

# Advent Devotional



by  
members and friends  
of

St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
Salem, Oregon

2020



# How To Use This Advent Booklet

*In 2020, Advent begins on Sunday, November 29.*

- 1.) Place an Advent wreath on a table.
- 2.) Each day, find a time to gather around the Advent wreath. Many find it convenient to gather after dinner or just before bed.
- 3.) Light the appropriate number of candles on your Advent wreath - one each day of the first week, two the second week, and so on. The Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. As each candle is lit, say:

First candle: “*We light this candle for the hope that is within us.*”

Second candle: “*We light this candle for the love that we show to ourselves and others.*”

Third candle: “*We light this candle for the joy we share.*”

Fourth candle: “*We light this candle for peace on earth.*”

Christ candle: “*Christ has come to light our way.*”

- 4.) Read the Scripture verse, the meditation, and the prayer that has been prepared for each day (beginning on page 10.) Each meditation and prayer was lovingly written by a member or friend of St. Paul’s. You will recognize many of the names here!

- 5.) Sing a favorite Advent hymn.

# What is Advent?

Prepare ye the way of the Lord!

It's Advent, the season that kicks off the new church year. During Advent, we look forward to the coming of the Christ child, and we prepare our homes and our hearts to receive this greatest of gifts.

These weeks are often marked by hectic activity - shopping, meal planning, decorating, and more. In the midst of all the holiday preparation, Advent reminds us to take time to step away from our busy activities, and to spend a few moments considering the reason we celebrate this season.

Advent is best known for the Advent wreath, which consists of four (or five) candles in a circle, traditionally decorated with evergreens. (*Fire safety alert: don't put flammable objects near an open flame!*) Each candle has a meaning.

**The first candle is the prophecy candle, and it represents hope.** We remember those who foretold the coming of the Christ. "*God himself will give you a sign: a virgin will get pregnant and give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel.*" Isaiah 7:14

**The second candle is the Bethlehem candle, and it stands for love.** When we light this, we remember Mary & Joseph's long journey to Bethlehem. "*You will find this sign: a baby, wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger.*" Luke 2:12

**The third (pink) candle is the shepherd's candle, and it stands for joy.** This Sunday is also called Gaudete Sunday, which means "rejoice!" When we light this candle, we remember the joyful news that was revealed to the shepherds. "*There were shepherds living in the nearby fields, watching over their flocks at night.*

*An angel of God appeared to them, and God's glory shone out, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid. I'm bringing you great news! Today in David's town a Savior was born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord." Luke 2:8-11*

**The fourth candle is the angel's candle, and it stands for peace.** When we light this, we remember the blessing of the angels when Jesus was born. *"All of a sudden, a huge group of heavenly messengers appeared with the angel, all praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heavens, and peace on earth to all people."* Luke 2:13-14

**The fifth candle is the Christ candle, often placed in the center of the wreath.** It is lit on Christmas eve - Christ has come! *"For unto us a child is born, a son is given. And the authority to rule will be upon his shoulders: and his name will be Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."* Isaiah 9:6

As St. Paul's member Gwendolyn Gowing reminds us:

*The word 'advent' refers to an arrival or approach. Advent is a time of preparation of the inner spirit, the soul, and so Advent may bring us a new experience as we draw closer to Christmas. When we take time to prepare our hearts during Advent, we invite a new understanding of some area of life, so that we will shine with True Light.*

*Careful devotion can take place in each person. It can be subtle and for some persons it occurs during deep silence. That inner silence helps us to discover a new relationship to God, and also aspects of our daily life, as we prepare for Christmas.*

We hope this Advent booklet will help families to draw closer as they explore the season, and that we will all discover an ever-richer relationship with God.

# Advent Activity—Advent Wreath

Make an Advent wreath! There are many different ways to create your own Advent wreath. Here's one:

Supplies:

- greens of your choosing (*note: all parts of the holly plant are poisonous to kids and pets*)
- five clear glass votive holders (*your local dollar store is a great place to find these.*)
- purple craft paint
- pink craft paint
- white craft paint
- votive candles



Instructions:

1. THREE purple votives: Put purple paint in a votive holder. Add a few drops of water to thin the paint. Swirl the paint up and around the inside (*ONLY*) of the candle holder. (*If the paint doesn't stick, you've added too much water, so add more paint.*) After covering the inside, dump out excess paint. Wipe off any drips on the outside. Repeat two more times, for a total of three purple votive holders.
2. ONE pink votive: Repeat the above process with pink paint.
3. ONE white votive: Repeat the above process with white paint.
4. Let paint dry for one hour
5. Place items on a cookie sheet in a cool oven.
6. Turn heat to 350 degrees, bake for 30 minutes.
7. Turn oven off and let cool completely in oven.
8. Wait 72 hours before using votives.
9. Arrange holders, with white in the center. Decorate (*safely!*) with greens. Place candles in the holders.

