



advent

DEVOTIONS FOR FRIENDS & FAMILIES

ABOUT THIS DEVOTIONAL

Advent is one of the most beloved periods in the church calendar, and for good reason. The change in color, both liturgical and tonal, after a long season of “ordinary time,” the wonderful hymnody, the wreaths and candles, the lengthening of the day’s darkness and its attendant drama.

And yet, the actual liturgical beginning of Advent is starker than we sometimes recall. We enter Advent, after all, praying the Great Litany, that long and comprehensive prayer for mercy in the midst of the world’s suffering, and then are confronted by one of the greatest of Prayer Book collects on Advent I — darkness and light, mortality and humility, last days and judgment, death and immortal life —now this is the stuff of Advent. There is little by way of sentimental peace, joy, and love here.

It’s also the stuff of our actual lives. Despite all of the greeting card language we often use around Christmas, deep down we can’t deny the darkness that threatens to engulf our lives. Each of our own homes bear their own burdens of broken relationships, failing health, and unspoken sadnesses. For so many of us the longer nights and colder temperatures seem intertwined with the gloom and frigidity of our hearts. The beauty of Advent is this: It is *here* into *just this* darkness that Jesus breaks. And while it may not feel like peace, or joy, or even love, what Advent does offer in spades is *hope*.

This little devotional is offered with that hope in mind. Each week offers a piece of visual art, a brief reflection, prayers, and the Daily Office readings to go along with our typical wreath-lighting liturgy for the home. Use as much or as little as you like, but we pray that this small devotional offers both a balm and a spur—that it comforts and unsettles, that it provokes honesty, but curbs despair. In short, that it can stir us up to hope, that God in Christ has shined a light into the darkness of our lives, and that his light finally will overcome the darkness that threatens.

May God fill your home with the hope of Christ this Advent, and may we brave the darkness in our world together as we await his coming in glorious light!

ABOUT ADVENT WREATHS

A tradition in the Church and in Christian families that dates back several generations, this wreath serves as both a reminder and an aid to walk through the Advent season. It consists of 1 pink and 3 purple candles on the wreath (one for each week of Advent), with 1 white candle in the middle (“Christ candle”), which is lit on Christmas Day.



Cover art: *Nativity of Christ Orthodox Icon (Byzantine)*

ADVENT I



ADVENT II



ADVENT III



ADVENT IV

ADVENT I

WEEK OF DECEMBER 1–6, 2024

Devotional for Reflection

by Rev. Matt Rossi



Art: Jeremiah, Lorenzo Monaco,
ca. c. 1407, tempera and gold on panel

PROPHETS are not great dinner party guests. John the Baptist is perhaps the best example, spoiling the punchbowl so badly that his head ends up on a platter. But John is in a long line of prophets who are generally, well, downers. Perhaps no prophet epitomizes the genre more than Jeremiah.

Often called “the weeping prophet,” Jeremiah’s ministry is both weird and tragic. Jeremiah says things like “God will bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle” and “I will make this city a horror, a thing to be hissed at” and “I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters.” Fun! Perhaps this is why Monaco’s Jeremiah does not look particularly excited about life.

This is all a rather dour way to begin Advent, isn’t it? What of the themes of faith, hope, love, and joy? Of warm hearths and full dinner tables and excited anticipation of the baby Jesus’ arrival in the manger? What of “the most wonderful time of the year?”

The prophets, the true mascots of Advent, have little use for the sentimentality that often accompanies the season leading up to Christmas. The advent of the Lord, for Jeremiah, is a fearful thing. Because of the darkness of our world, the Lord’s coming must mean judgment.

But Jeremiah, weepy though he may be, is not only a prophet of doom. Neither is the Lord’s coming only to be feared. The prophetic message, which is the message of Advent, is ultimately one of hope. For God’s judgment and his salvation, his wrath and his mercy, cannot finally be separated. We need God to come and destroy what is evil, to rescue us from the power of sin, death, and the devil, and to restore us again as his daughters and sons. Advent reminds us that we’re still waiting for this. I’ll give our unwelcome dinner guest the final word:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.” (Jer. 33:14-16) ❖



Lighting of Advent Candle 1 (Hope)

Q. Why do we light this Advent candle?

A. To remember this truth: Jesus is the Light of the world, and we who follow him do not walk in darkness but have the light of life. In him the nations will put their **hope** (from Jn 8:12; Matt. 12:21).

