



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2020

HOPE-FILLED *Christmas*

LINCOLN BEREAN CHURCH





- *What is* -
ADVENT?

Advent means “coming.” The Advent season serves as a time of preparation for Christmas—the celebration of the first coming of the Messiah. It is also a time to anticipate the Messiah’s second coming. Advent starts the fourth Sunday preceding Christmas and ends Christmas Eve. May your Advent season be filled with the wonder of the Messiah’s first coming and the hope of his soon return!



Too often we see Advent as a prelude, or warm-up, to Christmas. We use it as a time to ramp up our excitement for Christmas Day. It's a time for decorations and parties and good cheer. There is much good in such an approach, but, historically, this was not Advent's purpose.

Advent is a time of darkness. It is a season of the year the Church adopted to ponder the struggle of life—sin, death, evil, judgment—and face the reality of broken people living in a broken world. Emerging from the honest wrestling with our plight is the hope for redemption, restoration, and renewal.

Not unlike the Jewish people living in the darkness of their situation and looking forward to the Messiah's advent ("advent" means "coming"), the Church looks forward to the Messiah's Second Advent to put the world right. As the dark reality we live in should not cause us to lose hope, neither should our anticipation of the bright hope to come render us passive. A dark world plus the coming Light should lead to activity.

As God chose the Jewish people to be light in their dark world, so too he calls us, the Church, to be light in ours. We are called, in part, to counter the darkness and point people to the Light. The way of fulfilling our call is through repentance and self-sacrificial love for others.

Advent, then, becomes a perfect time to cast glimmers of light into the darkness through worship of the Light of the world, and through generosity to, presence with, and love for the suffering, oppressed, hated, and sinful people in our world.



- A Christmas full of - **WORSHIP**



O come, O come, Emmanuel

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

*O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

*O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*



- WEEK ONE -



NOVEMBER 29

2020 has reminded us that we live in a dark and broken world. We see and feel sinfulness, wickedness, evil, and despair all around us. If we are honest, we are horrified to find ourselves contributors to the darkness. This isn't new. The ancient Jews experienced their world in much the same way. Read the words of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 8:19-22. But in the middle of the oppressive darkness, God provides hope. There is light in the promise of a deliverer, a child, the Messiah. Continue reading the prophet's words in Isaiah 9:1-7. Can you imagine the encouragement this good news brought? In our darkness, God has also promised us that this same Messiah will come again to wipe away the darkness and crush the enemies of sin and evil. Read Revelation 20:1-4.

Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers

*Rejoice, rejoice, believers,
and let your lights appear!
The evening is advancing,
and darker night is near.
The Bridegroom is arising
and soon he will draw nigh;
up, watch in expectation!
At midnight comes the cry.*

*You saints, who here in patience
your cross and sufferings bore,
shall live and reign forever,
when sorrow is no more:
around the throne of glory
the Lamb you shall behold,
in triumph cast before him
your alleluias clear.*

*Our hope and expectation,
O Jesus, now appear;
arise, O Sun so longed for,
above the darkened sphere.
With hearts and hands uplifted,
we plead, O Lord, to see
the day of earth's redemption
that sets your people free!*

— Laurentius Laurenti



NOVEMBER 30

Jesus is the light that broke into our dark world. He is the focus of Advent as the one who is coming to chase the darkness away and put our broken world right. But, repentance must precede our acts of worship. Numerous times God reprimanded his people for bringing their acts of worship to him with unclean hearts. Read Micah 6:6-8 and Amos 5:18-27. Our first act of worship this Advent should be repentance. And when we offer God our hearts for cleansing, we, like our Savior, can be lights in our dark world. Spend some time in worship through confession of sins. Perhaps Psalm 51 can assist you in your confession.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

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 forever. Amen.

— Book of Common Prayer

O Worship the King

*O worship the King all-glorious
above,
O gratefully sing his power and his
love:
our shield and defender, the
Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendor and girded
with praise.*

*Your bountiful care, what tongue
can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in
the light;
it streams from the hills, it
descends to the plain,
and sweetly distills in the dew and
the rain.*

*Frail children of dust, and feeble
as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to
fail.
Your mercies, how tender, how firm
to the end,
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer,
and Friend!*

— Robert Grant



DECEMBER 1

When the turbulence of life tosses us about and upsets our sense of peace, security, and comfort, worship is not easy. Yet in those times, worship is essential. Worship brings hope. Our worship of our King reminds us of his love, care, and salvation. Worship celebrates his goodness and his past actions on our behalf. Advent reminds us to worship the One who is coming to allay all fears, heal all wounds, right all wrongs, and overcome all evil. O, worship the King this Advent!

