



ADVENT

with Communion of Saints

DAILY DEVOTIONALS from COSDOWNTOWN[®]

✦ for the 2025 ADVENT SEASON ✦

Time is inherent to the human experience. To be human is to live in time. Because of its enormous influence on our lives, most religious traditions have established distinctive ways of marking time. The Church has developed a calendar that follows the life of Jesus from the prophetic expectation of his birth through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to his return and unending reign. Keeping the Christian Calendar (aka the Liturgical Year) helps us to order our lives around the story of God, to enter his story and to see our stories inside of His.

The Christian Calendar begins four Sundays before Christmas with the season of Advent. This is our New Year! The Latin word *adventus* means “arrival” or “coming,” but it is a season of waiting. We join ancient Israel in waiting for Jesus’ first arrival, and we join the local, global, and historic Church in waiting for Jesus’ return. We hold together painful longing and joyful expectation. We name our ache, and we hope for every ache to end. This is an active waiting—a preparing if you will. In our waiting, we are prepping to celebrate Jesus’ incarnation in fragile infant flesh and ultimately to welcome his reappearing as the victorious king.

The season of Advent is followed by the season of Christmas or Christmastide. Christmas is a day and a season. For twelve days, we feast! (Yes, Christmas Day is the first day of Christmas not the twelfth.) We join with Joseph and Mary, Zechariah and Anna, the shepherds, and the angels in declaring the good news and giving glory to God. We rejoice for God has come and we trust he will come again. Christmas ends on January 5 and ushers in the Epiphany on January 6. In Epiphany, which means “manifestation” or “revealing,” we remember the story of the magi and proclaim that Jesus came not just for Israel but also for the nations.

As you can probably tell, I can get pretty nerdy about this stuff. I love the Church Calendar. I’ve been observing it in some way since my twenties. But like every Christian practice, it’s critical to remember that the goal is not to complete or perfect the practice. The point is the presence of Jesus. All Christian practices are meant to lead us into the presence of God!

This year’s devotional contains a collection of readings, reflections, poems, and prayers to help you be with Jesus during these seasons. As you read, may Jesus—Emmanuel—be with you, just as he promised!

Grace & Peace,
Jason

NOV
30

HOPE

SHEPHERDS — HOPE FOR THE OVERLOOKED

SCRIPTURE READING

LUKE 2:8-12

Hope often begins in unlikely places. The first people invited into God’s unfolding story were not kings or scholars, but weary night-shift shepherds. They had no status, no strategy—only routine. Yet heaven broke into their ordinary field and declared, “A Savior has been born for you.”

True biblical hope is confidence grounded in God’s goodness, not our circumstances. The shepherds didn’t yet see how everything would change—but the announcement itself was enough to move them. Hope is not wishful thinking—it’s trust that God is already at work before we understand how.

Meditation Question:

Where in my life have I grown cynical or numb—and how might God be whispering, “This good news is for you”?

Collect Prayer:

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.

WHILE I WAS
READING

SCRIPTURE READING

ISAIAH 9:2-7

Keep going. I wasn't going to make it. Tears welled, then spilled. It was Advent 2010. I stood before the congregation, trying to read out our Old Testament passage: Isaiah 9:2-7. I didn't realize it then, but as I struggled through the verses, God was changing everything: my perspective, my view of Him, and ultimately, my life trajectory.

All year, a relentless rotation of reasons to despair cycled through my mind: stabbings downtown, oil spills, school shootings, Haiti's earthquakes, Abu Ghraib, cancer, North Korean attacks. My tipping point—a tragic report on human trafficking in Nepal, where I'd spent my childhood. A young girl with the limited vocabulary of a child struggled to share the horrors she'd endured in an Indian red light district. Grief fed my fatalistic despair. Nothing will ever improve. Accusatory questions circled: Where are You, God? Do You see? Do You care?

As I awkwardly read Isaiah's prophecies aloud, relief overwhelmed me. God did have a plan and responses to my (unoriginal!) age-old questions. I felt light pierce my despair while I spoke: "For the people walking in darkness, those living in a land of deep shadows — LIGHT! Sunbursts of light!"

The ancient prophecy continued, painting a picture of a perfect future brought by a Ruler who would make all things right. This resonated at a soul-deep level. I suddenly knew this future was real. I sensed the rightness to come. We would be a people full of joy, in the presence of the Just Ruler, living in a wholeness with no limits. In mere seconds, God transformed my cynical pessimism, His Spirit making palpable the hope and certainty of this good future.

Abuse by oppressors, cruelty of tyrants—all their whips and clubs and curses: GONE! Done away with!

I thought of the Nepalis being trafficked. Oh, how they would love this God who brings light to darkness, a deliverance surprising and sudden, and a wholeness without limits! Eventually, I got through that reading. No longer despairing but full of a hope so real, I suddenly wanted to fully align my life with His and reflect that hope to others.

Recognizing God's love for the oppressed, our family moved to Nepal, where for thirteen years we ran a manufacturing company so we could offer good jobs to marginalized and exploited women and point to the eternal hope God gives. We returned to the USA last year, turning over a thriving company with hundreds of employees living transformed lives with hope from God.

An Advent reading changed my life. I wonder, what will God say to you this Advent? How can we make space to listen? Are His promises of a restored future leading us to new action?

KATRINA BRYANT

HOPE...
IN COMMUNITY

SCRIPTURE READING

ROMANS 15:3

"Your daughter has cancer." Chilling words. Not words of hope. Rather, words of fear, uncertainty, and isolation.

The Advent season is marked by waiting, by longing, and by hope. Hope is not something we carry alone; it is something God plants in us by faith, cultivates through the Holy Spirit, and nourishes through the community of saints.

Our two-year-old daughter was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a cancer of the nerve cells. This cancer is rarely caught early and generally does not have a hopeful prognosis.

When our faith faltered in the face of cancer, we experienced a beautiful, tangible expression of community that provided peace, lavished love, and allowed us to hope. Meals, prayers, care for our other children, and even the mowing of an overgrown yard. They cried with us, prayed with us, and sat in silence with us. Community became the means of grace by which we experienced an overflow of hope. What was hard and scary became a time of peace and growth, a time of learning to trust in God and in the people with whom He surrounded us.

