

MAKE WAY

Our 2025
Advent Devotional



BARTLESVILLE
FIRST UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH

BartlesvilleUnited.com

Introduction

Welcome to the Bartlesville First United Methodist Church Advent Devotional! We are pleased to present you with this collection of reflections, prayers, Scripture readings, and spiritual disciplines for your Advent season.

We encourage you to use this devotional as feels right to you. You may refer to it throughout each week of Advent, or you may pick one day a week to focus on. You could also use it with an at-home Advent wreath; you'll find a guide to creating your own.

Our prayer is that this devotional booklet doesn't become one more thing on your to-do list. Rather, we pray that for you, it becomes your "to-be" list, so that you can become more like Christ, with more love, more hope, more joy, and more peace.

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Advent Wreath Ritual for Your Home

The practice of lighting candles around an Advent wreath at home can be a new way to find meaning in an old tradition. This tradition leading up to Christmas does not need to be reserved as something to do in church.

Here are a few suggestions to help you build this ceremony into your family's own holiday traditions.

- Find or create a "wreath." You can find ready-made wreaths in many stores. Or, you can make your own with just about anything that will form a circle to hold the candles. The more personal your wreath, the more meaningful it will be.
- A white candle (the Christ candle) goes in the center of the wreath, with four others spaced around the outside. It is customary to use three blue or purple and one pink, lighting the pink one on the third week as a sign that the time of waiting is almost over. (It is appropriate to use four candles that are the same color, too.)
- Light each new candle, along with the previous weeks' candles, on the four Advent Sunday evenings. The Christ-candle is lit on Christmas Eve. You may want to light the same candles each evening of that week for a brief time. Try going to bed in silence after the candles are extinguished. Consider lighting the candles on Christmas morning, before gift-opening, as a reminder of the true reason for the season. The main purpose of lighting the Advent candles is to mark time in a way that is spiritual and tangible. Children especially love the drama of increasing brightness from the Advent wreath as the weeks progress.
- The lighting ritual can be as simple or ornate as you like. Readings or orders for lighting the candles can be found in books, magazines and on the Internet. You can use the Advent devotional in this very booklet. You can break the Christmas story into parts to tell or read each week. Maybe sing carols or choruses.



Pray. Have a time of silence. Let this tradition take on a life of its own for your household.

First Sunday of Advent

November 30



Prayer

Read: Micah 5:2, 4-5; Luke 21:29-32

Lord Jesus, our Shepherd and Savior,
you came from little Bethlehem to rule with true strength.
In a world which is often restless and fretful,
teach us to read the signs of your righteous reign,
just as leaves greening on trees remind us that summer is near.
Root our hearts in your nearness here and now.
And may we rest in Your reign and live as people of peace,
as we await in quiet confidence for your coming again. Amen.

Reflection

These reflection exercises pair particularly well with lighting an Advent wreath.

How can you be more aware of your own restlessness?

Practice this daily discipline during Advent, even if for only 2 or 3 minutes:

- Find a place that speaks of peace to you. Walk outside, or sit by your Christmas tree, or gaze at a nativity set. Take a few deep breaths and just be with the Lord.
- What is it like for you to get very still in moments like this?

Why a Womb Instead of a Seed?

I find it interesting that The Christ came and inhabited a woman's womb, and to top that the crux of the story is that the woman became pregnant without the "seed" of a man.

Why didn't Gabriel come to Joseph and say, "Joseph, don't be afraid, for you have found favor with God! You will give a seed to a woman, and this woman will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David."

Why not come through the seed of man? Why come through a virgin womb?

God divine in a helpless, young, scared, powerless, culturally oppressed girl. Unrestrained power and might, inside the most insignificant piece of society, inside the most vulnerable part of her body. Oh, the paradox of a uterus holding all authority on heaven and earth and under the earth.

Every piece of the Story of the Messiah turns cultural ways upside down, shines a light on the dark places of humanity, and demands a new way. His followers called it "The Way."

A prostitute will be one of Jesus's great-grandmothers, a son will rebel and break his father's heart, but still find he belongs and is welcome home. A cheating political figure will be invited to dine at the banqueting table, and a thief will be invited to experience paradise. A woman will have a man stand up for her and send her prosecutors away, a girl plagued mentally and thrown out of her community, will be healed and restored. The untouchable will be touched, the unhealable will be healed, the unforgivable will be forgiven.

My prayer for you, my dear, is that you would allow every part of you to be turned upside down. That you would open up the most vulnerable places inside of you and allow the Son of Light to show you a new and different way that heals and saves.

~Emily French

Why a Womb Instead of a Seed? (continued)

Luke 1:26-38 26 *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

In His Own Time

Finding a church after a big move was tough. These are the people you'll be doing your next "season" of life with. It took eight months after our move before I was even ready to step into a church. We still hadn't built close relationships, so choosing a church felt especially daunting.

I remember comparing the local Methodist options online, searching for any indication of which to choose. Neither of the churches I was looking at even hinted at the information I was seeking. With "disaffiliation" becoming normal language across the UMC, I prayed—desperately—that we'd choose well.