Read Romans 8:31-39.

O God, almighty and merciful, you heal the broken-hearted, and turn the sadness of the sorrowful to joy. Let your fatherly goodness be upon all whom you have made. Remember in pity all those who are this day destitute, homeless, elderly, infirm, or forgotten. Bless the multitude of your poor. Lift up those who are cast down. Mightily befriend innocent sufferers, and sanctify to them the endurance of their wrongs. Cheer with hope all who are discouraged and downcast, and by your heavenly grace preserve from falling those whose poverty tempts them to sin. Though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed; though they are perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of him who for our sakes became poor, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

— *Book of Common Prayer*



DECEMBER 2

Our world needs worshippers. It especially needs them in the dark, chaotic, murky mess we now find ourselves. No, our world does not need more people singing songs on a Sunday morning (though that perhaps might be of some help). What those around us who are living in darkness need are our acts of worship. Part of worshipping our King is the goodness we bring into the lives of those we encounter daily. As our King articulated numerous times, to love others is to love God. When we serve and care for people, we are worshipping our King. As we anticipate his return this Advent, what acts of worship can we present to him by ministering to others and bringing his light into their darkness?

James 1:26-27

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Galatians 6:9-10

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

*Lead On, O King Eternal
Lead on, O King eternal,
till sin's fierce war shall cease,
and holiness shall whisper
the sweet amen of peace.
For not with swords' loud clashing
or roll of stirring drums
with deeds of love and mercy
the heavenly kingdom comes.*

*Lead on, O King eternal;
we follow, not with fears,
for gladness breaks like morning
where'er your face appears.
Your cross is lifted o'er us,
we journey in its light;
the crown awaits the conquest;
lead on, O God of might.*

– Ernest W. Shurtleff

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is error, truth; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may seek not so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood and to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

*Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding,
Christ is nigh, it seems to say;
“Cast away the works of darkness,
O ye children of the day.”
– sixth century Latin hymn*

*I wait for your salvation, Lord,
and I follow your commands.
I obey your statutes,
for I love them greatly.
I obey your precepts and your
statutes,
for all my ways are known to you.*

- Psalm 119:166-168



DECEMBER 3

We worship in our waiting. This only sounds odd to those who view waiting as something passive—like sitting in a doctor’s waiting room. Advent is a time of waiting for Jesus’ return, but that waiting is anything but passive. The New Testament portrays waiting for Jesus to come back as activity. Like you wait for guests to arrive to your Christmas party by (hopefully!) cleaning your house, preparing food, and decorating, so too followers of Jesus wait for his return by serving him, serving others, and living as salt and light in this decaying and dark world. This is worship. This is what we are called to do in this time of waiting. This is what it means to be children of light in our dark world.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-5

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.



DECEMBER 4

When life's disappointments and tragedies fall on us, we find it easy to become focused on ourselves and our circumstances. This is normal. But, the more we focus on ourselves and our problems the more pressing, the more dire, our circumstances seem to be. This leads to more self-focus and the downward spiral continues. What's the remedy? Worship! Worship takes our focus off ourselves and places it on Jesus, our Redeemer. He and his many-splendored character become the center of our attention. Worship doesn't remove our problems, but worship gives us perspective. The coming King we worship and for whom we wait is more than capable to sustain us through life's trials. This perspective should take away some of the sting we feel living in our broken world.

Psalm 96

*Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*

*For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.*

*Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth.
Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.*

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness.*



DECEMBER 5

Our theme this week has been worship. Worship is the perfect antidote to the darkness and brokenness we face daily. As we ponder the struggles of life this Advent season, we must remind ourselves of our coming Hope; the One who rescues and heals and conquers. Our worship celebrates and honors our glorious Savior and reminds us that darkness and brokenness will not have the last word. Until that day when the Light comes to shatter the darkness, we worship! Maranatha! Come soon, Lord Jesus!

