>> Take a moment to give us some feedback about this prayer resource:

<https://us19.listmanage.com/survey?u=cbd6384064124b364f971d785&id=86cdc9720a&tribution=false>

>> For more downloadable 60-minute prayer resources: leicestertreeoflife.org/prayer