

Rievaulx Abbey

In late September 2025 we visited North Yorkshire, our visit followed several days of heavy rain that affected much of northern England. We were fortunate to have warm dry weather, although the ground around Rievaulx Abbey was rather soft.

I had wanted to visit Rievaulx for a while and it was worth the wait. Most of the photographs were taken by Sue or me.



How do you pronounce Rievaulx?

There appears to be several pronunciations. I've picked this one. Break the word into two syllables, Rei-vaulx. The first syllable sounds like 'rye' and the second syllable sounds like 'voh'. So, the simple pronunciation is **Rye-voh.**

The religious community in the 1160's numbered over 600, a hundred years later it was half that size. Rievaulx ceased to be an Abbey on 3rd December 1538, when the Abbot and 22 monks voluntarily surrendered their monastery to the royal commissioners. So, the Monastery and Abbey were 'suppressed' from that date.

If you wish delve more deeply into the historical background please go to the link below. If you go to the web site you will find illustrations by Tig Sutton from Wellesley College, Massachusetts, United States showing an artists impression of the Abbey in the Medieval period.

[History of Rievaulx Abbey | English Heritage](#)



The Cistercian monks followed the Rule of Benedict. Their day started early in the morning and had several periods of prayer during the day after the pattern of the psalmist '*Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments.*' *Psalm 119:164.* Their day ended in prayer, Compline, in the evening. When not in prayer they engaged in manual work, study or writing texts.

I have chosen verses from Psalm 119 to accompany the photographs of the Abbey and the North Yorkshire countryside and to be our focus for reflection. Psalm 119 has 176 verses, making the psalm the longest single chapter in the Bible. There are questions regarding the authorship and it was probably written over a period of time and then later compiled into the format we have today. There is not a natural flow to the psalm - it has been described as like a string of pearls where each has equal, but independent value. The New King James Version describes Psalm 119 as 'Meditations on the Excellencies of the Word of God'. However, some scholars recognise that the psalm's poetry leaves something to be desired and that the overall length and style give the psalm a peculiar feel. Having said this, the psalms have become 'the treasured daily food' for Christians across the centuries, Christians have 'linked the word of God so loved by the psalmist with the revelation of Christ'. (Eaton)



North Yorkshire, the setting for Rievaulx Abbey

Below is an audio presentation of the NKJV version of Psalm 119, the text appears on the screen. It will take about 20/25 minutes to listen to Psalm 119.

<https://youtu.be/Ny4fxJ0pBYc>

I have also included a sung version each group of verses used as part of the reflection. The text should appear on your screen when you click the link

Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming (adventus) of Christ in his incarnation, and also looks ahead to his final advent as judge at the end of time. The readings and liturgies not only direct us towards Christ's birth, they also challenge the modern reluctance to confront the theme of divine judgement. (Church of England Introduction to the Season)

As this reflection arrives in readiness for Advent, I have decided to use verses from Psalm 119. Angela Tilby writes that in *'some lectionaries this psalm is used in the last days of Advent. This points us towards Christ, the fulfiller of the law, and its fulfilment. He is the hidden treasure we seek in this psalm, the riches at its heart, the pearl of great price.'*

Each week during Advent there will be a section of the Psalm, eight verses, to reflect on.

Psalm 119 within the Hebrew context.

Psalm 119 has an alphabetic acrostic structure, this psalm is divided into 22 sections, the same number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has 8 verses in the NKJV each section has starts with the Hebrew letter e.g. א **ALEPH**, verses 1-8.

Advent 1

Prayer for the week

Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns, turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, that we may be ready to meet you in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. (Common Worship)



Click the link to hear  YouTube https://youtu.be/RPNm-P77irc?si=84F30p1ZLFv_f8qH



Psalm 119a-Aleph - Blessed Are They
Whose Ways Are Blameless (ZC Press)
The opening words pick up the theme of the darkness of sin. Have you recognised that it is easier to see the sin in others rather than ourselves? *'why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye'.* (Matthew 7:3)

Our Church is right when it says in the Introduction to Advent there is a *'reluctance to confront the theme of divine judgement.'*

Let us read these words from Psalm 119 and find the glimmers of light, the light of Christ within us.

I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments. I will keep Your statutes;(v 7-8)

We close this reflection with **O Come, O Come, Emmanuel** from the Chet Valley Churches.

 YouTube <https://youtu.be/kKu0or0t8Uw?si=m6jDOGngF9R8J2oJ>

x ALEPH

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the Lord!
² Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
³ They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
⁴ You have commanded *us*
To keep Your precepts diligently.
⁵ Oh, that my ways were directed
To keep Your statutes!
⁶ Then I would not be ashamed,
When I look into all Your commandments.
⁷ I will praise You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
⁸ I will keep Your statutes;
Oh, do not forsake me utterly!

Advent 2

Prayer for the week

Almighty God, purify our hearts and minds, that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as judge and saviour we may be ready to receive him, who is our Lord and our God



Click the link to hear **Zayin - Your Decrees Are The Theme Of My Song** (ZC Press)

 **YouTube** https://youtu.be/MR8_87nnLas?si=rKJRhS_UDDNUCbYE



τ ZAYIN

49 Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope.

50 This *is* my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.

51 The proud have me in great derision, *yet* I do not turn aside from Your law.

52 I remembered Your judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself.

53 Indignation has taken hold of me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law.

54 Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

55 I remember Your name in the night, O Lord, and I keep Your law.

56 This has become mine, because I kept Your precepts.

I am sure many of us have moments of stress and anguish and have sought comfort in the words of the Psalms. Perhaps not straight away but we got there in the end!