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

*Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.*

*Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.*

– Charles Wesley



- A Christmas full of -
GENEROSITY



- WEEK TWO -



DECEMBER 6

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 reveals much about ourselves—and not all of it is pretty. The pandemic drives many people to panic and to hoard goods for themselves. We all recall the shortages of toilet paper, sanitizer, and other necessities due to panic-driven selfishness and greed. In days of difficulty, sinfulness drives us to think only about ourselves and our own well-being. Disciples of Jesus should be different. Even during hard, uncertain, and frightening days, we should emulate our King. Our generosity should mimic his. He gave up the glory and status he enjoyed to become one of us. He ultimately gave everything—his very life—to rescue and redeem us. No misfortune, tragedy, or trial convinced him to selfishly hoard what was rightfully his. As worship is one response to the dark and broken world we live in, so too is generosity. This Advent season as we look forward to the return of our generous King, how can you use your resources to benefit others?

Philippians 2:3-11

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

continued

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

*And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest
place
and gave him the name that is above
every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee
should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the
earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus
Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Lord, teach me to be generous as you have been generous with me. Teach me that all I am and have are gifts from you. And gifts, Lord, are meant to be shared. Show me the joys of generosity. Help me to understand that others, perhaps unknown to me, depend on me for help. Remind me that my world, my community, need "Good Samaritans" to heal the wounds of our times. Make me a gift to others in your name. Amen

Psalm 16

*Keep me safe, my God,
for in you I take refuge.*

*I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing."
I say of the holy people who are in the land,
"They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight."
Those who run after other gods will suffer more and
more.*

*I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods
or take up their names on my lips.*

*Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant
places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.
I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I keep my eyes always on the Lord.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the
dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.
You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*



DECEMBER 7

Greed—the excessive love of money or possessions—prevents us from bringing light and healing into our world. Greedy people cling too tightly to their resources and are unwilling to give them up to help others. Fear often motivates greed (as does selfishness). In hard times we tend to grasp even more tightly our money and possessions. If we lose them, what will we do? This attitude shows lack of trust in God. The one who gives of his or her resources generously is the one who can trust God for the future. Sharing our resources with those in need not only bears witness to our confidence in God, but powerful response to the forces of evil. Advent is an ideal time to take inventory of our resources and to calculate how we can use them to serve those in great need. In a time of pandemic and economic uncertainty, is being generous scary? Yes! But what do we trust more? Do we trust our resources or the Giver of our resources?

Generous Father, our Great Provider, you encouraged the rich young ruler to sell his possessions and give to the poor if he were to come and follow you. He rejected you, and he went away disappointed for he loved what he already had. Lord, teach our hearts to give freely without counting the cost. Let nothing in this world keep us from reflecting your generosity. Let us trust that when we are generous, you will ensure that our needs are taken care of, for you are our Good Shepherd. Amen.



DECEMBER 8

The devastating effects of natural disasters serve as a further indications that life in our world is somehow not safe. We recall the plethora of forest fires this year raging in the western United States or the numerous hurricanes and tropical storms slamming our coastlines. But it's not only disasters in the United States that remind us of living in a perilous world. The wildfires in Australia, floods in Indonesia, earthquakes in Turkey, and numerous other natural disasters caught our attention. Such disasters particularly decimate the poor. Wealthier nations and people possess the resources to recover more quickly. Poorer nations and people have little hope. As we remember the vulnerable this Advent and their struggle to survive in the face of these disasters, how can you use the resources God entrusts you with to come to their aid? Maybe you could sponsor a child living in an area impacted by natural disaster. Perhaps you could sacrifice money or time to assist relief organizations to bring needed resources and support to these areas. Our King gave generously out of his resources to reach down to us when we were in dire circumstances. So too we need to generously give from our storehouse of resources to come to the aid of others in need.

Bless Them With Your Best

*So many need Your touch today.
Lord, bless them with Your best.
Our families here and far away –
Lord, bless them with Your best.
Friends and neighbors, wayward
children,
Lost and lonely, burdened down.
Father God, each one is precious.
Bless them with Your best.*

*We care but don't know how to pray.
Lord, bless them with Your best.
Reach out to them through us today.
Lord, bless them with Your best.
Love has lifted us from darkness.
Love can bring the help they need.
We Your Body stand here ready.
Bless them with Your best.*

- Ken Bible



DECEMBER 9

Unquestionably the major story of 2020 is the Covid-19 pandemic. This disaster not only plagued the world physically, but economically too. Beyond those who suffered from and even died of Covid-19, the pandemic produced some residual health-related effects. For example, blood donations dropped dramatically and the blood supply in many communities became depleted. Additionally, pandemic related lockdowns and restrictions forced businesses to close or scale back leaving people without work. Jesus' followers are called to respond generously in the face of these trials. Would you be willing to give blood? Enlist friends and family to go as a group. Would you be willing to use your resources to come alongside a person who lost work due to the pandemic or help out a small business that is struggling? The generosity of God's people provides a ray of light and a healing touch for our dark and broken world.