Instruction courtesy of <https://whitehouseblackshutters.com/painted-votive-advent-wreath/>

## Advent Activity—Jesse Calendar

The Jesse tree is a Christmas tradition that dates back to medieval times. Create your own ornaments using symbols to tell the story of the Bible from creation to the birth of Christ. Each day of Advent tell the story that corresponds with the symbol and hang each symbol on some branches from outside or even a Christmas tree. Printable ornaments and the scripture to read each day can be found at <https://www.faithward.org/jesse-tree/jesse-tree-symbols-and-bible-stories/>



## Advent Activity—Music!

Sing Advent songs! Here are some suggestions:

- O Come, O Come Emmanuel
- Come Thou Long Expected Savior

In addition, here are three curated Spotify\* playlists for Advent:

- [Advent with Sacred Ordinary Days](#)
- [Choral Music for Advent and Christmas](#)
- [Simple Advent](#)

\*Spotify is an audio streaming and media services provider, they offer a free limited account available at this link: <https://www.spotify.com/us/free/>

# Advent Activity

## Reverse Advent Calendar

We're all familiar with an Advent calendar, where each day, we enjoy images or treats hidden behind a door. This year, why not also do a Reverse Advent calendar? Instead of receiving a treat each day, you GIVE a treat by collecting one item each day of Advent to help those in our community who find themselves in need this season.

First, decorate a large box—perhaps with holiday wrap. Next, on each day of Advent, place one item in the box, to help those in our community who find themselves in need during the winter season.

You might choose to gather:

- School supplies;
- Non-perishable food items (*see the list opposite*);
- Warm clothing (*socks, hats, scarves, gloves*);
- Toiletries or gift cards.

Every day, you can look forward to placing one item in the box. By Christmas Day you will have filled the box! Donate the items to one of the many local organizations working to meet the needs of our community.



# REVERSE **ADVENT CALENDAR**

EACH DAY ADD AN ITEM TO A BOX.  
ON CHRISTMAS EVE DONATE THE CONTENTS TO A  
FOOD BANK.

- December 1 - box of cereal
- December 2 - peanut butter
- December 3 - stuffing mix
- December 4 - boxed potatoes
- December 5 - macaroni and cheese
- December 6 - canned fruit
- December 7 - canned tomatoes
- December 8 - canned tuna
- December 9 - dessert mix
- December 10 - jar of applesauce
- December 11 - canned sweet potatoes
- December 12 - cranberry sauce
- December 13 - canned beans
- December 14 - box of crackers
- December 15 - package of rice
- December 16 - package of oatmeal
- December 17 - package pasta
- December 18 - spaghetti sauce
- December 19 - chicken noodle soup
- December 20 - tomato soup
- December 21 - can corn
- December 22 - can mixed vegetables
- December 23 - can carrots
- December 24 - can green beans



PASSIONATEPENNYPINCHER.COM

## Sunday, Week One

**Psalm 118:24** “*This is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*”

I often get upset and frustrated with myself. I go into a room and can't remember why. Sometimes, it takes three attempts to pick something off the floor. Remembering a simple common word escapes me. Getting old is hard work!

8 year-old Evie also faces frustrations. New routines with virtual learning; learning how to balance on a 2-wheeler; dribbling and shooting a basketball; and the challenges of helping to care for two rambunctious kittens.

Psalm 118:24 is my ‘life saver’. This verse helps me to rejoice that I finally remember why I went into that room; that I was able to hold on to the object I tried to pick up; and that the word I needed finally came to me. For Evie, this verse encourages her to become a super bike rider, a whiz kid on the computer, to dribble and shoot baskets, and as for the kittens...well, they are still fascinated by long curtains!

I asked Evie what this verse meant to her. With a thoughtful look and finger tapping her chin she replied, ‘Hope...gives me hope.’ Yes, getting older is hard work, but so is being younger. There are challenges and frustrations at any age. But HOPE...hope is truly the answer.

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for this new day. Help us to enjoy the blessings and challenges you send today. May we learn to be more patient, and may our words and actions reflect our love for you. In your Holy Name, Amen.*

By Eve Edington and Judy Rankin

## Monday, Week One

**I Peter 1:8-9** “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

For many years, I have missed the message coming from God: to see joy in simple, unexpected, yet familiar ways.

This Advent season, I need to look back to remember the joy of God’s world and his many gifts to me: seeing a glorious sunrise over the Grand Canyon; playing a Bach Prelude and Fugue on the piano for pure pleasure; planting flowers for all to enjoy; baking treats for the children; singing in a choir; embracing my husband, family and friends; helping a student to achieve; receiving much needed encouragement from others at work, at home and at church; and finding time to meditate and pray each day.