Looking back now, I'm grateful we landed at BFUMC. Had we not, we'd likely be church "shopping" again. This reminder makes me delight in how quietly and in his own time God answers prayers.

In this Advent season, I'm aware again that God often guides us in ways we only recognize long after the waiting.

~Anonymous

1 John 4:7-12 *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

Second Sunday of Advent

December 7



Prayer

Read: Isaiah 11:1-9; Matthew 3:1-12

God of faithful love, from the stump of Jesse's family line
you brought new life through Jesus.

Let the love of Christ reshape our lives,
so that the wolf and the lamb within us may dwell in peace
under the rule of Your Son.

As John once cried out in the wilderness,
stir us to prepare the way for Jesus as those who bear the fruit of
repentance:

mercy, kindness, and self-giving love.

May our lives be a small sign of that coming day
where nothing will hurt or destroy,
when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Your love. Amen.

Reflection Question

How can you open your heart to the healing work of God's love?

As you continue the practice of being still for a few minutes (see last Sunday's reflection), now seek a greater awareness of some area of inner brokenness.

What is your inner struggle like, just now?

Let Joy Intrude

It was my first Advent as the pastor of St. Matthew United Methodist Church. We had had a very enjoyable year and were probably still in what pastors often call the "honeymoon" period.

It was such a change from my previous appointment, so I was quite surprised at how irritated I got when my pager went off. It was Christmas Eve, and I was in the choir room getting ready for the Christmas Eve service.

I thought, everyone I know knows it is Christmas Eve and I'm at the Christmas Eve service. Who could intrude on this Holy time?

My feelings changed quickly after I checked the pager, which offered a message from my son. It told me of the birth of my second grandson.

How joyous when a time of waiting is transformed into a moment of coming! That is when I realized the meaning of Advent. God fulfills our waiting when He comes in the form of a tiny baby. And He comes into our lives again and again.

Oh, what joy when waiting transforms into coming. Merry Christmas!

~Richard Whetsell

Matthew 1:22-23 *All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"*

Gifts of Comfort, Hope, and Love

Three years ago, during the month of December, our family welcomed its youngest member, Drew. Her arrival was early—not just by the hour, but a full six weeks ahead of schedule.

This sudden turn left her parents feeling anxious and uncertain, while her older brothers, ages 9 and 7 at the time, were filled with questions and confusion. They couldn't understand why visiting their new baby sister wasn't allowed, and the seriousness of her early birth was difficult for them to grasp.

Drew spent an additional 36 days in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) before she could come home to her waiting brothers and her exhausted parents.

Throughout those weeks, the family was surrounded by unexpected kindness from their family and community. Church members and families from the boys' school reached out with generous gestures—from delivering meals and offering prayers to volunteering to take the boys to sports practices and helping with other daily needs.

Each of these acts, whether big or small, provided comfort and support when the family needed it most.

These thoughtful gifts brought hope, joy, and love during a time of uncertainty, leaving a lasting impression on the family's hearts.

~Javier Pollock

II Corinthians 1:3-5 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.*

Third Sunday of Advent

December 14



Prayer

Read: Isaiah 35:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

God of joy,
you can make the desert burst into bloom, the wasteland burst into song
Where we are empty or discouraged,
let your joy spring up like streams underground streams
Strengthen us and steady our anxious hearts with the word, "Be strong,
fear not."
Teach us to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in
all circumstances,
so that on our life-journeys, with sorrows and sighing around us,
we may walk forward with singing and everlasting joy upon our heads.
Amen.

Reflection Question

How is joy trying to bloom in you this Advent season?

Continue to practice being still and becoming more aware of your inward stirrings. Add to this practice by jotting on paper or in a device some of the ideas and images that stir joy within you.

What ways might you share something from that list with someone this week?

The Magic Happens Through People

I have received grace and love through people in the most beautiful ways, especially in the last few years. Grace has transformational power. It can set you free.

Free from yourself, from your shame, from your insecurities, grace at the right moment will feel just like the "perfect love that casts out all fear."

And this type of grace and love is received through others. The magic happens through **people.**

The Spirit of God, the light in our neighbor's eyes, the love that is deep inside of us at our core, the human spirit that runs to help those in crisis or in need, is a piece of the stardust of the universe. The energy, the power, the God, the sun, the Light that lives in me, lives in you, and it is through my contact with you that I can share this incredible gift.

My dear, the healing power of your presence is needed in someone else's life. You might be the one someone needs today.

All around us, people are hurting, working through their trauma, their depression, their poor choices, and dealing with hard external pressures, and we have the ability as children of the light to offer the grace, love, or forgiveness a precious soul might need.

My prayer and hope is that we might understand how this grace, this light, changes everything. That we might receive the gift of being fully accepted and fully loved, where pure love isn't based on performance or the lack of mistakes, but it just simply IS.

"For how great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are."

My dear, you ARE, so therefore go and BE.