O God, our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; in this challenging and uncertain time of global pandemic and public health crisis we come before you offering our prayers on behalf of those in need, the Church and the world.

For the Church, that it may not grow weary of proclaiming the gospel of Christ and serve as beacon of hope to a suffering world.

For all affected by coronavirus around the world. Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they have access to medical care and

regain their strength and health; grant them your healing grace. Give strength to all who are caring for loved ones.

For healthcare workers who, with hearts of service, stand on the front lines of providing care. Grant them courage and protection as they put the needs of public safety before their own.

For those who have already lost loved ones to the virus and those who will yet suffer such loss, that they may know the consolation of your love.

For the leaders of the nations that they may work together for the common good as the outbreak spreads. May barriers that divide be brought down that bonds of trust may be strengthened to benefit the entire human family.

Remove the presence of fear and anxiety from our hearts, that confident in your providence we may be generous in sharing our resources.

Grant that our churches may reflect your love, as they minister to the most vulnerable among us; fill them with your Holy Spirit as they work to be your healing hands and feet to all in need.

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy. Sustain and support the anxious, be with those who care for the sick, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may find comfort knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen*

The Good Samaritan

*For life in its fullness, put love in control.
Love God with your heart, with your body
and soul.*

*And see all your neighbors? Go love them
as well,*

*And care for each one as you care for
yourself.*

*You wrestle with questions. There's more
you would know.*

*Just who is your neighbor? How far must
you go?*

*Compassionate love is not simple and neat.
Turn loose of your comforts. Get into the
street!*

*Consider a traveler just working for bread.
He's beaten and robbed and then left there
for dead.*

*Some pass him, and kindness is what they
profess,*

But they keep on going, ignoring the mess.

*Then one came and put his agenda aside.
He helped him and healed him and gave
him a ride.*

*When struggling, which one are you longing
to see?*

Then go be a neighbor to someone in need!

- Ken Bible



DECEMBER 10

Pandemic, natural disasters, injustice, economic trials, and other difficulties hit us hard. But they hit the poor the hardest. Already facing almost insurmountable problems, the poor suffer even in times we may consider "good." Poverty, whatever the cause, shows once again the darkness and brokenness of our world. God never intended a world with poverty. In fact, our God has a heart for the poor and has always pressed his people to care for the poor. As we long this Advent for the return of our generous King to free us from the burdens of this world, how might we free those stricken by poverty from the burdens of their world? Beyond bringing relief to the poor, your generosity will also point people to our generous God.

Lord God, thank you for the abundance of life, relationships, health, comfort, and wealth you have provided, and thank you that even in times of need, despair, and brokenness, you are there. Please, put your arms around children and families in extreme poverty so they feel comfort and hope; meet their need both physically and spiritually. And, Lord, guide me so I can be your hands and feet pursuing justice for the poor and upholding the cause of the needy. Amen.



DECEMBER 11

God created humans to work and to sustain themselves by the work of their hands. Whether due to disabilities, bad economic times, poor choices, or losing work in a number of other ways, many people suffer from unemployment and are unable to sustain themselves and their families. The darkness and brokenness of their condition can be most pressing during the holidays. What ways might God be calling you serve the unemployed and be generous and meet their needs? Could you buy groceries for them? Could you help them purchase Christmas gifts for their children? Could you use your time to help them find work or help equip them to obtain employment? Maybe you are in a position to hire them. Your generous act of love may be the glimmer of hope they need to endure the darkness they face.

Heavenly Father, we remember before you those who suffer want and anxiety from lack of work. Guide the people of this land so to use our public and private wealth that all may find suitable and fulfilling employment, and receive a just reward for their labor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

God, Bless The Work Your People Do

God, bless the work your people do throughout each working day,

The contributions that they make, the talents they display.