My loving cup is filled every day in unexpected ways!

During 2020, it has been harder to find unexpected joy, as I approach the nightly news with the pandemic and the sorrows of our planet. Our world seems fractured and broken in more ways than I can comprehend.

*Prayer: May we take time during this Advent season to find the unexpected joy in our day and share with one another. We know that if we but look, it will be there. Amen*

By Judy Quenzel



## Tuesday, Week One

**Luke 20:9-18** “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...”

Like those who fall on the cornerstone in the Gospel, sometimes our heart is what is dashed on the truth of the world. This is a season of rosy preparations and ringing calls for giving and helping are all around.

However, if we look past the easy charity into the realm of justice, if we ask deeper questions about why people are suffering so, it can break our hearts and change our lives. Being hurt and angry is a perfectly reasonable reaction to this often unreasonable world.

Today we are reminded that as we wait and work for God’s kingdom come, it doesn’t need to look or feel like a Hallmark movie. God loves our anger, because when God’s people are hurting, when there is injustice in the world, God is not content with the status quo, either.

*Prayer: God, who sees our anger and calls it holy, give us courageous and tenacious hearts to keep looking for you, even now.*

By Aimee Fritsch



## Wednesday, Week One

*Luke 1:39-45 “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!’ ”*

I've often thought about the unexpected ways God chooses to speak to me and the unanticipated people He brings into my life. Not being allowed to celebrate Christmas for most of my life, I find myself getting a little over-eager, beginning immediately the day after Thanksgiving. That's when I like to get out my tree, put it up and decorate it.

If I didn't have the wonderful patient family I have, I would've missed out on the warm blessings of the Advent season. My glowing church friends over the years, each in their own way, have also helped me see how the Lord is working in my life, however small the ways.

Even if it's only to tell me that it's perfectly fine for me to put my tree up the day after Thanksgiving.

*Prayer (originally by Thelma Donahe):*

*Dear Lord, You sent us a Priceless Gift, your Son, Jesus, Redeemer of all people. We pray His birth will redeem us from the bonds of all our sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord,*

*Amen.*

By Amanda Mills

## Thursday, Week One

***Isaiah 2:12-22*** “Stop trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils. Why hold them in esteem?”

In dark times we say to ourselves and to others, “Where is the leader that can get us out of this mess?” We look to political and faith leaders, looking for the one that can lead us out of our own Egypt. Most particularly in 2020, or likely, whenever you are reading this, the future can look so frightening. But the prophet reminds us that we should not be trusting in mere humans. We have a leader and a savior with us always. If our trust is in our God, along with our friend and mentor Jesus of Nazareth, then we have what we need to lead us out of darkness.

And though our trust is rightly in God and not in mere humans, those who are our fellow travelers are important in strengthening us on the journey. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul describes how we all long for those who give us hope and courage. “For we are all one in God”, as Jesus is quoted in Luke, “we are each given in love to God”.

*Prayer: Dear God please help us to know and trust in you, always as our leader and hope. We ask that we can be a good companion on the way and that you will lead us to those who will strengthen us on our journey. We are poor vessels and not worthy of trust except through you. We pray all this in the name of your dear son Jesus. Amen*

By Sydney (Brewster) Fitzpatrick

## Friday, Week One

**Luke 21:1-4** “He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.’ ”

Today's gospel reading tells the story of a woman who brings a gift to the temple. I remember hearing this story called “the widow's mite”. All the other gifts were much larger than her gift yet Jesus said that hers is the greater gift . How can that be? The widow did not have great riches, like the others. So giving her gift cost her much more.

What would it look like to give everything you have?

What can I give Him,  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb,  
If I were a Wise Man  
I would do my part,—  
Yet what I can I give Him,  
Give my heart.

from “a Christmas Carol “ , written by Christina Rossetti

*Prayer:*

*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son to us as a gift.  
Help us to understand that great gift and to give you our hearts  
in return. Amen*

By Virginia Adams

## Saturday, Week One

***Isaiah 4:2*** “*On that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.*”

Growing up in the 1950s with three younger siblings, it was understood in our family that children received gifts on their birthdays or at Christmas. If you were exceptionally lucky, there might be a trinket in the Easter basket. So don’t be asking for anything in between--and woe to the child who had a November birthday!

In the fall when I was 7, I came home from school and went to my bedroom to change clothes (which one did in those days—play clothes were not to be worn to school!). To my stunned surprise, there on the bed was a pristine coloring book and a brand new box of 48 crayons! I had never owned anything more than the box of 24 whose tips had long since been decapitated by my younger sister. Why? I asked my mother—what did I do to receive this not-to-be-believed gift?

