



Eric Gill, *Cantet Nunc Ite*, wood engraving, 1916

# Advent Devotional Reader

2014

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# The Season of Advent

## INTRODUCING ADVENT

Welcome to a new season in the Christian year, and a wonderful time to refocus your life on Christ. In the words of Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and Enuma Okoro in the excellent book *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, we learn that...

Advent, meaning ‘the coming,’ is a time when we wait expectantly. Christians began to celebrate it as a season during the fourth and fifth centuries. Like Mary, we celebrate the coming of the Christ child, what God has already done. And we wait in expectation of the full coming of God’s reign on earth and for the return of Christ, what God will yet do. But this waiting is not a passive waiting. It is an active waiting. As any expectant mother knows, this waiting also involves preparation, exercise, nutrition, care, prayer, work; and birth involves pain, blood, tears, joy, release, community. It is called labor for a reason. Likewise, we are in a world pregnant with hope, and we live in the expectation of the coming of God’s kingdom on earth. As we wait, we also work, cry, pray, ache; we are the midwives of another world.<sup>1</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF THE GUIDE

Because our devotion to Christ is not only a cerebral exercise or an individualistic experience, we have tried to include a mixture of activities that acknowledge that we are holistic beings created in and for community. Therefore the weekly activities include readings, art, music, fellowship, mission, family and Sabbath rest:

- Sunday – church worship & fellowship, Sabbath rest
- Monday – reflect on a piece of art
- Tuesday – reflect on a longer reading
- Wednesday – reflect on a piece of music
- Thursday – reflect on a short reading
- Friday – participate in a festive missional relational activity
- Saturday – focus on your family

### ***Advent & Christmas as Mission:***

Often we groan at the lack of intersection between our culture and our faith, but Christmas is one season when the culture wholeheartedly embraces a distinctly Christian event. Though the true meaning and origins of Christmas may not be known or taught, they are still very present in secular celebrations of Christmas. A fine example of this are the many Christmas carols that are recorded by non-Christian artists and regularly played on the radio, in malls, etc. Many non-Christians will have the lyrics memorized and sing along! This provides a unique opportunity for us to connect with these threads of the Christian faith that are still present in the culture and to redeem them by sharing their full meaning and significance in our lives. So even if you are not a fan of Christmas carols or the Christmas

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<sup>1</sup> Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove & Enuma Okoro, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 2010, p50.

season personally, ask God to show you how to use the commemoration of Christ's birth as an opportunity to share your faith.

***Some planning required:***

Along these lines, we are encouraging you to consider how the Advent and Christmas season can help you reach out and be missional with your non-believing family, friends and neighbours. This may require some advance planning, which is why we are mentioning it here in the Introduction. There are only three Fridays in Advent and UC is running two events that we consider to be missional, relationship building and festive, so some of the work is done for you! All you need to do for the first two Fridays is invite!

- The Carol Sing-Along on Friday December 5 is an all ages event that celebrates both the Christian and the secular traditions of the Christmas season. This is a fun and easy event to which you can invite friends.
- The University Community Children's Choir concert on Friday December 12 is another way you can be missional simply by being present. Your presence, attention, and applause at the concert mean so much to the kids and their families, and it shows that the UC community truly supports the Choir as way of building long term relationships with families living on the Westside.
- The Choir concert is also an opportunity to explain to friends and family that you've invited about why a church would support a non-church choir – and that's because our vision is to "love Christ and serve the world", and providing excellent programs and events for the neighbourhood is one of way of serving the world. What are the needs of your non-believing family and friends? How might we as a church serve them? How can you serve them?
- For the third Friday of Advent (Dec 19), we invite you to consider hosting a festive, missional, relationship building event of your own. This can be as simple as inviting someone over for Christmas cake, eggnog and conversation; or watching "A Charlie Brown Christmas" with your children and their friends, and talking about it afterwards. Alternatively, you could invite a friend to a festive event like a seasonal performance or fair.

Regardless of what you plan to do for your Friday (or other day) missional "activity", pray for an opportunity to share how the story of Christmas has an impact on your life.

The Saturday activities also require some advance planning. We are encouraging you to spend intentional time with your family. This could be planning to have a special sharing time over dinner with your parents, spouse, children, siblings, cousins etc. It could be scheduling a phone call date with an out of town family member, or writing a personal letter to a family member and telling them how much they mean to you (this can be a great way for kids to participate in the Advent activities as well).

