



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the First Sunday of Advent

(Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son, Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

Cranmer and those drawing up the Prayer Book of 1549 composed this collect to begin Advent and the new liturgical year. The Prayer Book prescribes its use (along with the appointed Sunday collect) each Sunday of Advent. Common Worship follows suit with the same collect, adapted into “you” and “your” form.

The Reformers drew, though, on two Advent collects in Latin, both to be found in the Gregorian Sacramentary, and one of them also in the Gelasian Sacramentary. Both of these liturgical collections are at least twelve hundred years old, and preserve far older material; the two prayers may go back to the time when the season of Advent began to be established, around the early sixth century. The first of them was an Advent collect which was based on Paul’s words in Romans 13:12, *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light”*. This Scriptural backbone would have appealed to the 1549 Reformers.

A glorious and rich prayer has been created from the underlying material. The first half refers to our life in the here and now and evokes Christ’s birth and his sharing our mortal life; the second half looks forward to the Second Coming with the final judgment of the “quick” (that is, the living) and the dead and the hope of immortal life. The two halves have echoes or contrasts. The “humility” of Christ’s first coming is contrasted with the “Majesty” of his second. “Mortal life” and “life immortal” echo each other, the second phrase’s reversal of the order of noun and adjective lending the collect a poetic flourish.

The collect reflects the Advent hope that the Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus lived and taught in “this mortal life” will be vindicated at his second coming.

A hallmark of living in the light of this hope is longing, the sort of acute longing which is implicit in the Beatitudes, where Jesus says, "*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted...Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:4,6). The blessed mourn the state of the world, and yearn for God's reign.

By this collect we pray that our lives may be shaped by trusting that the Kingdom of God which we long for will be fulfilled. We ally ourselves afresh with God's purposes by seeking his grace to "cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light". And the time when we do this is (and this is a key word in the collect) "now".

James Graham, November 2025