

The Empty Chair



In Advent we hear the Old Testament stories of those who longed for Christ to come – to bind up the broken-hearted, to bring light into the darkness and to set the captives free. An empty chair at table was often left for the promised Messiah. O Come Emmanuel.

Christians have the knowledge of God's gift of love in the birth of a Baby in Bethlehem – the **Sacrifice of Incarnation** – when God emptied himself of divine power and took on human nature as a servant – as Emmanuel / 'God-with-Us' - willing to share in the shadowlands of human experience – loss, fear, entrapment, ridicule, cruelty, even painful death. This is the measure of God's love for us, which we celebrate at Christmas.

But for many, the coming of Christmas is empty of hope or filled with fear, perhaps through bereavement, or homelessness, a diagnosis, imprisonment or conflict. Those trapped in abusive relationships, fearful of being alone with an abusive partner, may struggle to feel the presence of God. The empty chair represents their hope of liberation – where their inside story may be heard and where help will come.

Mothers' Union '**Rise Up**' campaign seeks to bring domestic abuse out of the shadows and into the open, where it can be challenged and victims given the help they need. Let our prayers this Advent include all those in life's shadowlands and those with unheard 'inside stories'.