***Sabbath Rest:***

There is no designated activity for Sundays, rather we are encouraging everyone to make Sunday a day of Sabbath rest. This will be particularly difficult to do during this very busy Christmas season, but without it, the joy of the season may be all but lost.

We need to make sacrifices in order to become better rested. To have rest may mean leaving something undone, less than perfect. It may mean doing something easy and refreshing like going for a walk. It may mean doing something fun that you have been looking forward to for some time like reading a novel. It may mean getting physical rest by going to bed super early or soaking in a warm bath. What ideas come to your mind?

As you rest remember Christ, try not to allow yourself simply to become numb, rather as you rest, remember the God who became a man and chained himself to the cycles of busyness and tiredness, rest and restoration that we humans experience. Remember Christ's work done for you and experience His refreshing.



Calvin and Hobbes from *Revenge of the Baby-Sat*, by Bill Watterson

### ***About the prayers:***

We have pulled prayers from the rich history of the Christian faith, so there is quite a bit of variety! You will notice that we have provided short introductions about authors for some of the prayers. These comments are in the footnotes so as not to distract the flow of the prayer itself. If the prayer is repeated, the footnotes will only appear on the first instance of the prayer (i.e. on Sundays and Mondays, generally speaking).

You will also notice that the prayers repeat throughout a given week and others repeat throughout the season. This repetition gives you time to dwell longer with the words, ideas, feelings, and reactions that may arise when praying them. Over time, you may find that a prayer which meant very little to you the first time you prayed it has become a cornerstone in your spiritual life after praying it several times. Furthermore, many of these prayers come straight from scripture, and praying them often allows us to bathe in the life giving Word as we pray. We may even memorize some of it!

### ***About the music and art:***

The work of many artists is generously made available online for free. Some of the songs we link to are by independent musicians. Please consider supporting them by purchasing their music.

### ***An approach:***

A common practice during Advent is to light a candle before your meal, or as you are doing your devotions as a visible and tangible reminder of the coming of the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. You may consider trying this yourself. Finally, try not to rush through the prayers, reading and activities. Let these words, images, experiences sit with you and make an impression on you. Let the incarnation, the great gift of God become human in the person of Jesus Christ, move you and change you.

Peace to you on this journey of waiting, expectation and hope. Amen.

## First Sunday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer<sup>2</sup>*

Rend the heavens and come down,  
 O God of all ages!  
 Rouse us from sleep,  
 deliver us from our heedless ways,  
 and form us into a watchful people,  
 that, at the advent of your Son,  
 he may find us doing what is right,  
 mindful of all you command;  
 Grant this through him whose coming is certain,  
 whose day draws near:  
 your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 God for ever and ever.

#### *John 1:1-14*

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.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *Benedictus (Zechariah's Song in Luke 1:67-79)*

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
 because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
 in the house of his servant David  
 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

<sup>2</sup> From *The Sacramentary (Revised Edition)*, ICEL, 1997 in Michael Counsell, *2000 Years of Prayer*, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1999.

salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—  
to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

### **Sunday Worship – 10am or 7pm**

- Come early to prepare your hearts for worship and/or the role in which you are serving this morning.
- Ask God to help you greet each person you encounter as though you are greeting Christ Himself.
- How did God speak to you through the acts of communal worship?

### **Sabbath Rest**

- Make a point to rest. See [Overview of the Guide](#) for some ideas on how to rest.
- As you rest remember Christ, try not to allow yourself simply to become numb, rather as you rest, remember the God who became a man and chained himself to the cycles of busyness and tiredness, rest and restoration that we humans experience. Remember Christ's work done for you and experience His refreshing.

## EVENING PRAYER

### THE IGNATIAN EXAMEN

*Consolation – The basis for thanks and re-orienting your life.*

What was life-giving for me today? This past week?  
Where/when did I sense God's presence?  
What was nurturing, soothing, refreshing to my soul?  
What drew me closer to God?

*Desolation – The basis for confession, drawing on God and re-orienting your life.*

What was life-draining for me today? This past week?  
Where/when did I feel alone, far from God?  
What was stressful, joyless, dark, cold?  
Was there evil or sin – mine or another's?

### PRAY

Spend 15 minutes praying through the issues that arose during the Examen. This may include giving thanks, asking for guidance, restoration, reconciliation, hope, joy, peace, etc.