God, bless the work your people do, with minds and hands and hearts,

To benefit the common good, the sciences and arts.

For all who have no respite, God, from labor without ease,

For those for whom their work is filled with danger or disease.

For all who labor without gain; or have no rest this day;

For all who labor without hope, O God, we humbly pray;

We pray for those who cannot work, or seek for work in vain,

Great God, we pray your mercy shall encourage them, again!

We pray for those whose work is hard, on body, spirit, soul,

The underpaid, under-employed, who fill a vital role.

Grant unto each a day designed for worship, joy and rest;

A Sabbath time of holiness, in which they may be blessed.

As you achieved creation's work, then rested from your task,

God bless the work your people do, and call it good, we ask!

- John Dalles



DECEMBER 12

This week's theme, generosity, reminds us of not only the difficulties of life, but of our responsibility as agents of God's love and kindness to bring hope, relief, and restoration. Even as we love because God first loved us, so too we are generous because God was first generous to us. In anticipation of the coming of our generous King, this Advent let's respond to the darkness and brokenness of our world with the hope-giving acts of generosity.

Sovereign Lord, I want to learn to imitate you. I want to walk away from the petty things that the world tempts me with. But alas, I find it difficult to break away from distractions. What I could use for generosity, I often use to entertain myself. Lord, help me see the needs that are always around me. Give me a more kind and gracious heart, that I might be of some use to those who are around me and so I am not fixated on my own desires. Amen.

The Rich Young Ruler

*With our arms full of riches,
Ever reaching for more,
With our hearts O so hungry,
Ever needy and poor,
Here we bow to You, Savior,
With no home of Your own,
And we ask in our blindness
For Your riches unknown.*

*We are fearful and grasping,
Seeking glory and gold,
Yet so weary of wanting
What our hands cannot hold.
All our wealth has deceived us.
It is never enough.
Here we trade these our riches
For Your riches of love.*

*We will treasure You, Jesus,
Not the things we possess.
We will give what is passing
That we gain what is best.
May we share all You give us,
Reaching out to each need.
As we love these our neighbors,
Lord, we love You indeed!*

- Ken Bible



- A Christmas full of -
PRESENCE



Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

- WEEK THREE -



DECEMBER 13

Beyond all the other difficulties 2020 brought our way, we have had to face the realities of illness and even death. Those, too, are signposts of living in a dark and broken world. Sickness and death remind us that not all is right in our world. They intensify our longing for our King to return and bring health and life. This is what the Advent season is all about—wrestling with life’s heartaches and looking for our Savior’s glorious return and his healing, comforting presence. But Advent is also a time for us to be present with those who suffer. As we contemplate the suffering and death that surrounds us daily, what better way to honor this season of the year than to be present with the sick, the bereaved, the anxious, the depressed, and the lonely. Like worship and generosity, our presence with those who suffer is an appropriate response to the darkness and brokenness we find in our world. In what ways can you be present for someone this Advent season?

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.



DECEMBER 14

The holidays are not a joyous time for all people. This time of year can be difficult for those struggling with anxiety, depression, or mental illness of various kinds. The pandemic of 2020 exacerbates these problems with lockdowns, quarantines, uncertainty, job furloughs, and so forth. These psychological struggles once more remind us that we live in a dark and broken world. But Jesus' followers are not without response. As instruments of God's care for others, the gift of our presence with those combating mental illness can bring a measure of light and healing into their dark and broken world. What person who struggles with anxiety or depression can you give the gift of your presence to this Advent season? Who can you spend time with, listen to, pray with, or encourage?

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Almighty God, whose Son took upon himself the afflictions of your people: Regard with your tender compassion those suffering from anxiety, depression, or mental illness; bear their sorrows and their cares; supply all their needs; help them to put their whole trust and confidence in you; and restore them to strength of mind and cheerfulness of spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.



DECEMBER 15

Death is a constant reminder our world is not what it should be. It's rare to make it through a year without someone's death significantly affecting us. Perhaps of all life's tragedies, death most makes us long for the return of Jesus. Advent is a time to ponder the awful reality of death and the hope that awaits our King's return. Though death is a defeated enemy, it still hurts. The holidays can be especially painful for those who have lost loved ones. This Advent season disciples of Jesus can follow his example and offer comfort to the bereaved (read John 11:17-35). What widow, widower, family, or neighbor can you give your time to this Advent? Simply sitting with or listening to or crying with them can bring comfort. Your presence might be the best gift they receive this year.