No reason, said Mom. I just love you.

*Prayer: As we approach this season of Advent with anticipation, help us to remember that the coming gift is unearned and given by you in complete love. May we do likewise with our lives.*

Amen.

By Jinx Brandt

## Sunday, Week Two

**Luke 7:28** “I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

In normal times, on the Second Sunday of Advent, we would be in church, watching someone we know and care about light the second candle of Advent. We would be surrounded by friends. We would quiet our bodies and minds as we joined the choir in hymns of contemplation and anticipation. We would try to heed our priests' call to step away from the rush and hectic preparations for Christmas and slow down, embrace the quiet, and reflect on the good that is to come with the birth of Jesus.

This year is different. Because COVID 19 has forced many changes, we will miss the warmth of our church community, the comfort of the liturgy, the beauty of the music, and the renewal of our spirits when we kneel at the communion rail. But because we are people of faith, we know that Advent is a time of anticipation and preparation. As we pass out of the realm of darkness, we can look forward to celebrating the birth of the son of God, and moving toward a higher principle of life in which love, hope, compassion, justice, inclusion, and peace reign.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, calm our minds. Fill our hearts with love. Help us walk with Christ and be His light in the world. Amen*

By Alex and Elaine Sanchez

## Monday, Week Two

**Luke 21:20-24** “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfillment of all that is written. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people.”

Sometimes the shortness of our winter days makes it seem like the light will never come. The weight of injustices in our world and the responsibilities and distractions of our days might feel like too much to bear. We might feel overwhelmed and even paralyzed by fear. But in Advent we are invited into stillness. We are invited to pause, to reflect and prepare. And preparation requires taking inventory; but not an inventory of candles, decorations, gifts, and party napkins. No, in Advent we take inventory of our hearts. Are we ready to welcome the Christ child? How can we create space to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us today? In humility, let's unfurl our clenched fists and open our hands and hearts to God. This is our invitation to notice the light even in the darkness.

*Prayer: God, we believe you are faithful and good. In your love, please open our minds and hearts as we wait for the light. Help us to know how to lead lives of love, even when we are overwhelmed by the hurt in the world around us.*

By Krista Hoffman

## Tuesday, Week Two

***Isaiah 5:15 “People are bowed down, everyone is brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are humbled.”***

Isaiah was an Old Testament prophet who wrote the book of Isaiah between 745-680 B.C. Isaiah tells us that God is our eternal Comforter, Redeemer and Savior. God will forgive our sins if we will turn away from our sins and turn to him.

One form of sin is that we spend a lot of money on fun things and nicer things but then we say we don't have money to help the poor.

What would be an example of fun things or nice things you spend money on?

Name a way you could help the poor?

In order to help us God became one of us by sending baby Jesus, and Advent is the time of waiting for baby Jesus to come to earth.

God did this because he loves us so much that he became one of us.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father we ask that you open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts that we might see what you want us to do and how you want us to live. Amen*

By Hollie Groves

## Wednesday, Week Two

*Isaiah 6: 1-3 "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' "*

One day the prophet Isaiah met several angels (*six winged seraphim!*) and entered the presence of God. In case you never met one, angels tend to overwhelm everyone they speak to. Isaiah was so overwhelmed that he cried out the many reasons he was not the kind of person God ought to be talking to: too sinful; too young; too insecure.

It was all true, of course, but God knew who he was talking to and asked "whom shall I send?" Suddenly emboldened, the angels convinced him and Isaiah volunteered, "Here I am." From that moment onward, Isaiah proclaimed that the salvation of the world would come about through a child whose young mother also met angels that sent her on a journey that would change the world.

The problems in the world and our insecurity about our capacity to change them are no reason to flee from God's desire to share his truth and love through each and every one of us. Seraphim or not, it's intimidating work, and the better angels of our nature may take some convincing; nevertheless, to paraphrase Isaiah, "here we are."

*Prayer: Dear God, we are sometimes frightened and need your assurance and strength to sustain and guide us on our journey. We pray that in our uncertainty, your strength will be sufficient to live and walk in your truth. Amen.*

By Kirk Seyfert

## Thursday, Week Two

**Luke 22:10-12** “Listen,” he said to them, “when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher asks you, ‘Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’’ He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.”

Christmas has always been made more blessed by music. Advent's sense of awed anticipation is shown in this ancient song, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten”. It ushers us into the holy mystery of Christ’s birth. The poem was written by Aurelius Prudentius, a 4th century CE monk. It was set to plainchant in the 10th century and translated into English in the 19th century. Here is one verse:

*O ye heights of heaven, adore Him; Angel hosts, His praises sing;  
All dominions bow before Him, And extol our Lord and King.  
  