#### *Expressions of faith*

Lord, You have always given  
bread for the coming day;  
and though I am poor,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given  
strength for the coming day;  
and though I am weak,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given  
peace for the coming day;  
and though of anxious heart,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always kept  
me safe in trials;

and now, tried as I am,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always marked  
the road for the coming day;  
and though it may be hidden,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always lightened  
this darkness of mine;  
and though the night is here,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always spoken  
when time was ripe;  
and though you be silent now,  
today I believe.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



## First Monday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer*

Lord draw me into Yourself this morning.

#### *Canticle*<sup>3</sup>

Christ, as a light illumine and guide me.  
 Christ, as a shield ,overshadow me.  
 Christ under me; Christ over me;  
 Christ beside me, on my left and my right.  
 This day be within and without me,  
 lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
 Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;  
 in the mouth of each who speaks unto me.  
 This day be within and without me,  
 lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
 Christ as a light; Christ as a shield;  
 Christ beside me, on my left and my right.  
 In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### *Hebrews 1:1-3*

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *Christological Hymn from Philippians 2:5-11*

Lord, I pray that you would give me the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
 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!

<sup>3</sup> From *The Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002.

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.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

Reflect on *Angels Announcing the Birth of Christ to the Shepherds*, by Govert Flinck. Oil on canvas, 1639.



*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." – Luke 2:13-15*

Flinck here captures the glorious magnitude of this moment. Streaming light from heaven reveals graceful, serene angels. There is much movement on the ground in reaction to this apparition. Most of the shepherds look afraid. One is still asleep. Their sheep appear calm while the cow is agitated. The

heavenly and eternal nature of the angels is contrasted with the earthly, transitory lifestyles of shepherds.

1. This painting puts the heavenly in stark contrast with the earthly, as if to emphasize what Jesus was leaving behind when He came to live on earth. How does the idea of a humble God, God made flesh, resonate with you?
2. The Bible says that the shepherds were “terrified.” Imagine seeing these angels, hearing this Good News, making a decision about what to do next. What emotions do you feel? Are you terrified, sceptical, joyful, amazed, or something else?
3. Do you see yourself in the sleeping shepherd? In a world of many distractions, how do you, or others you know, miss the most obvious and amazing opportunities?

## EVENING PRAYER<sup>4</sup>

### *Call to worship*

Come, let us sing to the LORD: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
Praise to you who lift up the poor: and fill the hungry with good things.

### *Psalm 22:22-25*

I will declare your name to my people;  
in the assembly I will praise you.  
You who fear the LORD, praise him!  
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!  
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!  
For he has not despised or scorned  
the suffering of the afflicted one;  
he has not hidden his face from him  
but has listened to his cry for help.  
From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;  
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

Praise to you who lift up the poor: and fill the hungry with good things.

Commenting on the activities of the early church, Roman Emperor Julian said, “The godless Galileans feed our poor in addition to their own.”

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Spend some dedicated time praying for those who are in poverty.*

### *Closing Prayer*

Lord, keep up from trying to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Help us work to alleviate suffering and injustice wherever we find it, trusting that the rest is up to you. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Evening prayers on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are adapted from the December morning prayers in Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove & Enuma Okoro, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 2010, p47-86.



## First Tuesday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer*

Rend the heavens and come down,  
 O God of all ages!  
 Rouse us from sleep,  
 deliver us from our heedless ways,  
 and form us into a watchful people,  
 that, at the advent of your Son,  
 he may find us doing what is right,  
 mindful of all you command;  
 Grant this through him whose coming is certain,  
 whose day draws near:  
 your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 God for ever and ever.

#### *Isaiah 9:1b-3, 6*

. . . In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

The people walking in darkness  
 have seen a great light;  
 on those living in the land of deep darkness  
 a light has dawned.

You have enlarged the nation  
 and increased their joy;  
 they rejoice before you  
 as people rejoice at the harvest,  
 as soldiers rejoice  
 when dividing the plunder.