Compassionate Father, for all those who woke this morning to the loneliness of bereavement—the empty bed or chair, an unaccustomed quietness, a life now incomplete—may they know your presence in the stillness of the day, and through the love of friends who offer their condolence. And in the darker moments may they reach out to hold your hand and feel the warmth of the One who has already passed from death to life to welcome others into God's Kingdom. Amen.



DECEMBER 16

Sickness is one more indicator our world is broken. We constantly face cancer, ALS, heart disease, Parkinson's disease, viruses, chronic pain, and myriad other illnesses. Such diseases prevent people from living anything close to normal lives. Jesus made time to minister to the sick. So should we. What specific ways can you be with and support those who battle sickness this Advent? Perhaps reading to them, watching a movie together, and, of course, praying with them will bring some comfort and encouragement. Your presence can brighten the day of someone whose illness has made life difficult.

Matthew 14:14

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Almighty and immortal God, giver of life and health: We implore your mercy for those afflicted with sickness, that by your blessing upon them and upon those who minister to them with your healing gifts, they may be restored to health of body and mind, according to your gracious will, and may give thanks to you in your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*- adaptation of prayer in
The Book of Common Prayer*

Heavenly Father, sustainer of our life and source of our hope: Comfort and relieve all who endure long-term illness or persistent handicap. Give your grace to all who minister to their needs, that they may be strengthened in their weakness and have confidence in your loving care; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- The Book of Common Prayer



DECEMBER 17

In a perfect world each person would have family and friends to encourage, support, and love him or her. But as Advent reminds us our world is far from perfect. Loneliness plagues many people and is felt quite deeply during the holidays. For all sorts of reasons they do not have the companionship of family and friends. There is no one with whom to share joys, struggles, hopes, fears, or thoughts. Our coming King was a friend to such people. We should follow his example. This Advent season whose life can you bring light into by your presence with him or her? Look for those around you who are lonely, who have no friends or family. Give them the gift of your presence. Take them out to eat. Participate with them in an activity or hobby they enjoy. Simply spend time with them giving them your attention.

Father, as we remember the birth of your Son and the significance of His coming, I ask that you help us to also remember those who are lonely. Lord, please open our eyes to anyone within our sphere of influence who are all but forgotten this Christmas. We ask for deep compassion and a conviction to extend our hands and hearts toward them. Lord, help us to understand loneliness in such a way that we would no longer ignore those who do not have friends or family by their side. Raise us up to step outside of our own traditions and embrace the outcast. Most of all Dear God, we ask that You extend your love to them. Be their comforter, their shelter, and their stronghold. We know from your Word that You place the lonely in families. I pray that we would be some of those families with open arms, willing to receive others into our homes to without reservation

or fear. Father, we thank You for the season of advent and the weeks leading to the birth of the Savior. We celebrate You and the blessedness of Your birth, death, and resurrection. We long for You more than anything, Lord. Show us how and when to reach out to those who need to hear about Your great love and precious gift of salvation this Christmas. We pray these things in Jesus' Name, Amen.

- Jennifer Waddle

A prayer for those who are experiencing loneliness.

Heavenly Father, I need you in a special way this Christmas. I feel so alone, and it seems impossible to enter into the joy this season its supposed to bring. It feels as though my suffering is invisible, but I know that it is never invisible to you. You see every moment of loneliness and every tear. You see my confusion, my exhaustion, and my grief. You look on me with love and compassion, and I know you desire to comfort me now more than ever. I pray that you will allow me to know your love for me in a special way this Christmas as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. Grant me peace in my heart at the thought of you, my loving Father. Grant me clarity and trust in your holy providence. Jesus, I place myself in your loving hands. Jesus, I trust in you. Amen.

*- adaptation of a
prayer by Sophia Swinford*



DECEMBER 18

Jesus had a well-earned reputation of spending time and identifying with people living at the margins of society—the outcasts, the despised, the unclean, the immoral. These were the prostitutes, tax collectors, shepherds, and foreigners in Jesus day. In our day they are the homeless, the addicts, the mentally ill, the immigrants. A society that ignores such people shows it has succumbed to the darkness. Yet time and time again God shows himself to be on the side of the outcasts and opposed to those who push them aside. As Jesus gave of himself and his time to be with societies outcasts, we too are called to do the same. Who at the margins of our society can you give the gift of your presence this Advent? Maybe you too can earn the reputation of hanging around all the “wrong” people and thereby bring glory to our returning King.