Let no tongue on earth be silent, Every voice in concert ring,  
Evermore and evermore.*

*Prayer: Father God, thank you for the gift of music. It affirms our faith and leads us more fully into worship. Let no tongue be silent as we sing your praises. Amen*

By Tracy Ragland

## Friday, Week Two

***Isaiah 7:14*** “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”

It's a bit different this year. Less hustle. Less bustle. Fewer opportunities to cram 587 activities and places to be into a finite number of days and hours. This is not a bad thing. Rather, it is a conspicuous invitation to take a breath and remember a promise from long ago. A rare moment where it is less comfortable to race than to relax and prepare for something we desperately need during this challenging season of life -- the Light.

After an arduous year, I have a strong desire to stock up on lights for Christmas. Our electric meter may spin like a fan, but the illumination will be substantial at our house. Instinctively, we all want to shine light in the gloom.

Jesus is our true Light in the darkness. We anticipate and long to bask in this brilliant Light that brings Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. In turn, we take this Light into a despairing world. Doesn't that seem essential, perhaps more than any other time in recent history?

*Prayer: Come, Emmanuel! Bring us your holy Light.*

*Light of the world, shine through me.*

*Amen.*

By Clarke Hylton

## Saturday, Week Two

***Isaiah 8:12-14a*** “*Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. He will become a sanctuary.*”

A few questions pop in my head every time I read my Bible: What does it mean to do the Lord’s work? How does one person approach a world so fraught with conflict? When should I wait? These are only a few of many questions I have after doing my daily reading. After doing my readings, once in a while I see something awful on the news. Like a political scandal or a natural disaster or someone that does harm to a society. It brings a great amount of fear, or sadness, or even anger.

But it’s easy to just throw yourself into the news. Nothing wrong with being informed, but I do my best to keep faith in a world that can seem so filled with evil. Faith can be kept during times of good. Faith can become more of a struggle during times of uncertainty. Fear can spread like a wildfire, but thankfully so can love.

There is good during times of struggle and uncertainty. You just have to know where to look. God isn’t just above the clouds, but in the hearts of everyone that is created from God. When there is fear, spread love. When there is ignorance, seek the truth.

*Prayer: Even if no one else will do what is right, we pray that we will do your work with humbleness. We can do it through your help. Amen.*

By Clayton Hall

## Sunday, Week Three

**John 3:27-30** John said, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

The Episcopal church is a liturgical church full of symbolism within its liturgy. Having a Fiber Arts degree and considerable study in liturgical history I internalize all of this during any service, so at times I may experience things in a different light.

What is so special about Advent? This is "Mary's time" in expectation of the birth of her child.

What do we see during Advent? First, there is a circular wreath, with various colored candles. The circle symbolizes wholeness/unity. The candles are deep blue or violet with one pink one. Violet represents penance and preparation, expectation. Dark Blue symbolizes the feminine principle, the soul, heaven, hence Mary's color + silver.

On Christmas morning this activity is finalized when a large white candle is lit to symbolize the birth of Jesus, when God became man, "The light of the world".

*Prayer: With our nation in such social turmoil we pray for HOPE, for the sharing of our Christian LOVE, and we ask for PEACE.*

By Shirley Van Orman

## Monday, Week Three

**2 Peter 1:5-8** “*Make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.*”

My mother taught us that we always need something to look forward to. That's what Advent has always meant to me. But these days we don't like to wait: we rush into relationships; we know we're pregnant almost instantly; we know the gender of our babies a few weeks later. Anticipation has lost its appeal.

Here in Advent 2020, we are filled with anxiety, waiting for a vaccine to save us from a deadly disease. Anticipation this year is mixed with fear, though that's really not new. Whatever we



Waterhouse John William—The Annunciation

believe about the nativity story, we can believe that a very young, unmarried girl named Mary was filled with fear to discover that she was pregnant.

It won't be easy this year. Like all expectant mothers, we wait. We

hope. We long. We are afraid.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to approach the celebration of the birth of Baby Jesus with hope, trust, and thankful hearts for Mary and for the wisdom of our own mothers.*

By Jean Urbanski

## Tuesday, Week Three

*Isaiah 9:2 “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.”*

Advent was established in the late fifth century AD. Its history is unclear, but it is related to a Roman soldier who gave part of his cloak to a beggar, became a Christian, was made the third Bishop of Tours and later named a saint. The Bishop's funeral was on November 11, and was celebrated as the Feast of St. Martin.

Between 461 and 490, Bishop Perpetuus, 6th Bishop of Tours, designated the feast of St. Martin until Christmas as a time for fasting. The fast was called St. Martin's Lent and was also known as the Nativity Fast or Fast of December. The fast is cited by Bishop Gregory of Tours as the beginning of Advent.