For to us a child is born,  
 to us a son is given,  
 and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called  
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *Magnificat (Mary's Song in Luke 1:46-55)*

Lord, make me like your servant Mary who responded to your call with humble servant-heartedness:

My soul glorifies the Lord  
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

**Spend some time reflecting on this reading by Jonathan Linman, *Holy Conversation: Spirituality for Worship*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), pp. 13–15**

# UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUALITY FOR WORSHIP

Karl Rahner, a prominent twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian, summed up well the spirit of our age when he suggested that “the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all.” Rahner’s observation suggests a recognition of people’s yearnings for direct experience of God, aspirations that go hand in hand with the current interest in spirituality. Walk through bookstores, browse through book catalogs, witness popular discourse, both sacred and secular, and you will see evidence of the explosion of interest in spirituality. Spirituality has largely replaced religion as the category of choice to speak of themes of transcendence or religiosity, as captured by the popular phrase “I am spiritual, but I am not religious.” Furthermore, given the explosive growth of Pentecostal Christianity through the twentieth century and throughout the world, one might conclude that ours is the era of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. But what on earth is spirituality, and what is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives? There are perhaps as many definitions and viewpoints as people and schools of thought employing the term and invoking the Spirit.

There is also great current interest in worship, indicated, for example, by exponential growth in the publication of worship books, hymnals, and various resources supporting liturgical life in a number of Christian traditions. But what exactly is worship? In a similar vein to the use of the term *spirituality*, there are perhaps as many approaches to understanding and defining worship as there are worship styles and traditions. . . .

Exploring the connection between spirituality and worship enriches and reinforces the understanding and experience of each. Linking spirituality with corporate worship keeps the notion of spirituality grounded, tethered to worshipping communities. Otherwise, spirituality might be reduced to individualistic practice and idiosyncratic experience. Likewise, linking spirituality and worship serves to deepen our understanding and experience of worship, keeping worship lively, vital, passionate, and attentive to the Spirit's transformative power working in our assemblies. . . .

## SPIRITUALITY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The word that may be translated “spirituality” does not as such appear in the Bible. However, the word translated “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) does appear, for example, in the Pauline letters. In such Pauline passages, the referent concerning that which is spiritual is specifically the Holy Spirit, and life in and according to that Spirit. For example, in Paul's discourse in the first chapters of 1 Corinthians, he explores the wisdom of God that contrasts with the wisdom of the world, and employs the category *spiritual* to speak of that which in fact comes from God through the Spirit: “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:12–13).

In this way, the word *spiritual* as used here does not refer to innate human capacity as much as it makes clear reference to the Holy Spirit as a focus for understanding what is spiritual. In other words, the content of the word *spiritual* is the Holy Spirit. This is a crucial feature of a specifically Christian understanding of spirituality. “Spiritual” comes to be connected with “spirituality,” and all of this has to do with the Holy Spirit.

An early appearance of the word translated “spirituality” (from the Latin, *spiritualitas*) occurred in the fifth century in Epistle 7 of Pseudo-Jerome, which reads, “So act as to advance in spirituality.” Pseudo-Jerome uses this term in a Pauline sense with reference to life in and according to the Holy Spirit of God. This fragment from an ancient letter reveals significant aspects of an understanding of Christian spirituality. One such aspect is that Christian spirituality involves activity, practice, deeds, behavior—“so *act*” as the text from Pseudo-Jerome suggests. Additionally, Christian spirituality has to do with processes of change, growth, progress, maturation—“so act as to *advance* in spirituality.” Such activity and growth happen via the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit in terms of the Pauline theology that informed Pseudo-Jerome. . . .

. . . The Spirit's work also bears the fruit in us of attitudes and dispositions central to the understanding of Christian life in the Spirit. “Awe came upon everyone. . . . They broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people” (Acts 2:43a, 46b–47a). Awe, gladness, generosity, praise, and goodwill—all are characteristics of en-Spirited Christian life. Or, as the apostle Paul elaborated elsewhere: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23a).

All of this is the Spirit's work. This process happens daily over the course of a lifetime, or as Acts puts it, “day by day” as the followers engaged in the community's work. The activity is all quite ordinary. Christian spirituality, in this way, does not focus on the exotic and the extraordinary in terms of practice and experience. Rather, it is about awe and praise cultivated in

the mundane but sacred routines we undertake in Christian community. Christian spirituality reclaims the commonplace, especially in terms of liturgy, the Ordinary of the Mass, the regular segments that comprise the pattern for liturgy, that is, the *ordo*, what we ordinarily do in assembly and how we do it; we come to see the extraordinary in what is common and routine.