Paul speaks about our hope overflowing from a place of joy and peace born out of faith. Faith in a Father God who declares we are seen, known, loved, and part of a family.

You may not face a cancer diagnosis, but this Advent season, you may be telling yourself a different story. A story of fear, uncertainty, and isolation. Family is far away and you feel alone. You lost someone close to you, and the holiday season feels profoundly empty. Chronic illness is keeping you from community. You're facing financial struggles. You've experienced a failed relationship. This Advent season, take the brave step of pressing into community and asking for help. You are not alone. You are seen and loved by the Body of Christ.

A routine, yet providential exam found a cancerous tumor in our daughter before it should have been able to be found, which meant that it was still intact and able to be removed. Even the surgeon marveled and stated that he'd never taken out a neuroblastoma intact.

Our hope is in a faithful Father, an incarnate Savior, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the people of God pressing into faith together, carrying others who are weak, and allowing others to care when we are overwhelmed.

In Advent, we hope together as a community. This Advent season, our prayer is that you will also find hope in the midst of community. May we hold to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.

KYLE AND TERRA FISK

HOPING, HOLDING,
AND WAITING

SCRIPTURE READING

LAMENTATIONS 3:21-26, JOHN 1

The baby cries.
Up, again
Holding her close,
Rocking her,
Minutes pass—
They feel like hours—
At 3am.

No one prepares you
for these (seemingly) endless wakings
In the disordered, delirious darkness
Where there is nothing required of me
But to wait,
To hold and to hope
And wait
For her to settle at last in my arms,
For the dawn to come,
For this night to be over,
For a new day to beckon us both
Out of exhaustion
Into the light.
A new day.

I look at the clock:
How have only two minutes passed?
And wait.

As new parents, in the first couple of years of our daughter's life, it seems like we've spent countless nights in her room, rocking her and trying to get her to fall back asleep at any-and all-hours of the night. The exhaustion is real, as is the loneliness, and even, at times, despair that she'll ever fall back asleep or that we will get any rest. I, Lynnae, have struggled to find hope many nights. And yet, unfailingly, the morning always comes.

In the midst of darkness, there are often true feelings of despair to which God speaks the hope of His coming morning. In the third chapter of Lamentations, Jeremiah's witness to the destruction of the temple and fall of Jerusalem, he reflects, still, on the Lord's faithfulness, how His compassions "are new every morning." Even in Jeremiah's season of darkness and seemingly unending lament, he still says, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him."

The gift of Advent is that in the waiting we know not only that the morning will come, but, too, who it will bring, as we wait for the coming of the Lord. It is Jesus who has "moved into the neighborhood," as Eugene Peterson put it in his translation of John 1, into our present darkness to wait with us. He is both the one who waits with us in the darkness and the one who heralds its ending, the present portion and the deliverance of morning. Jesus sits with us in the hour-long minutes, having been both a sleepless babe Himself and the Father who sits with us when we cannot sleep.

As we wait in this Advent season—whether you are a parent who can relate to our interrupted sleep, or are in your own season of waiting in seemingly dark nights, unsure of when the light will come—what orients you to hope? What may be God's invitation to you in the waiting? Where might He be in the darkness with you?

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HOPE AT THE END
OF OURSELVES

SCRIPTURE READING

REVELATION 21:4

Around October 3rd, some sort of GI bug started making its way around our house. It started with our daughter, who couldn't keep food down for days and seemed generally weak and lethargic—and then it moved on to my wife, who ended up having what she called “the worst night of her entire life” because of it. She got sick almost thirty times during that first twenty-four hours. At some points, she couldn't breathe. The midwife on call recommended Zofran (my wife is also pregnant), but we couldn't get that until 10 A.M. If she couldn't keep fluids down after that, we were advised to go to the ER for an IV.

At 1 A.M., I was fully dressed and ready to go to Wal-Mart for emergency supplies—until I realized that Wal-Mart isn't open 24/7 like it used to be. So I gathered up everything I could find at our house, but my wife couldn't keep any of it down. “The only thing I can compare it to is going into labor,” she said later. But it wasn't labor. There was no beautiful child at the other end of it. It seemed to be pain with no purpose.

Those twenty-four hours felt like a fever dream. Trying to comfort my one-year-old daughter, who also didn't feel great and only wanted to be with her mom—but whose mom was too weak to even move and was getting sick up to four times an hour—added a layer of emotional pain to the physical.

Twenty-four hours may not sound like much to you, but we were all pretty much ready for Jesus to come back by the end of it.

For much of my life, the virtue of hope has confused me. Not because life has seemed hopeless, but because hope seems a lot like the opposite of contentment, which also seems like an important virtue. If contentment means making the most of what we have here and now, hope seems to point our attention at things getting better later on, outside our control. But sometimes contentment can be like having a decent but ultimately inadequate medicine cabinet on the worst night of your life. It's still worthwhile to make the most of what we've already been given—but that doesn't stop us from coming to the end of ourselves.

Thankfully, the hope we have in Jesus' second Advent is not just about a few circumstances improving—it's about the whole world stepping into the shalom it was originally made for. And when that happens, as Revelation 21:4 puts it, there will be no more “mourning or crying or pain anymore.” I have to think that means no more sickness, either.

EVAN BARBER

HOPE IN A CATHEDRAL
GRAVEYARD

SCRIPTURE READING

PSALM 46:1-3

I've found different appearances of hope over the past ten years of my life. In seasons of depression and anxiety, hope has looked like putting one foot in front of the other—one second, one minute, one hour, and one day at a time. After the death of my sister-in-law, hope has looked not quite like I thought it would in seasons of grief. Instead of platitudes like “She's with Jesus now,” I've accepted that death is a part of life, and have become somewhat of a realist. Hope in grief for me looks like radical acceptance of reality, and regularly thinking about all the life stages Ellie is missing while her peers get married, have children, and travel.