*For those deprived of their human needs and their human rights,
that they may be given the dignity which God confers on all his
people;*

We pray to the Lord

*For all who are forgotten or thrown away, and especially for the
poor, the sick and the aged,
that God might change our hearts and move us to love them as the
image of Christ;*

We pray to the Lord

*For all who are lonely or afraid, for teenagers on the street, old
people in nursing homes,*

*prisoners with no one to visit them, and all whom the world has forgotten:
that Christ might lead us to them;
We pray to the Lord*

*For all who are forgotten or cast off, that we might value each human life,
as a priceless gift from God;
We pray to the Lord*

Amen.

Luke 5:27-31

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."



DECEMBER 19

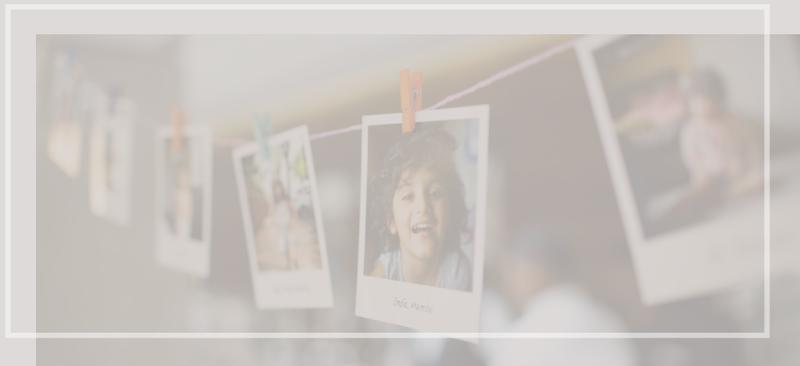
Our theme of presence this week reminds us what a lonely, difficult, painful, frustrating world we live in. We know that without God's presence the darkness and brokenness of this world would overtake us. As the presence of the Messiah at his first advent brought joy and hope and salvation, so too will his presence at his second advent. But, we, his followers, can bring small rays of hope, joy, and salvation when we are present with the weak, sick, lonely, and marginalized. Your presence is by far the most valuable gift you can give this Advent.

O God, almighty and merciful, you heal the broken-hearted, and turn the sadness of the sorrowful to joy; Let your fatherly goodness be upon all whom you have made. Remember in pity all those who are this day destitute, homeless, elderly, infirm, or forgotten. Bless the multitude of the poor. Lift up those who are cast down. Mightily befriend innocent sufferers, and sanctify to them the endurance of their wrongs. Cheer with hope all who are discouraged and downcast, and by your heavenly grace preserve from falling those whose poverty tempts them to sin. Though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed; though they are perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of him who for our sakes became poor, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ Alone

*In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground, Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace, When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All, Here in the love of Christ I stand.*

- Keith Getty / Stuart Townend



- A *Christmas* full of -
LOVE



- WEEK FOUR -



DECEMBER 20

The social turmoil of 2020 vividly reminds us of how dark and broken our world really is. The ugly and destructive forces of injustice, riots, violence, incivility, hatred, and division betray how evil the human heart can be. In times like these, we realize there is no human answer, no human solution. We are forced to look elsewhere for any hope. We are forced to look and pray for our just, peaceful, loving King to return to stamp out these evils that plague us. And yet we, his followers, are not left without any response to the destructive forces of human evil we encounter daily. Our King send us out into this dark and broken world as agents of his love. As worship, generosity, and presence are needed responses to our world, love too is how we should respond to the social turmoil of our day. Like Jesus responded to the injustice, hatred, and violence of his day with love, he asks us to do the same. How can you show love this Advent season to someone who suffered injustice, to an enemy, to someone who has been uncivil or violent to you, to someone who is different than you?

