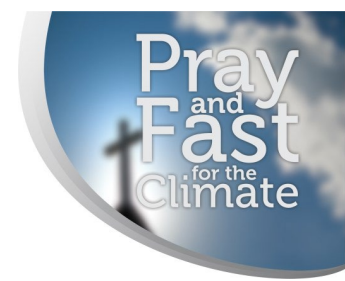


Prayer points – December 2022



Advent Hope

Why, we may sometimes wonder, did the Western mediaeval church choose to start the church year on Advent Sunday, just when people in the north are going into their coldest, darkest period? The nights grow ever longer; the air is chill; the signs of new life are hard to see. Surely one should (as people in the South do!) start the New Year at a time of growing light and new birth?

But perhaps the bleak, northern Advent conveys a message that is vital in these difficult times. It reminds us that the act of preparation for the Messiah starts before any signs of His coming are visible: our calling is to hopeful, expectant action based on faith, which isn't dependent on what we see around us. And it reassures us that even the seasons of gathering gloom are encompassed in God's time and lead towards the transformation of the world by Emmanuel, God with us.

Throughout this month, wherever we are and whatever difficulties we face, may God grant us *joy* as we recall Christ's birth and saving work; *strength* to follow Him faithfully now; and *hope* in the Kingdom to come.

COP27: Progress on loss and damage

For decades, there have been calls to compensate people in climate-vulnerable developing countries for 'loss and damage' – the suffering experienced as a result of climate impacts. "The system," Climate Action Network's Harjeet Singh [explained to Carbon Brief](#), "has money if you want to put up solar panels, it has money if you want to retrofit your home ... but it doesn't have money when people are losing their homes. It's a clear gap."

Historically, developed countries have blocked efforts to establish such funding, as they fear anything that would imply legal liability for the impacts of their emissions. There have also been [disagreements](#) over how funds for loss and damage might be administered and whether those paying in should be only the traditional 'developed countries' or also include major recent emitters such as China. After much negotiation, however, the COP27 talks agreed to "establish new funding arrangements for assisting developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, in responding to loss and damage."

This is a clear victory for the principle that people who have contributed relatively little to climate change should not be left to bear the burdens of its consequences. But the agreement's contribution to climate justice will depend on how effectively it is implemented. Wealthy countries have a poor track record on delivering climate finance, and major questions remain: Who will pay? Will the funding be additional, or just redirected? Will it be focused on areas that developing countries see as priorities? We give thanks for the progress, and pray that the questions will be resolved well and that the funding arrangements will become a meaningful force for justice.

What next for 1.5?

While there is cautious excitement around the loss and damage funding, there is concern that the COP 27 documents aren't strong enough in the measures they propose to reduce emissions and limit global heating to 1.5°C. Delegates who wanted strong language on the 1.5C target [had to fight](#) even to keep [strong language about it in place](#), and efforts to increase ambition around the phasing out of fossil fuels failed to make progress. Few countries have increased the ambition of their targets since the Glasgow COP, despite being requested to do so; the new text doesn't make further requests and didn't measure progress since Glasgow. Nor did it echo scientists' call for emissions to peak as soon as possible and by 2025 at the latest.

There was some positive movement in looking at sectoral emissions – and the head of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, [has said](#) claims that 1.5C is dead are "factually incorrect, and politically ...very wrong." He also warned that "Proponents of the existing energy systems will be the beneficiaries if the obituary of 1.5C is written." We pray that countries will increase their ambition and that the target will indeed be met.

Colossians 1:15-20

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

West African Floods

Flooding during West Africa's rainy season is a common occurrence, but this year's May to October floods [were exceptional](#): in Niger, Nigeria and Chad alone, more than four and a half million people were affected, including at least 1.9 million people who were displaced. Over 800 people died; houses and infrastructure and more than a million hectares of crops were damaged or destroyed.

A rapid attribution study carried out by the World Weather Attribution service's scientists suggests that "the flooding occurred as a consequence of above average rainfall throughout the 2022 rainy season exacerbated by shorter spikes of very heavy rain." Looking at the main rain events, they find that the seasonal rain in the Lake Chad region was made 20% more intense and 80 times more likely by climate change, with the shorter Niger Basin rain event made 5% more intense and twice as likely.

Lord, we lament the destruction and loss of lives and livelihoods. We pray for all affected by these and other floods this year. We ask your blessing on efforts to recover and to build back better. And we pray that these events will give urgency to the discussions on reducing emissions and funding for loss and damage.

Protecting the diversity of creation

From the 7th to the 19th of this month, delegates from 196 countries will [meet in Montreal](#) to discuss ways of protecting biodiversity and ensuring that its benefits are justly shared. The biodiversity crisis is linked to the climate crisis – and, like it, is at a critical stage: [one quarter of plant and animal species are at risk of extinction](#), and the World Wildlife Fund [estimates](#) that global wildlife populations have declined by 69% since 1970.

The Montreal meeting is due to agree the next Global Biodiversity Framework – a roadmap of action designed to lead to a future in which humanity is more in harmony with nature. It will also look at funding for preservation efforts and [proposals to set aside 30% of both land and sea areas](#).

"How wonderful are your works, O Lord!" the Psalmist says. We thank and praise God for the beauty and diversity of creation, repent of our own and others' misuses of it, and pray for the success of the Montreal conference.

Reef at risk

A UNESCO mission to evaluate the status of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia [has recommended](#) that the site be placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The mission's visit coincided with a mass bleaching event, and the report states that pressures of climate change and degraded water quality are placing the 'Outstanding Universal Value' of the site irrevocably under threat.

The mission's priority recommendations to the Australian government [include](#) a number of proposals to improve the area's water quality and a call to the government to ensure that its plans for the reef "include clear government commitments to reduce greenhouse emissions consistent with the efforts required to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C" – an acknowledgement that while the new government's climate commitments are stronger than the old one's, they don't yet align with a 1.5°C target. We pray that the Australian government [won't treat this as a criticism](#) which requires defensiveness, but as a challenge which inspires them to do even more. We pray, too, that this vitally important ecosystem can be preserved.

Prayer from Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Anglican Church of Southern Africa

The original version of this prayer ends: "We light this candle as we commit ourselves to fast and pray for climate justice." If you're using it in a place where you can light an Advent (or other) candle, do add these words!

Spirit of God,
You established the dance of Creation.
Bring life out of death,
Bring order out of chaos.
Call us to radical action:
To care for the web of Creation,
To share our resources justly,
And to work for the renewal of our Mother, Earth.