Hope feels like an integral part of the Advent and Christmas season—the now and not yet—a longing for wholeness. I want Christmas to look like a beautiful scene from the Nutcracker, with the cozy feelings of White Christmas, but it doesn't always feel that way. It can be hard to look for hope when my family's worst nightmare came true—the loss of a vibrant life we dearly loved. If I can lose anything and anyone at any moment, how can I have hope for tomorrow? How can I find hope in the chaos of extended family relationships at a time that should be beautiful and joyful, but that often leaves me in a puddle of tears on the floor?

My family recently had the opportunity to visit Scotland, and while there, I was struck with the contrast of the presence of graveyards inside the walls of cathedral ruins and churchyards. When a long life was even less of a guarantee in the 1800s and earlier, people were forced to regularly confront death while walking into church. Hope in the midst of loss and a reminder that the world is not as it should be.

Ellie's life and death taught me that people and my relationships with them are the most important thing—the only thing that will last aside from an eternal relationship with Jesus. It's why I make the decisions I make, how I prioritize the way I spend my time. My things will fade away, but the relationships I have with others and with Jesus will last into eternity. I find hope in the reflections of light I see in others, and the light I hope I have brought to others in their seasons of darkness. Hope is grounded in Jesus' resurrection. Hope means choosing to believe that Jesus will make all things new, even when I can't see it and struggle to believe it. Hope means fighting to believe that Jesus has an eternal plan that is bigger than what I can understand.

CHELSEA ADELLMAN

FALL ON YOUR
KNEES

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 1 (MSG)

“A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices...” These powerful lyrics from the beloved Christmas carol, “O Holy Night,” were written in 1747 and still speak deeply into our shared human experience. Every Christmas Eve as we sing these words, my eyes moisten with tears as I think across the decades of my own ministry experiences among some of the poorest people on the planet.

The French author of this much-loved hymn, Placide Cappeau, was a wine merchant, a part-time poet, and a staunch opponent of slavery who rarely attended church, yet the local priest asked him to write the song. I’m sure neither of them could have ever anticipated that nearly three hundred years later, his words would still inspire hope, even in the midst of darkness.

This same hymn, one of my favorites, touches bluntly—even if eloquently—upon the issues of slavery and oppression of other humans: “For the slave is our brother” seems to stand boldly against racism in every form.

The weariness with which he penned his now-famous song is not new; the people of Israel often cried out, “How long, oh Lord?” And every year, as the season of Advent comes upon us, we hear stories, sing songs, and even watch movies of fall and redemption.

Yet the very message of it all is summed up in this line of the hymn: “For yonder breaks, a new and glorious morn...” It speaks of a new day and a new creation, yet at the same time describes the humble birth of a baby who would ultimately die for the brokenness of all humanity. The Incarnation—Jesus coming and living among us—is indeed Good News!

The Message translation wonderfully translates John 1:14 as, “He [Jesus] moved into the neighborhood.” The hope is not merely that God will rescue us immediately from this world’s trouble, but that He comes and lives with us and in us, through the trouble.

We live in a very divided and contentious time, yet there is reason for hope! God came to us, lived among us, and continues to be with us!

When our family faced a very difficult season several years ago, someone asked me if I had ever considered leaving my faith. I could only reply by quoting John 6:68, when Peter was asked a similar question by Jesus and he replied, “Lord, to whom else would I go?”

I go to the God who actually came down to us and, through His Spirit, continues to live both among and within us!

“Lord, may the thrill of hope fill us and enable us to look with faith toward a new Creation, when all things will be made new!”

Amen.

STEVEN TODD

Peace

HEROD —
PEACE VS. CONTROL

SCRIPTURE READING

MATTHEW 2:3-8, 16

Herod teaches us that the greatest enemy of peace is not chaos—it’s the illusion of control. He had armies and palaces, yet lived in fear. A soul at peace is satisfied in God’s care, even when circumstances haven’t yet changed. Herod refused to let go. Jesus’ arrival exposes the places in us that cling to power, comfort, or image rather than yielding to His rule and reign. The invitation of Advent is not merely to celebrate peace—but to surrender into it.

Meditation Question:

Where am I grasping for control instead of allowing Jesus to rule with His peace?

Collect Prayer

Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of your holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE PIVOT POINT OF PEACE

SCRIPTURE READING

COLOSSIANS 1:19-20

Hovering presence,
Formless and empty, darkness
Voice bringing forth life

“Let there be,” He spoke,
Wildlife, animation,
Alignment, order,

Garden intruder,
Lying voice, fractured friendship.
The first covering.

“Let there be,” He spoke.
Cradled in straw and wonder,
Witness the witt-ness

One last sacrifice
Rough timber and cruel spikes
A place of ending.

But now the plot twists,
Reconciliation flows,
Veins releasing peace

“Let there be,” He spoke,
Access granted, veil removed,
Resurrection proof.

Splintered, now wholeness.
Scattering, now gathering.
Shaken, now stillness.

Unity restored.
Children of dust and breath...rest.
Soul tranquility.

Continued on next page...

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to himself all things...making peace through His blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:19-20)

The cross truly is the pivot point in human and cosmic history. Peace is not a prize for the disciplined, but a gift given at the cross. We need only receive the peace offered to us and join in the restoration of all things, participating in the process of reconciliation in all of our unique spheres of influence, loving those around us more radically and sacrificially. Peace is not just the absence of noise, tension, and dispute; it is the nearness of Christ healing what has been fractured. We love being in nature. Recently, on a weekend hike, standing by a mountain waterfall with my family, I watched with amazement at how the water cascaded down and carved pathways through jagged boulders. Paul says peace flows this way from Christ—cutting through the broken places of creation: filling barrenness with hope, restoring vision to holistic blindness, challenging legalism and oppression, and redeeming prodigals. Sometimes peace feels violent and overwhelming. As a husband and father, I see my own need for this deluge of peace. Too often, my mind is restless, caught between work and home, between being present and being pulled away. As a therapist, I witness how desperately people long for peace—marriages aching for connection and tenderness, hearts weighed down by trauma and shame, souls weary from striving and self-protection. I hear the whisper of Jesus, for them and for me: Peace is not earned. It is given.

