**Thinking ahead about...Advent and Christmas**

**Opening Devotions**

**THE GATHERING**

O LORD, God of my salvation,

when, at night, I cry out in your presence,

let my prayer come before you;

incline your ear to my cry.

(Psalm 88:1-2)

*After silence a candle is lit.*

It is good to give thanks to the LORD,

to sing praises to your name, O Most High;

to declare your steadfast love in the morning,

and your faithfulness by night.

(Psalm 92:1-2)

*After silence a candle is lit.*

Blessed be the name of the LORD

from this time on and for evermore.

From the rising of the sun to its setting

the name of the LORD is to be praised.

(Psalm 113:2-3)

*After silence a candle is lit.*

Blessed be the name of the LORD.

**Come bless the LORD,**

**all you servants of the LORD,**

**who stand by night in the house of the LORD!**

**Lift up your hands to the holy place,**

**and bless the LORD.**

May the LORD, maker of heaven and earth,

bless you from Zion.

(Psalm 134)

**SONG** As we are gathered

As we are gathered,

Jesus is here;

one with each other,

Jesus is here;

joined by the Spirit,

built up in love,

part of the Body,

the Church of God.

As we are gathered,

Jesus is here;

one with each other,

Jesus is here. (R&S 469)

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**BIBLE TEXT** Matthew 1: 18-24

**REFLECTION** Virgin Birth by Joy Crowley

**PRAYER**

O God,

As we discuss the meaning of Advent and Christmas create in us a growing will to be people of faith. Help us to accept your Spirit changing the shape of our faith. May we welcome the motion of demanding thoughts that stir unseen within us and let us be accepting of others who help to midwife the new ideas that we labour with. Work through us all so that what we do here is not our work but yours. Amen.

*The candles are extinguished.*

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Sources -

Worship *from* The URC: Evening Prayers

Bible Text – New International Version

Virgin Birth by Joy Cowley from *Psalms Down-Under* in *No Empty Phrases* ed. Donald Hilton (NCEC 1999)

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