



## Opportunities

### Advent Daily Prayer

To help you stay awake in this season, click on a calendar day to receive scripture, art, music and a reflection. Details [here](#).



### Love is Born Exploring Advent and Christmas

Join Stephen Cottrell and Paula Gooder in conversation. See the trailer [here](#). Watch the full talk on YouTube after 8 December.



### Rhythms of Life 24 Hour Retreat 17-18 December

[Link](#)



### Women's Christmas Retreat Jan Richardson

This free downloadable retreat can be taken at any time, on your own or with a group. Find the details [here](#).



### What Matters Most (Now)?

Download this free audio walking [retreat](#) from Brian Draper and reflect on your journey through the pandemic.

## Staying Awake

It's now that time of year when we get home between five and six in the evening and, because of the dark, it feels like three hours later! But it's not time for bed yet and we don't feel as inclined to go out again. I wonder what you are doing to stay awake?

The Latin word for 'wakefulness' is 'vigilia' from where we get our words 'vigilant' and 'vigil'. It takes some stamina to hold a vigil, to stay awake, to be vigilant in support of a good cause or beside someone who is dying. It's all about watching, waiting and over-coming - this is Advent.

*Learning to weep,  
keep vigil,  
wait for the dawn.  
Perhaps this is what it  
means to be human.  
(Henri Nouwen)*

For churches that have midnight services such as on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, these can be a challenge to stay awake for. But there in the darkness can be found a special sense of God's presence if we are able to stay awake. And when we leave we take a warm sense of hope, joy and light with us.

Some people on retreat choose, like those in some monastic orders, to get up in the middle of the night to pray - to hold their own vigil. This can be a hard choice but the stillness and peace of the night draws them to a special intimacy with God.



In our 24/7 activity driven world it's hard to get into a rhythm which enables us to stay awake to things which don't involve work, TV, shopping, eating out, etc. Some of us also need a caffeine boost to do these things! But:

*The season of Advent  
means there is  
something  
on the horizon  
the likes of which  
we have never  
seen before.  
So stay [awake].  
Sit.  
Linger.  
Ponder.  
Wait.  
Behold.  
Wonder.  
There will be time  
enough  
for running.  
(Jan Richardson)*

Maybe we can allow the physical darkness to show us flickers and shafts of light as we stay awake and hold vigil this month and into the new year.

## An Exercise

### LIGHT IN DARK PLACES

Watch this short [video](#) which speaks of light and darkness at Christmas. For the remainder of Advent, you may like to light a candle once the sun has gone down and hold vigil for someone or some thing.

- Stay there for two minutes remembering the person or thing.
- Consider what the need is in the situation.
- Mention that need to God.
- End by reading the words from Isaiah 9:

*The people  
walking in darkness  
have seen a great light...  
For to us  
a child is born...  
called  
Wonderful Counsellor,  
Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace.*



Try this [meditation](#) as you get closer to Christmas day.

On Christmas Eve, turn your lights off and watch this [video](#) backed by the song O Holy Night. Remember and be thankful for those who kept vigil.