'I life up my eyes' Psalm 121, 'The Lord's my Shepherd' Psalm 23, 'Out of the depths I cry' Psalm 130, all familiar words but perhaps we

would not turn to Psalm 119. But words of comfort are there, woven within the word of the law. **50** 'This *is* my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life', and **54** Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

Prayer:

God of loving mercy, in this place of our pilgrimage turn your laws into songs, that we may find your promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord.

We close with the Advent hymn 'Come thou long expected Jesus'

 **YouTube** https://youtu.be/WBGx_4PxO3g?si=AOVBT0sc2KtSVPeF

Advent 3

Prayer for the week

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world



7 QOPH

¹⁴⁵ I cry out with *my* whole heart;
Hear me, O Lord! I will keep Your statutes.
¹⁴⁶ I cry out to You;
Save me, and I will keep Your testimonies.
¹⁴⁷ I rise before the dawning of the morning,
And cry for help; I hope in Your word.
¹⁴⁸ My eyes are awake through
the *night* watches,
That I may meditate on Your word.
¹⁴⁹ Hear my voice according to Your
lovingkindness;
O Lord, revive me according to Your justice.
¹⁵⁰ They draw near who follow after wickedness;
They are far from Your law.
¹⁵¹ You *are* near, O Lord,
And all Your commandments *are* truth.
¹⁵² Concerning Your testimonies,
I have known of old that You have founded
them forever.

we may be found an acceptable people in your sight.

This is one of the longest of the Advent collects and associated with John the Baptist, the Messenger. In the collect the ministers are called to prepare the way, so are the stewards, that is all of us, 'Laos', the laity, the People of God. We all have our role.

Let listen to the verses 145-152 Psalm 119 - Qoph - I Rise Before The Dawn And Cry For Help

 YouTube

<https://youtu.be/eexmo8dHIAAs?si=qmj35dX0EnENeQVv>

(ZC Press)

These words from Psalm 119 remind us that the task of a messenger is not always easy our faith journey takes many twists and turns that help build up our faith and add to the message we have to share. The message of the lovingkindness of God.



The closing words from these verses, v 152, have a certain resonance to the closing words of Matthew's Gospel, the Great Commission ¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and*

of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

We close this reflection with Tell out my Soul sung by Chet Valley Churches Choir

 **YouTube** <https://youtu.be/vz-FkqobgXY?si=EiHUsLMaKy-kvbZg>



Runswick Bay coastline The eastern end of the bay, with Hill Stones in middle distance and Kettle Ness beyond.

Advent 4

Prayer for the week

Eternal God,
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,
so we wait for his coming in glory;
bring us through the birth pangs of this present
age to see, with her, our great salvation
in Jesus Christ our Lord.



I long for Your salvation, O Lord,
And Your law *is* my delight. V 174

We come to the closing words of Psalm 119 let hear these sung
Psalm 119 - Tav - I Have Gone Astray Like A Lost Sheep

 **YouTube** <https://youtu.be/aftR75LnohM?si=5O1M7lkOjPyX0hs1> (ZC Press)



So, we have come towards the end of the Season of Advent, with images of the remains of Rievaulx Abbey to remind us of a house of work and prayer. A place that at its height had the voices of over 600 monks singing the psalms.

We have heard, read verses from the longest chapter in our scriptures and listened to voices sing words from Psalm 119. Not perhaps a conventional way to prepare for Advent!

Advent is a time of preparation and an awareness that we don't always get it right. Archbishop John Sentamu wrote in his reflection on these verses

'We won't always get it right, but we must keep close to Jesus Christ; keep close to his Body, the Church; keep close to all humankind—standing daily in the power of the Holy Spirit, at the intersection where human need and divine pity meet.'

Reflection by John Sentamu

Prayer:

God of mercy, swift to help us, as our lips pour forth your praise, fill our hearts with the peace you give to those who wait for your salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord.

π TAU

169 Let my cry come before You, O Lord; Give me understanding according to Your word.

170 Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word.

171 My lips shall utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes.

172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness.

173 Let Your hand become my help, For I have chosen Your precepts.

174 I long for Your salvation, O Lord, And Your law is my delight.

175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; And let Your judgments help me.

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

We close with Chet Valley Churches singing 'Joy to the world'

 **YouTube** <https://youtu.be/vZhqpb97y7Q?si=H8NEXulyNiGKHmGV>

Fr Derek Akker
Advent 2025

Acknowledgements

Psalms for Life, Hearing and Praying the Book of Psalm - John Eaton, SPCK, 2006 pages 307-309

Reflections on the Psalms App (hymnsam.co.uk), also available as a paperback Reflection, Angela Tilby, John Sentamu

Prayers taken from Reflections on the Psalms

Collects

Advent 1 -3 Church of England Prayer and Worship

Advent 4 Anglican Compass

Music

All the music comes via the  **YouTube** link

The sung setting of Psalm 119 is recorded by the Zion Christian Press (ZC Press)

All the hymns are sung by Chet valley Churches.

Photographs

Photo of scenery of inland North Yorkshire, Laurie Smithies

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Advent Candles

Liesel - Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0

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(Derek is an Honorary Associate Priest (All Saints & St James and St Stephen's, Elton) Prior to his ordination he was accredited as a Methodist Preacher in 1968 and served within the Methodist Church until returning to the Anglican Church in the mid 1980's)

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The dual Parishes of Kirklees Valley, Bury, (All Saints, Elton & St James, Woolfold) and St Stephens, Elton are in the Diocese of Manchester.

Vicar of the two parishes - Fr. Samuel Eccleston O.P. (Anglican Order of Preachers-Dominicans)