Finally, the Spirit's work is directed outward, to the nations and peoples who would hear and respond to the proclamation of the gospel. The whole point of the Pentecost event recorded in Acts is the telling of God's deeds of power in raising Jesus from the dead in many different languages, the languages of varied nations and cultures. Christian spirituality thus also has an outward focus, embraces the gift of cultural diversity, and serves the church's mission in and for the sake of the world, to be the body of Christ broken for the world. It may well be that Christian spiritual practices enrich our inner lives, and that is well and good. But if spirituality ends in interiority, its true end is in fact missing altogether. Varied spiritual practices, including liturgical worship, build us up in the power of the Spirit for the sake of mission among the many diverse peoples of the world.



## EVENING PRAYER

### *Opening sentences*<sup>5</sup>

My soul waits for the Lord  
more than those  
who watch for the morning,  
more than those  
who watch for the morning.

I will wait for the Lord.  
My soul waits,  
and in His word  
do I hope.

### *Confession*<sup>6</sup>

Gracious God, we have come to see that our lives fall far short of your glory.

Have mercy and forgive me.

You have given your Son for us, and poured out your Spirit, yet we fail to return your love with all our heart.

Have mercy and change me.

Too often we are selfish and proud, ignoring you and neglecting others.

Have mercy and cleanse me.

When we do not truly trust and obey you, we are overwhelmed by self-pity, fear and worry.

Have mercy and deliver me.

In Christ we are given a sure hope and secure love, yet we follow the false hopes and desires of this world.

Have mercy and renew me.

Father, through the redeeming death of your Son, by your Spirit, and through your word, enable us to follow you with joy. All this I ask, confident of your faithfulness and love. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

### *Closing Prayer*<sup>7</sup>

Strengthen for your service, Lord, the hands which have been stretched out to receive your holy things, that they may daily bring forth a harvest of good works to your glory. Grant that the ears which have heard the sound of your songs may be closed to the voice of clamour and disput; that the eyes which have seen your great love may behold the fulfillment they hope for; that the tongues which have sung your praises may ever speak the truth; that the feet which have trodden your courts may walk in the light; and the bodies which have tasted your risen body may be restored to newness of life. And may your great love remain with us for ever, so that we may return abundant praise to your Majesty. Amen and Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> From the *Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 2002, p22.

<sup>6</sup> *Sunday Services*, from [http://bettergatherings.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=101&Itemid=93](http://bettergatherings.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=101&Itemid=93).

<sup>7</sup> The Malabar Liturgy. The Syrian Christians of India, known as the Malabar Church, claim to have been founded by St Thomas the Apostle. From Michael Counsell, *2000 Years of Prayer*, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1999, p62-3.

## First Wednesday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer*

Lord draw me into Yourself this morning.

#### *Canticle*

Christ, as a light illumine and guide me.  
 Christ, as a shield ,overshadow me.  
 Christ under me; Christ over me;  
 Christ beside me, on my left and my right.  
 This day be within and without me,  
 lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
 Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;  
 in the mouth of each who speaks unto me.  
 This day be within and without me,  
 lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
 Christ as a light; Christ as a shield;  
 Christ beside me, on my left and my right.  
 In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### *Isaiah 42:1-4*

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
 my chosen one in whom I delight;  
 I will put my Spirit on him,  
 and he will bring justice to the nations.  
 He will not shout or cry out,  
 or raise his voice in the streets.  
 A bruised reed he will not break,  
 and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.  
 In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;  
 he will not falter or be discouraged  
 till he establishes justice on earth.  
 In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *The Lord’s Prayer*

Our Father, who art in heaven  
 Hallowed by your name,  
 Your kingdom come,  
 Your will be done,  
 On earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread,  
 And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

**Reflect on and listen to the Christmas song “Mary Did You Know?” Lyrics by Mark Lowry, music by Buddy Greene, 1984.**

[Listen to “Mary Did You Know?”](#) as performed by a capella group Pentatonix and read the lyrics below. (For hard copy users, search Pentatonix Mary Did You Know and choose the Official Video.)

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would one day walk on water?  
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know that your Baby Boy has come to make you new?  
This Child that you delivered will soon deliver you.

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy will give sight to a blind man?  
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy will calm the storm with His hand?  
Did you know that your Baby Boy has walked where angels trod?  
When you kiss your little Baby you kissed the face of God?

Mary did you know....  
The blind will see.  
The deaf will hear.  
The dead will live again.  
The lame will leap.  
The dumb will speak  
The praises of The Lamb.

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy is Lord of all creation?  
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would one day rule the nations?  
Did you know that your Baby Boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?  
The sleeping Child you're holding is the Great, I Am.