Question for reflection

Where in your life do you resist reconciliation, and what might it look like to let Christ's peace soften that place?

Call to Surrender

Come, weary soul. Come, restless mind. Come, burdened body. Exchange the heaviness. At the trading post of Christ.

Benediction

Go into this season as one who is already reconciled. Carry peace not as a fragile thing to guard, but as a gift already secured by Christ.

PRACTICING
HIS PEACE

SCRIPTURE READING

LUKE 8:22-25

“Peace. This word feels very hard to come by for me in this season. Parenting small children well-ish, running events, spending time with Jesus, coordinating weddings, staging houses, grocery shopping, running laps around my neighborhood for exercise, trying to eat well, keeping my marriage intact AND thriving, trying to find time to be creative and to enjoy the outdoors, navigating the deep and shallow waves of grief and loss, building and maintaining solid friendships, going to counseling, helping to launch a new church...ahem. Just a few things to preoccupy every fiber, of every part of me, every moment of every day. Who has time for PEACE?!

This time of year, we are additionally overwhelmed by extra shopping, gift wrapping, travels, family dynamics, holiday parties, divisive political conversations, expectations...you get the idea. It often feels like Luke 8 to me, when the disciples are in the sinking boat—which is rapidly filling with water—and panicking that they will drown. Then Jesus stands up and calms the storm with His words. He asks them why they would doubt Him? Of course, He knows. He knew that the storm would come, and He knew how He would show up for them. He was brought into the world He created in a chaotic barn, full of terrible smells, a panicked mother, a confused earthly father, and animals who were most definitely not keeping time with their hooves like the song suggests.

I often get to a place where I feel completely out of control, only to remember that I haven’t asked Jesus to be present with me. The world is too loud and anxiety-ridden to stop, to breathe, and to invite Jesus into our storm. And yet, as I’m writing this, I am going to pause to do just that...and as you’re reading this, I invite you to do the same.

Take one minute now to pause, to picture your current storm, to breathe deep, and to whisper “Come Holy Spirit.” Picture the presence of Jesus with you—knowing, resting, and speaking peace over your mind. Over your emotions. Over your physical body and your Spirit. The world might feel too loud and anxiety-ridden to stop, to breathe, and to invite Jesus into your storm like you’ve just done. You may not have chosen the storm you find yourself in. Very likely, your life looks and feels very different than you expected. But Jesus knew. He left His Holy Spirit to guide you and to speak to you. May you find His deep peace and also bring His peace into other people’s stories. He is by YOUR side. He himself IS peace. So, as we navigate this wild west that is the holiday season, may Advent catch you by surprise. May the peace of Christ bring you this real peace, as well as comfort and joy, and may you experience a new facet of who Jesus was then and who He continues to be.

BEKAH FRIESEN

JUST OVER
MY SHOULDER

SCRIPTURE READING

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

I’ve seen people move through life with cheery, calm exteriors no matter the situation. I’ve looked at them and judged myself, thinking, Ah, that’s what peace must look like. But when I go through hard times, I get weepy and lethargic and just watch way too many movies.

This year hasn’t been a picture of peace. I’ve been a consistent COS Downtowner for six years, yet in 2025, I’ve only been to church four times (as of October). Winter was brutal on my bones and kept me home; Spring saw me sick, ending in weeks-long vertigo; Summer crushed a few of my dreams due to medical treatments. As I finally hoped to get back to church, a concussion landed me firmly on my rear end. Now in Autumn, I’ve had to cancel trips, haven’t been allowed to drive, have missed out on events with friends and family, and more.

I feel like a joint out of socket, hanging there, useless until it’s put back into place. But I have a sneaking suspicion I’m not the only one who’s felt like that. Knowing you’re part of the body, but feeling like a crooked limb.

In this tension with all these areas of life, I realized the one place I’ve felt safe is in my nearness to God. It’s been so comforting, in fact, that I almost took it for granted. I’ve even complained to Him about how hard some things are without realizing I’m experiencing peace with Christ Himself in the midst of it.

But, to quote people who’ve used this phrase before...it’s as if He’s just over my shoulder. As if I can turn my head and look, and there He is. As His child, what an incredible gift to experience that kind of peace with God Himself!

Sure, I’m wrestling with body, mind, and community. Yet I’ve been given the awareness of Christ’s closeness to me. As I sit and reflect on that, I come to the conclusion that I’d rather have this type of peace than simply a “picture-perfect” reaction to life’s happenings. My exterior might not always be calm, and I might be like a joint out of socket, but I’m still connected to the body of Christ, and I can still experience His peace.

So I hope that you, brothers and sisters, enjoy nearness and peace with Christ in this season. I know He’s just over your shoulder, too.

LAUREL BURLEW

WHERE IS PEACE?

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 16:33

Does peace fit into Advent? Love? Sure, because love incarnate is here! Joy? Of course, because centuries of waiting have come to an end. Hope? Obviously, because the promise of a new kingdom has finally come.

But peace seems difficult in the Christmas story. For Mary and Joseph, several parts of their journey were anything but peaceful: being pregnant out of wedlock, frantically finding a place to sleep in Bethlehem, going into labor in the midst of being displaced, escaping into hiding in Egypt. It would seem that love, joy, and hope came at the expense of peace. Even now, does the hustle of the holidays evoke peace? If anything, peace seems to come when Christmas is over. Felt in the sigh of relief when the final wreath comes down.

In years past, the excitement of decorating the Christmas tree to our favorite carols was always a highlight, but the overwhelming feeling of all the clutter and the meltdowns over who got to put the star on the tree quickly zapped all happiness. Suddenly, we resonated more with the Grinch instead of St. Nick.

In preparing for Advent this year, we have wondered where peace fits into our own lives. Especially in light of a large, peace-stealing circumstance of a cancer diagnosis. And yet on Christmas, the Prince of Peace, who proclaims “you will have peace in me,” was born (John 16:33 CEB).