As the first candle of Advent is lit, the following is said:

Leader Our King and our Savior, draw near.

All O come let us adore him.

Hymn: Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus (Hymn 66)

The Collect for Advent 1

ALmighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your 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 living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Weekly Bible Readings

Sunday

Psalms 146, 147 // 111, 112, 113

Isa. 1:1-9

2 Pet. 3:1-10

Matt. 25:1-13

Monday

Psalms 1, 2, 3 // 4, 7

Isa. 1:10-20

1 Thess. 1:1-10

Luke 20:1-8

Tuesday

Psalms 5, 6 // 10, 11

Isa. 1:21-31

1 Thess. 2:1-12

Luke 20:9-18

Wednesday

Psalms 119:1-24 // 12, 13, 14

Isa. 2:1-11

1 Thess. 2:13-20

Luke 20:19-26

Thursday

Psalms 18:1-20 // 18:21-50

Isa. 2:12-22

1 Thess. 3:1-13

Luke 20:27-40

Friday

Psalms 16, 17 // 22

Isa. 3:8-15

1 Thess. 4:1-12

Luke 20:41-21:4

Saturday

Ps. 20, 21:1-7 // 110:1-5, 116, 117

Isa. 4:2-6

1 Thess. 4:13-18

Luke 21:5-19

ADVENT II

WEEK OF DECEMBER 7–13, 2024

Devotional for Reflection

by Rev. Joe Dewey



IN THE early 16th century, a plague swept through the Alsace region of France. The colloquial name for this plague was “Saint Anthony’s fire,” but is now known to us as ergotism. Its effect on the human body could be devastating. In the best cases, it would only lead to blisters, swollen limbs, and headaches. In the worst cases, the sick would hallucinate, convulse, succumb to seizures, and eventual death.

It was called “St. Anthony’s fire” because the monastic order of St. Anthony tended the sick by converting their cloister to a hospital. It was one of the few places in which people were healed from ergotism. In the chapel of this hospital, the

sick would be confronted at the altar by a large painting of Christ crucified painted by Matthias Grünewald. It was a favorite of the great 20th century theologian, Karl Barth, and hung over his desk. What made this painting unique is that the Crucified Christ was depicted as one suffering from ergotism.

In Grünewald’s altar crucifixion piece, John the Baptist is placed at the feet of the cross, pointing up to our dying savior with a latin inscription, *illum oportet crescere, me autem minui* (“He must increase, but I must decrease”). Below John the Baptist is a lamb with a cross, echoing his words from the gospel of John: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Barth placed a replica of this painting above his desk in his study to remind him that the chief occupation of any theologian is to point to our crucified Lord.

In this hauntingly beautiful painting, we see our vocation as a people who live between the two advents of Christ. Our Lord entered time and space, assuming the lowest places of our existence, absorbing our sin and suffering on the cross. A savior dying on the cross with “Saint Anthony’s fire” at the hospital chapel of St. Anthony’s is a living picture of Hebrews 4:15: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Our vocation is to point to him with our lips and our lives; to proclaim his saving work to a suffering world. ✠



Lighting of Advent Candle 2 (Peace)

Q. Why do we light this Advent Candle?

A. To remember this truth: Jesus is our Lord who lightens our lamp in the darkness. For Jesus himself is our **peace**, the one who has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (from Psalm 18:28; Ephesians 2:14).

As the first and second candles of Advent are lit:

Leader Our King and our Savior, draw near.

All O come let us adore him.