This song highlights the great mystery of the incarnation: the fact that God, Creator of the Universe, chose to come to earth as a mere human being, with all of our confines and limits, in order to bring us salvation, love and everlasting life.

1. As you listened to the song and read the lyrics, note any phrases that stood out to you.
2. How do you feel when you consider the fact that Jesus was once a small helpless baby boy?
3. In what ways might this song help you understand the magnitude of God’s love?

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Call to worship*

Come, let us sing to the LORD: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
You speak in my heart and say, “Seek my face” : your face, LORD, will I seek.

### *Psalm 27:1-4*

The LORD is my light and my salvation—  
whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—  
of whom shall I be afraid?  
When the wicked advance against me  
to devour me,  
it is my enemies and my foes  
who will stumble and fall.  
Though an army besiege me,  
my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me,  
even then I will be confident.  
One thing I ask from the LORD,  
this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek him in his temple.

You speak in my heart and say, “Seek my face” : your face, LORD, will I seek.

Nineteenth-century abolitionist Sojourner Truth said, “I’m not going to die, honey. I’m going home like a shooting star.”

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Spend some dedicated time praying for those who are in trapped in slavery of all kinds.*

### *Closing prayer*

Lord, when we strive after healing in the world and nourishment for those who hunger, we find you at our side. Whenever we long to see your face, help us not to avoid the corners of our communities where you most often dwell. Stir our hearts that we might seek and find you today in those places where you have promised to be. Amen.

## First Thursday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer*

Rend the heavens and come down,  
 O God of all ages!  
 Rouse us from sleep,  
 deliver us from our heedless ways,  
 and form us into a watchful people,  
 that, at the advent of your Son,  
 he may find us doing what is right,  
 mindful of all you command;  
 Grant this through him whose coming is certain,  
 whose day draws near:  
 your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 God for ever and ever.

#### *Zechariah 12:10; 13:1*

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son...  
 On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *Benedictus (Zechariah's Song in Luke 1:67-79)*

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
 because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
 in the house of his servant David  
 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),  
 salvation from our enemies  
 and from the hand of all who hate us—  
 to show mercy to our ancestors  
 and to remember his holy covenant,  
 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
 and to enable us to serve him without fear  
 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
 for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
 to give his people the knowledge of salvation

through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

Reflect on a short excerpt from C.S. Lewis' book *Miracles*.

### Saving a Ruined World

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14*

The central miracle asserted by Christianity is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this. Just as every natural event is the manifestation at a particular place and moment of Nature's total character, so every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the Incarnation...

In the Christian story God descends to reascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space; down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and sea-bed of the Nature He had created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying in his shoulders.<sup>8</sup>

1. Do you agree with Lewis that the central miracle of the Christian Faith is the Incarnation?<sup>9</sup>
2. How does Lewis explain this miracle as being in accordance with the character of Nature?<sup>10</sup>
3. How does the picture of the strong man illustrate for us God's strength and saving power?
4. The 'picture of the strong man' brings new vigour to the classic children's song "He's got the whole world in his hands." How are these illustrations of God's power encouraging to you?

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<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p.108, 111

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cslewis.org/resources/studyguides/Study%20Guide%20-%20Miracles.pdf>, p.5

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cslewis.org/resources/studyguides/Study%20Guide%20-%20Miracles.pdf>, p.5

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Opening sentences*

My soul waits for the Lord  
more than those  
who watch for the morning,  
more than those  
who watch for the morning.

I will wait for the Lord.  
My soul waits,  
and in His word  
do I hope.

### *Confession*

Gracious God, we have come to see that our lives fall far short of your glory.

Have mercy and forgive me.

You have given your Son for us, and poured out your Spirit, yet we fail to return your love with all our heart.

Have mercy and change me.

Too often we are selfish and proud, ignoring you and neglecting others.

Have mercy and cleanse me.

When we do not truly trust and obey you, we are overwhelmed by self-pity, fear and worry.

Have mercy and deliver me.

In Christ we are given a sure hope and secure love, yet we follow the false hopes and desires of this world.

Have mercy and renew me.

Father, through the redeeming death of your Son, by your Spirit, and through your word, enable us to follow you with joy. All this I ask, confident of your faithfulness and love. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

### *Closing Prayer*

Strengthen for your service, Lord, the hands which have been stretched out to receive your holy things, that they may daily bring forth a harvest of good works to your glory. Grant that the ears which have heard the sound of your songs may be closed to the voice of clamour and disput; that the eyes which have seen your great love may behold the fulfillment they hope for; that the tongues which have sung your praises may ever speak the truth; that the feet which have trodden your courts may walk in the light; and the bodies which have tasted your risen body may be restored to newness of life. And may your great love remain with us for ever, so that we may return abundant praise to your Majesty. Amen and Amen.