So while it may be tempting to think that peace won’t come until after the decorations are down, parties are over, treatments are complete, or the healing is finished, we must fight for the truth that Emmanuel has come and that Peace has been born. His peace offers a stark contrast to the chaos around us, just as it offered a stark contrast to the world He was born into.

So since the Prince of Peace is here, may He reign in our hearts. And may we be possessed by the peace that is promised in Him.

Reflection:

What is disrupting your peace? Where is the tension in your body, mind, or heart? How has God brought back peace into your life?

Breath prayer:

Inhale: “I need peace.” *Exhale:* “I have peace in Jesus.” *Inhale:* “I have trouble in this world.” *Exhale:* “The Prince of Peace has overcome the world.” *Repeat.*

BRIT AND HAILEY ULLRICH

THE ADVENTURE OF ADVENT

SCRIPTURE READING

ISAIAH 53, PHILIPPIANS 2

It is interesting that different words drawn from the same root often take on very different meanings over time. The way we use the two words today may offer no hint of their original connection. And yet, when we go back to the root of the two words, we often find interesting insights.

“Advent” and “adventure” are two of those words. They very clearly share a root, and yet have completely different definitions today.

On occasion, I lead adventure trips with a local high school. The trips sometimes take us to one of Colorado’s many fourteeners. Some of those trips are trouble-free and proceed according to plan. We show up, the weather is great, we make our way up the mountain, and we get back to camp for a good meal and a good night’s sleep under the Milky Way (and way too many Starlink satellites). Sometimes, though, we encounter weather, or the exposure on the mountain is challenging, or one of the kids simply struggles with the effort. After those excursions, we get to camp cold, hungry, and mentally and physically exhausted.

There are two interesting contrasts between those situations. First, the group generally remembers and likely even cherishes the difficult journey while the nominal trip is soon forgotten. The difficult journey is a true adventure. The second contrast is that the group is so much more appreciative of the comforts of home after the difficult journey. That first shower is absolutely divine.

We can tie those same contrasts to Jesus’ Advent. In fact, we should recognize Advent as a true Adventure! Both words tie back to the Latin *advenire*, which means “to arrive.” The Advent was the arrival that began the Adventure. It certainly included monumentally difficult experiences in a place that was in stark contrast to the home he was welcomed back to (Isa 53 and Phil 2).

There’s a lesson in Jesus’ Advent that is informed by our own physical adventures. We often go to great lengths to enjoy a comfortable life—to remove risk and maintain “peace.” And yet, it is our true adventures that are memorable and impactful. It is risk and difficulty that enable us to look forward to a time of true peace with great relish.

Isaiah 52 includes a picture of feet on a mountainside: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...” (ESV). This Advent season, consider what you can do to put your feet upon the metaphorical mountain, accept its challenges with grace, and relish the Adventure it brings!

KEN HUBBARD

A JOURNEY
OF WHOLENESS

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 14:27

Winding our way through thick jungle in a bus at twilight, I overheard a sobering conversation that would become a defining moment for me. It was 1996, and I was in Guatemala on my first mission trip. It was the tail end of a civil war in Guatemala involving historic disputes over land distribution between the government and the Mayan people. My friends were in the process of moving there as career missionaries with their three-year-old daughter and had been leading our youth group as we prepared to be immersed in the faith and culture of their new home country. We were en route to an indigenous village for the evening outreach when I overheard our translator telling one of our group leaders about a recent incident involving another bus full of Americans who had been stopped by the local militia and detained for questioning, the outcome unknown.

As a fairly new follower of Jesus at age fifteen, I remember being faced with an undeniable reality that night. I could follow my body's response and give in to utter fear, letting my mind run away with a scenario I did not know much about, or I could borrow upon the faith and courage of my missionary friends who were radically choosing to walk toward peace as they left everything familiar to serve the people of Guatemala. Somehow, supernaturally, I felt compelled to reach for the peace that I could not conjure. A peace that passes all understanding. I still thank God for that pivotal moment.

In the Scriptures, peace is translated as shalom. And in the Hebrew root of the word, shalom, we find the concept of wholeness. Wholeness. As in, the Lord is my Shepherd, "I do not experience anything as missing" (Psalm 23). What if peace is less of an emotion or state of being than I thought? What if it is present, even in the midst of conflict? In the presence of my enemies? Even when I am outnumbered? What if peace has less to do with my circumstances and more to do with something that can actually be accessed through the Lord?

In this season of awaiting our Savior's birth, what if we became deeply enamored with what Jesus says about peace? John 14 says, "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." What might we experience if we let Jesus speak wholeness, true peace, and shalom over us this Advent season?

MOLLY ABELOE

Joy

MAGI —
JOY THAT MOVES US

SCRIPTURE READING

MATTHEW 2:1-2, 9-11

The Magi didn't just admire the star—they followed it. Their joy was not passive emotion but active pursuit. Joy often comes not in the arrival but in the journey—through long roads, wrong turns, and small obediences. Joy is a byproduct of gratitude, and these travelers were so overwhelmed with wonder that they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." Their joy led to worship, generosity, and humility. Real joy doesn't make us loud—it makes us kneel. It points us back to the "most joyous Being in the universe" (Dallas Willard).

Meditation Question:

What "star" has God placed in front of me—some small sign of His presence—that I've noticed but not yet followed?

Collect Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, you sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise make ready your way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient toward the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world, we may be found a people acceptable in your sight; for with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A SINGLE
FLAME

SCRIPTURE READING

MATTHEW 5:14-16

When the Creator of this world entered it, it was not as one would expect. It was not the immediate revival God's people were expecting regarding liberation from the Romans. It was a humble shift started by a baby born in the dirt to a lower-class family. The Incarnate came as you and I would have. Unknown to many, the renewal of all things, previously promised by the prophets, would start with this baby. After His ministry, and later His death and miraculous resurrection, a small group of extraordinarily normal men would go out from Jerusalem, bringing this news with them. This renewal started as a single spark striking a flame in a stable and was spread from one wick to the other.