Hymn: Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming (Hymn 81)

The Collect for Advent II

MERCIFUL God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Weekly Bible Readings

Sunday

Psalms 148, 149, 150 // 114, 115

Isa. 5:1-7

2 Pet. 3:11-18

Luke 7:28-35

Monday

Psalms 25 // 9, 15

Isa. 5:8-12, 18-23

1 Thess. 5:1-11

Luke 21:20-28

Tuesday

Psalms 26, 28 // 36, 39

Isa. 5:13-17, 24-25

1 Thess. 5:12-28

Luke 21:29-38

Wednesday

Psalms 38 // 119:25-48

Isa. 6:1-13

2 Thess. 1:1-12

John 7:53-8:11

Thursday

Psalms 37:1-18 // 37:19-42

Isa. 7:1-9

2 Thess. 2:1-12

Luke 22:1-13

Friday

Psalms 31 // 35

Isa. 7:10-25

2 Thess. 2:13-3:5

Luke 22:14-30

Saturday

Psalms 30, 32 // 42, 43

Isa. 8:1-15

2 Thess. 3:6-18

Luke 22:31-38

ADVENT III

WEEK OF DECEMBER 14–20, 2024

Devotional for Reflection

by Rev. Jordan Griesbeck



Art: Mattea Preti, *St. John the Baptist Preaching*
c. 1665, oil on canvas

JOHN the Baptist reminds us that Advent is always bad news before it is good news. John is strange. He eats strangely (locusts), dresses strangely (camel's hair), and talks strangely (who calls other people "vipers?"). John has near-zero manners. He seems entirely unconcerned with human opinion. Honestly, it's hard to imagine what people would write in his yearbook; he's certainly not "most popular," "most likable," or "most likely to succeed."

In fact, he's a character straight out of a Flannery O'Connor story. Maybe you remember some of her stories: the serial killer named the Misfit; or Manley Pointer, a Bible salesman who steals a handicapped woman's wooden leg. Commenting on her strange style, O'Conner (a Roman Catholic) said, "I use the grotesque the way I do

because people are deaf and dumb and need help to see and hear." Elsewhere, she said, "When you have to assume that your audience does not hold the same beliefs you do, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the blind you draw large and startling figures."

John is a large and startling figure. God sends John because his audience (the Pharisees then / us now) are spiritually deaf and blind. God sends John because we need to be shocked. Our hearts have flatlined—and we need to be revived.

Advent is bad news before it is good news, because that God comes means there is a reason he must come. Even as the sound of an ambulance siren means something bad has occurred, so Advent signals that something has gone wrong here. As Karl Barth said, Advent is the ultimate indictment on human potential. If we had within us the innate ability to go, be, seek, and live with God, Advent would be unnecessary. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, and we do not know the way back to the Shepherd, so he must leave the ninety nine, and come to us.

So, look at John. Be startled by him. His incongruence with the world is a sign of our incongruity with who God made us to be. He is the ambulance siren. When we look at him, and hear him, our first thought should be, "What happened here? What has gone wrong?" But if you can stomach John—if you can see through the camel's hair, the locusts, and the bad manners—you will see God. ✠



Lighting of Advent Candle 3 (Joy)

Q. Why do we light this Advent candle?

A. To remember this truth: Jesus is the Word through whom all things were made. In him is life and his life is the light of all people. If we receive his light, our **joy** is made complete (from John 1:1-3; John 15:11).

As the first, second, and third candles of Advent are lit:

Leader Our King and our Savior, draw near.

All O come let us adore him.

Hymn: There's a Voice in the Wilderness Crying (Hymn 75)

The Collect for Advent III

STIR up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Weekly Bible Readings

Sunday

Psalms 63:1-8(9-11), 98 // 103

Isa. 13:6-13

Heb. 12:18-29

John 3:22-30

Monday

Psalms 41, 52 // 44

Isa. 8:16—9:1

2 Pet. 1:1-11

Luke 22:39-53

Tuesday

Psalms 45 // 47, 48

Isa. 9:1-7

2 Pet. 1:12-21

Luke 22:54-69

Wednesday

Psalms 119:49-72 // 49, [53]

Isa. 9:8-17

2 Pet. 2:1-10a

Mark 1:1-8

Thursday

Psalms 50 // [59, 60] or 33

Isa. 9:18—10:4

2 Pet. 2:10b-16

Matt. 3:1-12

Friday

Psalms 40, 54 // 51

Isa. 10:5-19

2 Pet. 2:17-22

Matt. 11:2-15

Saturday

Psalms 55 // 138, 139:1-17(18-23)