## First Friday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer*

Lord draw me into Yourself this morning.

#### *Canticle*

Christ, as a light illumine and guide me.  
 Christ, as a shield ,overshadow me.  
 Christ under me; Christ over me;  
 Christ beside me, on my left and my right.  
 This day be within and without me,  
 lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
 Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;  
 in the mouth of each who speaks unto me.  
 This day be within and without me,  
 lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
 Christ as a light; Christ as a shield;  
 Christ beside me, on my left and my right.  
 In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### *Malachi 4:2*

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.

#### *Haggai 2:7*

I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about these passages grab your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Christological Hymn from Philippians 2:5-11*

Lord, I pray that you would give me the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
 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.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

**Festive Missional Activity** (see [Overview of Guide](#) on page 4).

Bring friends the Carol Sing-Along, today at 7pm

## EVENING PRAYER

*Call to worship*

Come, let us bow down and bend the knee: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.  
Remember your little ones, Lord: and give us courage to stand for them.

*Psalm 33:18-21*

But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,  
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,  
to deliver them from death  
and keep them alive in famine.  
We wait in hope for the LORD;  
he is our help and our shield.  
In him our hearts rejoice,  
for we trust in his holy name.

Remember your little ones, Lord: and give us courage to stand for them.

Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army and a passionate advocate for children, said, "There is no improving the future without disturbing the present."

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Spend some dedicated time praying for children you know and don't know, and issues affecting children such as poverty, education & trafficking.*

*Closing prayer*

Lord Jesus Christ, you welcomed the little children to come unto you, and invited us to come like them. Help us see how we can welcome children as you have welcomed us into your body.  
Amen.

## First Saturday of Advent

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### Saint Nicholas' Day

Nicholas of Myra (Fourth Century) is traditionally recognized on December 6<sup>th</sup>. The original “Old St. Nick” who inspired the tradition of Santa Claus, Nicholas was bishop of Myra in fourth-century Turkey. Little is known about his life except that he entrusted himself to Jesus at an early age and, when his parents died, gave all of their possessions to the poor. While serving as bishop, Nicholas learned of three girls who were going to be sold into slavery by their father. Moved to use the church’s wealth to ransom the lives of these little ones, he tossed three bags of gold through the family’s window. We recall this ancient Christmas gift, even as we remember that 1.2 million children are trafficked each year in the global sex trade today.<sup>11</sup>

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer*

Rend the heavens and come down,  
 O God of all ages!  
 Rouse us from sleep,  
 deliver us from our heedless ways,  
 and form us into a watchful people,  
 that, at the advent of your Son,  
 he may find us doing what is right,  
 mindful of all you command;  
 Grant this through him whose coming is certain,  
 whose day draws near:  
 your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 God for ever and ever.

#### *Isaiah 11:4-5*

But with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
 with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.  
 He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
 with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.  
 Righteousness will be his belt  
 and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

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<sup>11</sup> From Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove & Enuma Okoro, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 2010, p55.

*Magnificat (Mary's Song in Luke 1:46-55)*

Lord, make me like your servant Mary who responded to your call with humble servant-heartedness:

My soul glorifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

### **FAMILY**

Spend intentional time with your family, immediate and/or extended. (See [Overview of the Guide](#) on page 4.)

### **PRAYER**

Spend an extra 15 minutes praying for three people in your family. Pray for each person for 5 minutes. Who will you pray for?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

If you are looking for a way to begin, you can pray Paul's words from Ephesians 3:17-18 over each person:

I pray that \_\_\_\_\_, would be rooted and established in love, and that he/she may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Opening sentences*

My soul waits for the Lord  
more than those  
who watch for the morning,  
more than those  
who watch for the morning.

I will wait for the Lord.  
My soul waits,  
and in His word  
do I hope.

### *Confession*

Gracious God, we have come to see that our lives fall far short of your glory.

Have mercy and forgive me.

You have given your Son for us, and poured out your Spirit, yet we fail to return your love with all our heart.

Have mercy and change me.

Too often we are selfish and proud, ignoring you and neglecting others.

Have mercy and cleanse me.