~Emily French

1 John 3:1-3

The Magic Happens Through People (continued)

1 John 3:1-3 *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he^[g] is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

The Thrill of Hope

Hope is a revolutionary concept.

It is a concept that those who would seek to oppress, suppress, and repress others would not want those others to have.

If pain, suffering, and sorrow are inevitable, hope seems foolish. Why bother to hope for better?

But the birth of the Messiah offered nothing so much as hope.

The Jewish people had been oppressed, suppressed, and repressed for a long time. Many longed for their hoped-for king. Perhaps many also wondered if this hope was a foolish one.

But finally, on a day marked by angels and bright stars, He came, and that hope was fulfilled at last.

Jesus' birth wasn't merely an ancient hope fulfilled; it provides hope of a bright future today. And we can continually offer that hope to others: when we are truly His hands and feet, we offer the hope of heaven.

~Nicole Haschke

Hebrews 6:19-20 *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and reliable and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21



Prayer

Read: Isaiah 7:10-16; Matthew 1:18-25

God of hope,
in fearful times when courage failed, you promised a sign:
the birth of a child whose name would be Immanuel, "God with us."
When our hearts tremble like trees in the wind
and when the world seem like it might collapse,
teach us to trust Your quiet, hidden work.
As we wait for the Child of Promise to be born anew,
anchor us in the hope that you are with us now and will be faithful to the
end. Amen.

Reflection Question

In what area of life do you most need hope?

Continue the holy habit of stillness and awareness as a daily discipline.

Make notes about your most memorable or meaningful experiences so far during this year's Advent.

What might God be saying to you as you face your fears?

It's Just Temporary

Shortly before my beloved passed, he gripped my forearms and repeated the word, "temporary" over and over again. I responded, "Temporary what?" With great frustration, he feebly and frantically shook my arms, still repeating the word "temporary," but I just didn't get it.

Several days later, the nursing home's two lay ministers came into his room. Gathering around the bed, we held hands in prayer. The minister prayed that God would bless us as we began to enter a time of "temporary separation!"

Tears flowed as I realized that God had sent a messenger to clarify my loved one's final words!

These days, when I reflect on this great loss in my life, the reminder that "It's just temporary!" helps to soften my grief. Make Way for Hope!

~Mary Lynn Smith

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

The “Christmas” Controversy

Lately, debates over using the word “Christmas” in the wider culture may have simmered down some. But there is a bubble every now then, like the one a couple of years back when a noted coffee shop changed their cups for the season.

My take on this topic might surprise you: in short, those who seek to limit usage of the word “Christmas” may be doing the church a favor. Granted, there may be people or groups who are hostile to the church, but most seek to be more inclusive. Even if we disagree with those efforts, we might exercise some wonder at the opening this debate provides.

Consider this: “Christmas” was the church’s word long before it became the climax of the retail year. Its roots are in the mystery of the incarnation—God becoming flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. Only in the last 150 years or so has Christmas been co-opted as a season of consumption.

I’m all for generosity and gratitude, but surely Christians agree that Christmas ought to be used in mostly spiritually significant ways. By contrast, we don’t see “Hanukkah Sales” or “Ramadan Bargains.” Those words remain largely religious, as they should be. “Christmas” alone is stretched so thin it can mean everything and nothing. To put the best spin on it, when there are cultural attempts to limit the word, they are saying, largely unintentionally, “Christmas is sacred to Christians—let it mean what it truly means.”

The real fight for Christmas is not in courtrooms or boardrooms but in our hearts. Will we, the baptized disciples of Jesus, let Christ rule our attitudes and actions? If the world is to know the real “reason for the season,” it will be because the church keeps telling the story—and living it out in clearcut ways. Thus will we “keep Christmas all the year through,” to quote Uncle Scrooge.

Christmas Blessings, y’all!

~Pastor Terry

The “Christmas” Controversy (continued)

Matthew 5:13-16 *“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

Christmas Eve

December 24



A Christmas Eve Prayer

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7

Lord Jesus Christ,
this night we recall that the people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.
Into the shadows of our world and the depths of our hearts,
shine as our Wonderful Counselor.
Let the gift of your birth break the yoke of burden and shatter oppression.
Reign in us so that your power at work in our lives, our homes, and our
church
will spread into a weary world.
May we rest this night in the zeal of the Lord of hosts,
who has done—and will do—these things. Amen.

Christmas Day

December 25



A Prayer for Christmas Day

Read: Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-4

Lord God,
thank you for all those who bring the good news of Christ,
who proclaim your ways and say, "Your God reigns!"
On this Christmas morning we rejoice
that the Word who was in the beginning, who was with God and who is
God,
has come among us in flesh and blood.
In Jesus, your power can be seen by all people,
your purpose made known to all the ends of the earth.
Let the light and life that are in your Son fill our hearts, our words, and our
deeds.
May we join the ruins that sing of new life, for you still comfort and redeem
your people.
Send us out as bearers of the good news:
that in Christ, God is with us, and God is for us. Amen.