Gregory of Tours' historical writings are the source of information on the beginning of the celebration. He died in 593 or 594 and was thereafter recognized as a saint. By the 13th century AD, the fast was not commonly practiced. In modern times, Advent traditions and practices vary from place to place.

*Prayer: Lord, we ask Christ's message of love and forgiveness be renewed and strengthened in us as we anticipate the anniversary of his birth. Amen.*

By John Bagg

## Wednesday, Week Three

*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”*

**Mark 1:1-8** John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins....He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Anticipation- we have all been through these periods: waiting for a birth, perhaps a refund check in the mail, or even the arrival of a plumber to fix a leak.

We have, for almost three weeks, been anticipating the Christmas Season, not knowing what to expect this year. Fewer family members around the table. Even some spending this joyful day alone, due to the virus. Some traditions will be postponed. Remember, however, that even with these adversities, the Lord has not turned away but his hand is stretched out still. He is with us!

*Prayer: Lord, let us be patient as we await your coming. Help us to remember that you are always with us, in adversity and in anticipation. Amen.*

By Susan Dauer

## Thursday, Week Three

**Matthew 3:1-3** “*In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”*

For me, the meaning of Advent is a time to celebrate the first coming of Jesus. When Jesus came, he showed the world what love really is. He loved people that none could love, he forgave people that none wanted to forgive, he didn't give up on people that everyone else gave up on, he gave mercy to people that none gave mercy to. He loved everyone the same, no one more or less.

At times like these we feel alone and worried. God knows this, but he never forgot us nor will he ever. Advent is a time to celebrate the memory that was the birth of Jesus, and we rejoice at the thought that he will love us and care for us every day.

*Prayer: Though this Advent season will be different than any other, and we won't be able to visit our relatives and friends as much as we hope, or have them visit us. Still we will always keep them in our hearts and prayers, and we know that you love and care for them and for us. Amen.*

By Claire Meaney, age 10

## Friday, Week Three

**Matthew 11:2-5** “When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.’ ”

What are some of your favorite things about Christmas? I love cutting down a Christmas tree with my family. I love frosting Christmas cookies with my Grandma, and I especially love giving and receiving gifts! Isn’t it fun to unwrap a gift when you don’t know what it is?

Giving a gift to someone is one way to show them that you love them. That was true in the Bible too. The book of Matthew tells us that there were three Wise Men who went searching for Jesus after he was born in Bethlehem. They brought him precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These special gifts were priceless at that time and honored Jesus.

We can’t give wrapped gifts to Jesus like we give to other people, but there are other ways we can give to Jesus. We give gifts to Jesus when we pray, when we go to church and worship him, and when we help people in need. We don’t have to give Jesus fancy gifts, he is worthy of all our gifts big or small!

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas this year, help us remember to give something to you to show how much we love you.*

By Coleman Casebeer, age 8

## Saturday, Week Three

*Luke 3:4-6 “As it is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah, ‘Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”*

I collect nativity scenes and recently I was challenged to consider that my beloved traditional manger scenes likely aren't very accurate. Middle Eastern scholar, Kenneth Bailey, encourages readers to remember the communal culture into which the Christ child came. In Bailey's writings, he asserts that local midwives would have circled round Mary. Culturally it would have been shameful to allow even an unwed woman to birth alone. The midwives would have brought her steaming food for nourishment, clean cloth to swaddle the infant, and water and wine to refresh the parents.

Birth is gritty. It is exhausting and messy. It is not easy. So too can be the sorting out of theologies that we have accepted as truth for so long, that in accepting have prevented us from the beauty of learning from other cultural perspectives and insights into the Biblical story. How would our nativity scenes be different if it included attending midwives? What care would a midwife bring to you today, as you birth new understandings of old stories, new theologies, and hopes for this coming year?

*Prayer: Holy God, would you tend to us like a caring mother and midwife today. Encourage us in this time of waiting. Strengthen us and calm us as we fight against the busyness and the expectations of this Christmas season.*

By Krista Hoffman

## Sunday, Week Four

***John 3:16-17*** “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him*”.

During Advent, when I lead children in Sunday School, I talk with them about the importance of getting ready to enter the great mystery of Christmas.

Our busy lives often lead us away from this great mystery with shopping, parties and presents. But we can stop, watch and pay attention to the wonder of the light that came from Bethlehem. For God so loved that world that he gave his son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. In this light we see our worth.

Stop, watch and pay attention. We can practice this with our presence in this special season. In Advent we are getting ready.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, let us see all your people with the love filled eyes of children. Help us to be ready to enter the mystery of Christmas. Let this light lead us to be patient, broad minded, gentle and wise in this season and those to come. Amen*

By Robin Ellis

## Monday, Week Four

***Isaiah 64:8*** "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."

When we demand or plead for grand outcomes –  
"cure this child, crush those opponents, make us rich" --  
there's no rush of wind, no flapping angelic  
multitude winging to a symphonic crescendo.  
Miracles are rare.