Isa. 10:20-27

Jude 17-25

Luke 3:1-9

ADVENT IV

WEEK OF DECEMBER 21–24, 2024

Devotional for Reflection

by Rev. Cody Turner



Art: Jacopo Tintoretto, "Visitation" c. 1588, oil on canvas

AFTER weeks of warnings, omens, and portents in the heavens, we might be tempted to expect one final, cataclysmically apocalyptic *pièce de résistance* for this week. But not so—or at least, not at first. Instead, a quick glance reveals a family reunion, a rather mundane affair. Two women greeting, a husband and a betrothed looking on. The gaze of the women's eyes are not face-to-face, but downward, nodding toward the children that they bear. A meeting of pregnant mothers — all terribly *ordinary*.

But the moment is far more significant. The women are not so much embracing as they are reaching toward each other's wombs. They look with awe. The men look less like doting fathers than seers gazing into an unspeakable mystery. Their faces are grave, stone-like. And they are shockingly silent, too—Zechariah's mouth has been shut by an angel, and we do not have a single direct quote from the mouth of Joseph in all of Scripture. Instead, it's the women whose words punctuate the moment: "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should

come to me?" cries the elder; "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek," prophesies the younger. It is all rather unsettling.

We learn this is no ordinary moment at all. No, we are staring at a grand reversal—those on the margins are being brought to the center. The weak are being empowered. The humble are being exalted. The rich and powerful are not even let in on the secret. The Kingdom of Heaven is coming, and the world that

those on top have found to be quite comfortable is being turned upside down.

Tintoretto's painting reminds us that Christ's entry into our world is far more apocalyptic than the seers' visions or the prophets' dreams. Because Jesus' life among us reveals who we are. And his presence unsettles us—it unsettles our society, our expectations, our values, our lives. Jesus reveals just how much we lost the plot when we turned (and turn) to our own devices. He reveals the foolishness of the world that we built and build for ourselves.

But he also reveals (and is) the God who meets us in our foolishness, who seeks and finds us precisely where we are. The God who is moved with compassion for our world and is committed to making it new. Who binds the wounds of our brokenness with his own. Yes, this revelation unsettles us and reveals who we are, but in a far more magnificent way, it is the ultimate unveiling of the love and graciousness of God. ✠



Lighting of Advent Candle 4 (Love)

Q. Why do we light this Advent candle?

A. We welcome God's light into our lives and we welcome the full revelation of God's unfailing **love** for us and for all of creation. For Jesus is the Word of God, the lamp to our feet and light to our path (from Psalm 119:105).

As the first, second, third, and fourth candles of Advent are lit:

Leader Our King and our Savior, draw near.

All O come let us adore him.

Hymn: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Hymn 56)

The Collect for Advent IV

PURIFY our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Collect for Christmas Eve

O GOD, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Weekly Bible Readings

Sunday

Psalms 24, 29 // 8,84

Isa. 42:1-12

Eph. 6:10-20

John 3:16-21

Monday

Psalms 61, 62 // 112, 115

Isa. 11:1-9

Rev. 20:1-10

John 5:30-47

Tuesday, December 24

Psalms 66, 67

Isa. 11:10-16

Rev. 20:11-21:8

Luke 1:5-25

Christmas Eve

Psalm 89:1-29

Isa. 59:15b-21

Phil. 2:5-11



CHRISTMAS DAY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2024

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Q. Why do we light the Christ candle?

A. With joy we remember Christ's coming and with joy we look forward to his coming again when night will be no more and lamp and sun will no longer be needed because he will be our light forever and ever (based on Revelation 22:5).

As the four candles of Advent and the Christ candle are lit:

Leader Alleluia! Unto us a child is born.
All O come let us adore him. Alleluia!

Hymns:

Oh, Come All Ye Faithful (83)
 Hark the herald angels sing (87)
 Go Tell It On The Mountain (99)
 Joy To The World (100)

Readings:

Ps. 2, 85 // 110:1-5(6-7), 132
 Zech. 2:10-13
 1 John 4:7-16
 John 3:31-36

Nativity of our Lord: Christmas Day

O GOD, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