As a staff member with Engineering Ministries International, my job involves designing buildings and water systems for other ministries in Latin America. It has taken me all over the world, and I truly love what I do. However, I am often reminded that God most of the time works quietly and intimately in the world. We tend to focus on the big projects or grandiose events, hoping to see a fiery explosion of revival; however, most often it is a quiet candle being lit over a simple meal. Again, this flame being passed from one person to another.

This year, Haven, my wife, got to meet a new friend at church. Bertille was a French exchange student living in Ensenada, Mexico, and going to our church. She had heard about Jesus from a friend and had just recently given her life to Christ before coming to Ensenada. Being a new believer, she had so many questions. All she knew was that she realized Jesus was real and had risen from the dead. After getting connected, Haven met with her for coffee, and a simple Bible reading plan led to a rapid growth and deepening of faith in her life. Haven still meets weekly with her on WhatsApp, even though she has since returned home to France. We love seeing from afar that her faith is growing even in France. While this is not a revival of the masses you hope for in ministry, this is proof of the quiet and steadfast renewal God is bringing in Bertille's life. A small flame, helping another flame continue to grow.

As you reflect this Advent on the birth of our Savior, remember that He came as the first spark. This spark passed through the disciples, then grew into the Church today. While we are still waiting for the final renewal of all things, how can you pass your single flame—this great news of salvation and joy—to another?

JACOB PEKRUL

MANGER TO CROSS:
JOY IN WAITING

SCRIPTURE READING

PSALM 116:15, HEBREWS 12:2, JOHN 17

Christmas is a season of joy. For many, it's also a season of grief and waiting—missing a loved one and waiting to be reunited with them in the resurrection.

In college, I lost my grandma to lung cancer. I traveled with my parents to be by her bedside mere hours before she died, the beeping of medical monitors transforming her living room. I was young in faith and didn't know how to pray. I prayed for a miracle and envisioned a mustard seed moving a mountain, whatever that meant. I sat quietly with her, opening my Bible randomly to Psalm 116.

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15)

My grandma went home that night. Christmas has never been the same without her. My formative years were defined by Christmas in her living room. Family traveled from miles around to eat together, laugh together, and be together. The joy was palpable.

Christmas will always be a joyful season, but there's grief too, remembering the loved ones who've gone home. Joy intertwined with grief—a present reality mixed with hopeful expectation. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Christmas announces the God who entered our suffering to defeat death.

Matthew and Luke start Jesus' story at the nativity, but John starts Jesus' story “in the beginning.” Jesus knew when He created Adam and Eve that He'd bear our flesh. He knew we'd fall. He knew He'd pay the ultimate cost to redeem all creation from death.

Hebrews says Jesus endured the cross, “for the joy set before him” (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17 reveals the source of His joy as He prepared to give Himself up:

I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. (John 17:19, emphasis mine)

The communion of saints and our consecration as a holy people forever is the joy that helped Jesus endure the cross. Jesus was born a child so He could give eternal life to all who believe in Him (John 17:2-3).

As I've gotten older, I miss many loved ones who brought joy to Christmases past. There is immense joy with the ones I still hold tight and expectant joy as I wait to hold those who have passed before me.

Find a quiet place and read John 17. Think of someone you miss but expect to see again because Jesus came to redeem us and conquer the grave. Thank Him for the incarnation and the resurrection. Then ask: How can I honor that loved one's memory this Christmas in a way that points to the hope Jesus won?

MATT STICKEL

WHEN JOY
ARRIVES

SCRIPTURE READING

LUKE 13:10-17, PSALM 16:11

It's our usual habit after soccer practice. Lily, my seven-year-old, sits in the backseat as we swing through a drive-through.

"What does 'Since 1948' mean, Mom?" she asks while holding made-to-order burgers and fries.

"Oh," I say. "That is when the restaurant began." I do some mental math and tell her it was seventy-seven years ago.

Lily replies, "Is that when Jesus was born? Is that the old days?"

Cracking a smile, I savor the sweetness of her question.

Then I explain, trying not to chuckle, that Jesus was born much further back in history than In-N-Out. Conversations like these remind me that joy can abound anywhere we are, and we have the opportunity to slow down and be present in that moment. It's especially true during this Advent season. Jesus invites us to have our hearts open to childlike joy. And His definition of joy isn't one-inch deep. It's life-changing, transforming.

One of my favorite stories is found in Luke 13:10-17. Jesus sees this weak woman, bent over for eighteen years. Seeing her pain, her desperate need and limitations, Jesus interrupts her. He walks over and places His compassionate hands on her, saying, "You are free." She immediately straightens up, praising God. Wow—what joy broke out that day! Literal strength returns to her bones, as well as to her identity, the way she sees herself.

Jesus shows us what God is like—Bringer of Joy. That gives me so much hope. If joy feels out of reach for you, it certainly felt that way for the crippled woman. But He found her, and He finds us too. If you are in a moment of depression, anxiety, or worry, Jesus can find you there. Maybe it begins with a simple prayer, asking Him to come in a fresh way this Advent and bring His beautiful joy. Will you join me?

"Jesus, we invite You to interrupt us with Your joy-filled presence today."

"You teach me the way of life. In your presence is total celebration. Beautiful things are always in your right hand." (Psalm 16:11 CEB)

IN THE
WEEDS

SCRIPTURE READING

ISAIAH 61

My job gives me the joy and privilege of spending my summers in Europe running Young Life outreach camps. This year at a middle school camp, we hosted a girl whose mother died last year. The camper was the one who had found her—a heartbreaking thing for a twelve-year-old to have experienced.

My first interaction with the camper was at breakfast when I complimented her earrings. She responded by telling me her mom had given them to her and then recounted the story of finding her mom's body. While my heart broke for her, I also understood that in the depths of her brokenness, she was using her trauma to create bonds with anyone who would listen. This pattern kept repeating with our staff and volunteers until midweek, when a tangible change began in her.