Matthew 5:38-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Isaiah 1:16-17; 10:1-3

*Wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;
stop doing wrong.
Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
plead the case of the widow. . .*

*Woe to those who make unjust laws,
to those who issue oppressive decrees,
to deprive the poor of their rights
and withhold justice from the oppressed
of my people,
making widows their prey
and robbing the fatherless.
What will you do on the day of reckoning,
when disaster comes from afar?
To whom will you run for help?
Where will you leave your riches?*



DECEMBER 21

While we can't escape noticing the dark and broken world we live in, all too often we are oblivious to how dark and broken it really is for people who do not enjoy the comforts and security most of us experience. More disturbing is how often we are apathetic or even contributors to the plight of the poor, oppressed, victims of injustice in our own communities, our country, and around our world. In both the Old and New Testaments God has some very strong words for those of his people who neglect the vulnerable (widows, orphans, poor, foreigners) and contribute to their plight. God want his people to respond with love and justice as he has done for us when we were enslaved and oppressed by sin. The Advent season is an opportunity to bring light into the darkness and repair to he brokenness by loving the vulnerable and mistreated. What can you do to show love to an immigrant, someone unable to provide for his or her family, the abused child, or the inner-city child who struggles to read and write?

Deuteronomy 10:17-19

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Psalms 146:1, 6-9

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord, my soul. . . .

He is the Maker of heaven and earth,

*the sea, and everything in them—
he remains faithful forever.
He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.*

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Almighty God, you created us in your own image: Grant us grace to contend fearlessly against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and help us to use our freedom rightly in the establishment of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who live and reign with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

- The Book of Common Prayer



DECEMBER 22

Among the images etched in our minds from this past year are those of violence and hatred—riots in response to police killings and elections; physical violence over political differences; vulgar language and threats hurled at law enforcement, public officials, protestors, and neighbors; destruction of property. Our world is one where we respond to injustice with more injustice. We respond with revenge. God’s people can either participate in the violence and revenge or respond with love to those who treat us unjustly, say or do hateful things to us, or seek to harm us in other ways. When confronted with violence and hatred Jesus did not respond in kind; he responded with love and kindness. What demonstration of love can you perform this Advent season to a person or group you perceive as an enemy or who has harmed you in some way?

Romans 12:14-21

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

*O God, the Creator of all, whose Son
commanded us to love our enemies: Lead
them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver
them and us from hatred, cruelty, and
revenge; and in your good time enable us
all to stand reconciled before you in Jesus
Christ; in whose Name we pray. Amen*

- The Book of Common Prayer



DECEMBER 23

Politics tend to bring out the incivility in us whether elections, Supreme Court appointments, or policy debates. Very few people can discuss these topics with kindness and respect. Rather we shout, call names, slander, misrepresent, and demonize those who differ with us. And it's not only in the political realm where incivility reigns. We have learned to be uncivil to one another in all spheres of life. This is one more indicator of the dark and broken human condition. God calls his people to be different and the Bible gives instruction to help us be civil. James implores us to be "quick to hear and slow to speak" (1:19) and Ephesians commands us not to speak "unwholesome words" (4:29). Further wisdom concerning our speech is found in Proverbs (10:19; 12:18; 15:4) and James 2. Civility is an act of love toward one with whom we disagree. What ways can you promote and model civility? Try listening more than speaking. Avoid media (social media, cable news media) that entices you to be uncivil. Look for ways to speak kindly to others who hold different views. Remember the wisdom of Proverbs 15:1; "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

James 3:3-12

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Proverbs 10:19; 12:18; 15:4

*Sin is not ended by multiplying words,
but the prudent hold their tongues.*

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

*The soothing tongue is a tree of life,
but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.*

O Holy Night

*O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;*

*Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was
born.*

O night, O holy night, O night divine.

*Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is Love and His gospel is Peace;
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our
brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease,
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful Chorus raise
we;*

Let all within us praise his Holy name!

*Christ is the Lord, then ever! ever praise we!
His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!
His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!*

- Adolphe Adam



DECEMBER 24

On this night the light of love obliterated the darkness. The One who is Love took on human nature to bring healing and salvation. As the angel announced to the shepherds, this child in a manger is the source of joy for all people. He would teach and live the kind of love that possesses the power to eradicate injustice, oppression, hatred, violence, incivility, divisions and a host of other social and interpersonal ailments that wreck society. This love from above is the love Jesus' followers are to bring into the world. Our response to social evils is one of love. When we respond in love to the wickedness around us, we give tangible witness to the One who so loved the world that he gave the gift of his Son that first advent and to the sure reality of his second advent.

1 John 4:8-10

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.



*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace
as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with
hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

- Romans 15:13

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