But ordinary gifts are everywhere.  
Each requires work and work is love.

We are the work:  
The empty space in the bowl  
holding soup for someone else;  
a baby's blanket crumpled by the hamper;  
a rinsed plate on the counter;  
muddy boot brush on the mat;  
mop bucket at the end of a hall;  
bus parked after depreciation is credited;  
equipment inventory at incident command;  
flattened I.V. bag in the ICU;  
a hammer scoured to roundness  
where the last nail binds the world.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, You have shown us generosity in the abundance of your creation that flows to each and every one of us. Please help us to be mindful of others and to know what is needed to be done or to be given. Please give us insight to determine our true gifts and to be grateful for the value we bring to the world. May the work of our hands and minds always be a gift of love for you and a gift of love for our neighbors. In Jesus name we pray. Amen*

By Ann L Lovejoy

## Tuesday, Week Four

***Revelations 21:3*** “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

God tells us repeatedly that She is with us and sends us folks to help us see the way, most especially Her son, who is a beacon to all the nations. We hear that the kingdom is coming. As we wait for the light in Advent, these readings remind me of some words said to me over twenty years ago, by a friend who is now in seminary. What he said was “Pray devoutly but hammer stoutly.” Yes indeed.

Waiting for the light is not a passive thing, and neither is our faith. Music always helps me to pray, so I think of lyrics such as “*Keep your lamps trimmed and burning; the time is drawing nigh*” and the musical about Jesus “*Prepare ye the way of the Lord.*”

We must do the work to bring the kingdom into being, whether it is praying constantly, or literally picking up a hammer to help with a Habitat for Humanity house. If hostility and jealousy are to cease, then that is work for us to achieve. We are the hands and feet that can bring the new heaven and earth to fruition.

*Prayer: Dear Mother Father God, send your Holy Spirit to chat with us about the work you would have us do, in pursuit of the Light, and your Kingdom on earth. Your will not ours be done. Help us to discern our call to your service. Amen*

By Sydney (Brewster) Fitzpatrick

## Wednesday, Week Four

***John 5:33-36*** "You sent a delegation to John, and he testified to the truth...and I have a testimony greater than John's...the works that I do testify about me."

Leaders harassed Jesus because his works went against their rules about how things "should" be done. They ignored the miracles, and criticized the method.

It makes me wonder how often we miss the miracle. How often do we overlook good work because it wasn't approached in a method to our liking?

I remember the 'kitchen ladies' in a former church. Heaven help the volunteer who put clean dishes away in the wrong spot! Or who put an extra scoop of coffee in the percolator (*so that the end result would have SOME color.*) Or who served homemade muffins still in their paper wrapper. God bless those ladies—their intentions were good, but they spent so much time worrying about orderliness and presentation that they missed the love and enthusiasm of the other volunteers.

I'd love to say that I never fall prey to this - but I know that isn't true. In fact, my oversights are probably far more egregious. I know that I've minimized the accomplishments of those whose political and societal views differ from mine. I've missed the good work done by those who rub me the wrong way. Oh, Heavenly Divine, help me to remember that there are miracles all around, if I can only get past the "shoulds".

*Prayer: In these final days of Advent, let us remember to look for the miracle, and be less critical of one another. Amen.*

By Cherie Renae Atiyeh

## Thursday, Week Four

**Isaiah 29: 17-20** “Shall not Lebanon in a very little while become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be regarded as a forest? On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the tyrant shall be no more, and the scoffer shall cease to be; all those alert to do evil shall be cut off.”

As we journey through this Advent Season, I’m sure we are all reflecting that this has been like none other. That is probably so, for most of us who have never known the chaos that surrounds and threatens us at this time.

But, historically there has been chaos during many Advent Seasons for many peoples since the time our Savior was born. Indeed, chaos has been by far the usual not the exception for over 2,000 years for most peoples. He did not come to bring an end to chaos, but to give us the strength to overcome it.

*Prayer: May we be given the strength to remain steadfast amidst chaos, and to remember that our strength comes from God. Amen.*

By Richard Van Orman



## Friday, Week Four

***Isaiah 33:17 “Your eyes will see the king in his beauty.”***

Every day is a special day, but our birth day is even more special. When the girls were younger, they would wake up to balloons and crepe paper streamers decorating the house for their special day. Their favorite boxed cake with homemade frosting was waiting to be eaten after their favorite dinner. A party with friends would happen the next weekend. So much fun to celebrate their special day! Sounds a little like getting ready for Christmas.