As she heard more of the Gospel and started to process (appropriately with her leader) a God who loves her, something shifted. Instead of connecting with others by oversharing her trauma, she started connecting by making beautiful wildflower bouquets, gathered from flowers found around our camp in the French Alps. At one point, an adult in our group pointed out how beautiful it was to see her go from oversharing trauma to learning to connect through something so lovely—something inspired by delight in the beauty of the wildflowers God created.

It reminded me of a Five Iron Frenzy song I loved (way back in the day!) that talks about a young boy picking dandelions for his mom. She sees the love and beauty in the gift he is giving her, even though they are just weeds. The song then reminds us that, "He [God] sees love where anyone else would see weeds." What a gift that we get to bring the mess and brokenness of our lives—the weeds—and He looks on that offering with such love and delight, then transforms it into something beautiful.

As for that student, she gave her life to Jesus at the end of the week, and the change in her demeanor could only be described as true joy. She is now plugged into a local church in her hometown in the Netherlands and is being loved and cared for by the family of God.

Isaiah 61 talks about the restorative power of God, about how He takes mourning, ashes, and heaviness and replaces them with beauty, joy, and praise. The Lord grew something beautiful in the cracks of that student's life; He planted true beauty. He can do the same for us.

JOY? IN THIS PLACE?

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 10:10

Joy to the World, all the boys and girls! Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea,
Joy to you and me!

It wasn't Christmas; it was February.

No manger scene here on this Caribbean Island.

This wasn't a church choir; it was karaoke, and the performer was my husband, Cor.

But there was a miracle, and it had been a long time in coming.

We were on a trip with my parents, who were taking their seven kids and our spouses on a 50th anniversary trip. And there we all were, like one big, giant, oversized Brady Bunch family. And that was a miracle.

JOY?!- That would not be how you would have characterized my family of origin.

Fifty-two years before, the untimely death of my mother in childbirth had left my dad with newborn me and my one- and two-year-old brothers. After a time of grieving, he heard about a single woman who was working at a grocery store in a town nearby, and he wrote her a letter asking if he could hire her to nanny his three young children. She came, and they fell in love and married. Ten months later, my first little sister was born. Now there were four kids, four years old and under. Let's just say there was not a lot of time for bonding. Let me be clear, there was no abuse in my family of origin. But I felt like I was always "in the way" at home, and I couldn't wait to leave.

So I graduated from high school on Friday night, and Saturday morning I was in the car, on my way to an aunt and uncle's house a hundred miles away, where I had a summer job and could start my adult life. From there, I went to college, then on to grad school, returning home for a few days here and there for a wedding or event.

Cor and I married in our mid-twenties, and he loves my parents! We started seeing my family more. There were a few overdue conversations, a softening of the defensive posture, and gradually, the healing power of the Spirit brought love, peace, and even JOY into our restored family. Thirty-four years after I walked out the door to start my not-family life, I find myself on this tropical island, singing and laughing, eating and talking, four-wheeling and snorkeling, and truly loving the family I grew up with. Joy to the World, indeed!

And the karaoke story of the Carol and the Bullfrog? That is Cor's story to tell, another time...

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

BRENDA VANDERWELL

THE FULLNESS OF JOY

SCRIPTURE READING

PSALM 16, ZECHARIAH 4

In the early morning darkness, I pulled up to Weidner Field right as the stadium lights flickered on. We (the Switchbacks) had a very unusual game scheduled for 10 am, the first of its kind, actually. Up until this point, even after ten seasons, playing in the national championship game seemed unreachable amidst our challenges.

As I headed for the roof, climbing three flights of stairs to inspect the new setup of the national broadcast cameras, I soaked in the dawn light. As part of leadership for the organization, our plan had been to build an exciting team, energize the city, and bring the community together—but to play and host this final had only been a dream. Even more incredible, CBS and USLC had previously scheduled and pulled a nationally televised match earlier in the season because "we weren't good enough"; yet here they were preparing to broadcast. Most astonishingly, after twelve years of struggle and beating great odds, we had been blessed to agree on sales terms for the franchise with our business partner just weeks before.

As I stood there on the roof and watched the reds and oranges color the mountains around me, an overwhelming sense of awe and a fullness of joy came upon me. God's presence was so real all around and within.

Psalm 16:11 reads: "In Your presence is fullness of joy." No doubt, the most beautiful gift in all of human history was almighty God choosing to live meekly among broken people to serve and save a world of wandering souls. Jesus' presence in that manger brought the fullness of joy, the good news, to the whole world and hope for joy eternal. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6).

On that quiet morning, our game was still yet to be played, but in that moment, a fullness of joy was already filling me and proclaiming that we had somehow already won. May our church experience the Holy Spirit's presence and the fullness of joy anew this Christmas season. Will you believe that while the story is unfinished, in Christ, you have already won?

NICK RAGAIN

LOVE

MARY —
LOVE RECEIVED AND
RETURNED

SCRIPTURE READING

LUKE 1:26-38

Mary's story begins not with effort but with receiving. Before she does anything for God, she accepts that she is favored. First and foremost, she allows herself to be defined as beloved. Only then does she respond with willingness: "Let it be to me according to your word." Most obedience starts in the hidden spaces of our lives, not in heroic gestures—but with acts of kindness, service, and words of encouragement. Love is not sentiment—it is surrender that moves us to work for the good of someone else. Mary models both sides of love: received and returned.

Meditation Question:

Do I live as someone God merely tolerates—or as someone He delights in?

Collect Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and as we are sorely hindered by our sins from running the race that is set before us, 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.

LOVE IS
CENTRAL

SCRIPTURE READING

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8

When you get married in your mid-thirties (like us), you tend to bring in experiences, failures, and selfishness that comes with living on your own for many years, and thus more opportunities to grow. As we have been figuring out how to transition from singleness to a married couple, the difficulties don't just come from the two of us in the marriage, but also the other people who have only known us as the flexible, single friend/sibling for the past ten to fifteen years. Holiday gatherings become delightfully full and joyous, however, also more complicated due to new (spoken and unspoken) expectations from both sides. Old traditions have to shift. New ones have to develop. Add to that all the pressures of work, bills, and health, and a whole host of other worries.

One of our biggest questions is how to navigate the stress and tension of wanting to please each other and our extended families, our friends, and all the other people in our lives. The answer we found is keeping focused on the love that we have for each other, and the power of that love ultimately comes from God.

Jesus told us that above all else we should be loving the Lord with all our soul, heart, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-38). Oftentimes, we get so wrapped up in our own worries that we often fall short of living out these commands well. So how do we live it out practically? In 1 Corinthians, Paul outlines his definition of love by describing things that love is and what it isn't.

Whether you're walking through a life of marriage, singleness, or any other, and experiencing the joy and pain that any of those "statuses" bring during Advent, it's helpful to keep these practices of love in front of us. By starting with those closest to us, like our family and friends, we have opportunities to build the strength of our love by seeking the Lord's love when and how we communicate our holiday expectations. Loving our neighbors well is perhaps how we smile and genuinely ask how the cashier is doing as they ring up the groceries in kindness. How we seek to love our different extended families well through patience and rejecting anger and resentment, even when there might be tension and past hurt due to division in ideologies. Perhaps it is giving more responsible nos instead of irresponsible yeses to help balance out a busy calendar.

Love practiced on the daily is a beautiful way to connect to the love of our heavenly Father. This season, how can we embrace the things that love is and resist what love isn't?

EXTRAVAGANT
LOVE

SCRIPTURE READING

1 JOHN 3:1

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1).

Once upon a time, our public schools openly celebrated Christmas, complete with pageants and carols. The songs about Jesus deeply touched me and stirred my young heart. I believed in God but didn’t know how to reach Him.

My family didn’t know God either. We experienced many moments of warmth, laughter, and love, but life in our home was mostly confusing. During Christmas, we tried harder. When everyone drew near and our time together was sweet, I called it “feeling Christmas.”

Like the tree lights we untangled each year, our family was intertwined with addiction and codependency. I was often lonely in our household of seven. By my early teens, I couldn’t feel Christmas or anything else. I thought I was a burden to my parents and filled the emptiness with alcohol and drugs, which led to a dark abyss of depression well into my twenties.

One day, I heard the Gospel and realized “I was looking for love in all the wrong places,” as the song says. I repented of my sins and began a relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He started cleaning up the mess that was my broken life. The first time I sang Christmas carols during church worship, I cried. I could feel Christmas again! I realized God’s love had been reaching out to me through songs all those years ago.

Upon reading the Bible for the first time, I learned about Jesus’ great love and sacrifice. I loved Him dearly, yet struggled with God the Father. I thought He had to love me because He created me; but I believed He didn’t like me, so I often hid from Him. I felt He was disappointed and saw me as a burdensome child.

It was many years before I truly grasped my heavenly Father’s extravagant love. I’d read His words so many times, but finally I knew that “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), and God so loved me, too. Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). How had I missed it for so long?

God lavishes His love on His children. Lavish means “sumptuously rich, elaborate, or luxurious” or to “bestow something in generous or extravagant quantities on.” He loves us more than we can possibly imagine.

Whatever pain or trials you’re experiencing today, I pray you’ll reach out to your Father who will never leave or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:8). People hurt and disappoint us, but God’s love never fails.

DEBBIE DECKER

CHRISTMAS
EVE READING

TO BE READ ON CHRISTMAS EVE,
POSSIBLY AROUND DINNER

SEASONAL GREETING CALL - ISAIAH 9:6

Reader: or unto us a child is born

Response: Unto us a son is given.

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.

OLD TESTAMENT READING - ISAIAH 9:1-7

Nonetheless, those who were in distress won’t be exhausted. At an earlier time, God cursed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but later he glorified the way of the sea, the far side of the Jordan, and the Galilee of the nations. **2** The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned. **3** You have made the nation great; you have increased its joy. They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest, as those who divide plunder rejoice. **4** As on the day of Midian, you’ve shattered the yoke that burdened them, the staff on their shoulders, and the rod of their oppressor. **5** Because every boot of the thundering warriors, and every garment rolled in blood will be burned, fuel for the fire. **6** A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. **7** There will be vast authority and endless peace for David’s throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever.

Reader: The word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Continued on next page...

NEW TESTAMENT READING - TITUS 2:11-14

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. **12** It educates us so that we can live sensible, ethical, and godly lives right now by rejecting ungodly lives and the desires of this world. **13** At the same time we wait for the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of our great God and savior Jesus Christ. **14** He gave himself for us in order to rescue us from every kind of lawless behavior, and cleanse a special people for himself who are eager to do good actions.

Reader: The word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

THE HOLY GOSPEL - LUKE 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. **2** This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. **3** Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. **4** Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. **5** He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. **6** While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. **7** She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom. **8** Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. **9** The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. **11** Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. **12** This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." **13** Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, **14** "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors." **15** When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." **16** They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. **17** When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. **18** Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. **19** Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. **20** The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

Response: Praise to you, Lord Christ.

CHRISTMAS
DAY READING

COLLECT OF CHRISTMAS DAY

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born [this day] of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

NEW TESTAMENT READING - TITUS 3:4-7

But "when God our savior's kindness and love appeared, **5** he saved us because of his mercy, not because of righteous things we had done. He did it through the washing of new birth and the renewing by the Holy Spirit, **6** which God poured out upon us generously through Jesus Christ our savior. **7** So, since we have been made righteous by his grace, we can inherit the hope for eternal life."

THE HOLY GOSPEL - JOHN 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. **2** The Word was with God in the beginning. **3** Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being **4** through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light. **6** A man named John was sent from God. **7** He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. **8** He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light. **9** The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world. **10** The light was in the world, and the world came into being through the light, but the world didn't recognize the light. **11** The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him. **12** But those who did welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children, **13** born not from blood nor from human desire or passion, but born from God. **14** The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.



SPECIAL THANKS

We would like to give special thanks and recognition to the fellow Saints who empowered the creation of this year's devotional by sharing their time, stories, and gifts with us.

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On behalf of the entire COS team and family, thank you, we love you all, and Merry Christmas!