Jesus' birthday is a busy time of the year. There is 'so much to do and so little time'. Evie says, " Birthdays are special days for you to 'grow up' and celebrate with family and friends. It's very exciting to celebrate His birthday on Christmas Day and we all get to open presents for His birthday." The house will be decorated, presents wrapped, food baked and prepared for family and friends. This year will probably be different than any other year. Family and friends may not be able to join in the festive activities. But the reason for celebrating Christmas Day will still be there! Advent is the perfect time to reflect on this special day. Happy Birthday, Jesus!

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for all the blessings you have given me and my loved ones. Help me to appreciate that every day is a special day and may I live it according to your will. In your Holy Name. Amen.*

By Judy Rankin and Evie Edington (age 8)

## Christmas Eve

**Luke 1:68-69** “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David.”

Why have we come to the manger tonight? To visit a non-threatening babe? To sit comfortably with a God who conforms to our way of thinking?

Or, instead, have we come to have our easy ideas shaken; to have our rigid thoughts broken; to be challenged and transformed?

*“If you came expecting a tame story, or a story that does not threaten you, then you came for a God whom we do not worship here.*

*But if you came to be reminded that God loves you too much to leave you unchanged; if you came to follow the light even if it blinds you; if you came for salvation and not safety; then, ah, my friends, you are precisely in the right place.” -Quinn G. Caldwell,  
excerpts from All I Really Want: Readings for a Modern Christmas.  
Abingdon Press (2014)*

I ask again, why have we come?

*Prayer: Oh Divine, as we celebrate the birth of your son, let us renew our commitment to boldly follow the path of our salvation, and forsake the safety of our comfortable notions. Amen.*

By Cherie Renae Atiyeh

## **Christmas Day**

***John 3:34-35*** “*He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.*”

I believe that when something crosses your path more than once in a short period of time it is worth taking note. That is the case with a poem by the English Stevie Smith: *Not Waving but Drowning*.

*I was much too far out all my life  
And not waving but drowning.*

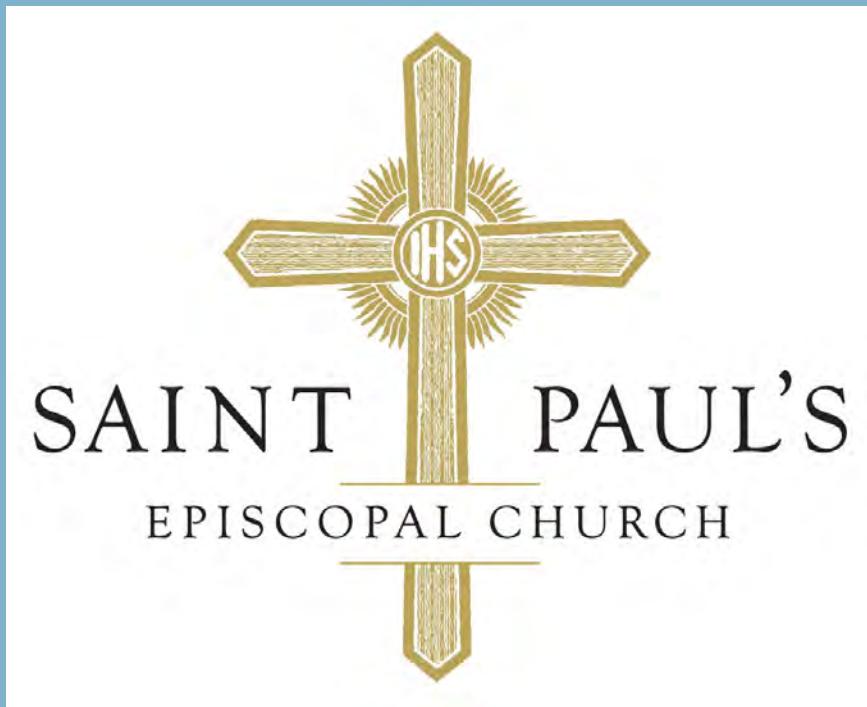
Our collective experience with the pandemic, intensified by political unrest, reminds us all of our vulnerability.

Let us celebrate the birth of Christ with renewed confidence that we aren’t too “far out.” The baby Jesus is reaching out – offering us a saving hand. Welcoming us into the Christian community. We aren’t too far out for fellow Christians to reach us and we aren’t too far out to reach out for others.

*Prayer: Help me, Lord, to recognize the baby Jesus as a gift to share. Remind us that you are always reaching out and that you always hear us when we call. Teach us to hear others calling out and give us the confidence to reach for them with love and understanding.*

By Sandra Chiodo





St. Paul's Episcopal Church Salem, Oregon

1444 Liberty St SE Salem, OR 97302 ~ 503-362-3661

[www.stpaulsoregon.org](http://www.stpaulsoregon.org)