When we do not truly trust and obey you, we are overwhelmed by self-pity, fear and worry.

Have mercy and deliver me.

In Christ we are given a sure hope and secure love, yet we follow the false hopes and desires of this world.

Have mercy and renew me.

Father, through the redeeming death of your Son, by your Spirit, and through your word, enable us to follow you with joy. All this I ask, confident of your faithfulness and love. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

### *Closing Prayer*

Strengthen for your service, Lord, the hands which have been stretched out to receive your holy things, that they may daily bring forth a harvest of good works to your glory. Grant that the ears which have heard the sound of your songs may be closed to the voice of clamour and disput; that the eyes which have seen your great love may behold the fulfillment they hope for; that the tongues which have sung your praises may ever speak the truth; that the feet which have trodden your courts may walk in the light; and the bodies which have tasted your risen body may be restored to newness of life. And may your great love remain with us for ever, so that we may return abundant praise to your Majesty. Amen and Amen.

## Second Sunday in Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening sentences from Psalm 27:4*

One thing I have asked of the Lord,  
This is what I seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
All the days of my life;  
To behold the beauty of the Lord  
And to seek Him in His temple.

#### *Declaration of faith from John 6:68*

To whom shall we go?  
You have the words of eternal life,  
And we have believed and have come to know  
That you are the Holy One of God.

Praise to You. Lord Jesus Christ,  
King of endless glory.

#### *Isaiah 62:10-12*

Pass through, pass through the gates!  
Prepare the way for the people.  
Build up, build up the highway!  
Remove the stones.  
Raise a banner for the nations.  
The LORD has made proclamation  
to the ends of the earth:  
“Say to Daughter Zion,  
‘See, your Savior comes!  
See, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense accompanies him.’”  
They will be called the Holy People,  
the Redeemed of the LORD;  
and you will be called Sought After,  
the City No Longer Deserted.

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *Benedictus (Zechariah’s Song in Luke 1:67-79)*

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David  
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—  
to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

### **Sunday Worship – 10am or 7pm**

- Come early to prepare your hearts for worship and/or the role in which you are serving this morning.
- The University Community Children’s Choir will be performing in the service today. How can you be a welcoming presence to the children and their families? Pray for them and your encounters.
- How did God speak to you through the acts of communal worship?

### **Sabbath Rest**

- Make a point to rest. See [Overview of the Guide](#) for some ideas on how to rest.
- As you rest remember Christ, try not to allow yourself simply to become numb, rather as you rest, remember the God who became a man and chained himself to the cycles of busyness and tiredness, rest and restoration that we humans experience. Remember Christ’s work done for you and experience His refreshing.

## EVENING PRAYER

### THE IGNATIAN EXAMEN

*Consolation – The basis for thanks and re-orienting your life.*

What was life-giving for me today? This past week?  
Where/when did I sense God's presence?  
What was nurturing, soothing, refreshing to my soul?  
What drew me closer to God?

*Desolation – The basis for confession, drawing on God and re-orienting your life.*

What was life-draining for me today? This past week?  
Where/when did I feel alone, far from God?  
What was stressful, joyless, dark, cold?  
Was there evil or sin – mine or another's?

### PRAY

Spend 15 minutes praying through the issues that arose during the Examen. This may include giving thanks, asking for guidance, restoration, reconciliation, hope, joy, peace, etc.

#### *Expressions of faith*

Lord, You have always given  
bread for the coming day;  
and though I am poor,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given  
strength for the coming day;  
and though I am weak,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given  
peace for the coming day;  
and though of anxious heart,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always kept  
me safe in trials;

and now, tried as I am,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always marked  
the road for the coming day;  
and though it may be hidden,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always lightened  
this darkness of mine;  
and though the night is here,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always spoken  
when time was ripe;  
and though you be silent now,  
today I believe.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Second Monday in Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Collects (Short Prayers)*<sup>12</sup>

God our deliverer, whose approaching birth still shakes the foundations of our world, may we so wait for your coming with eagerness and hope that we embrace without terror the labour pangs of the new age, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God our lover, in whose arms we are held, and by whose passion we are known; require of us also that love which is filled with longing, delights in the truth, and costs not less than everything, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God whose Holy name defies our definition, but whose will is known in freeing the oppressed, make us to be one with all who cry for justice; that we who speak your praise may struggle for your truth, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

O God our disturber, whose speech is pregnant with power and whose word will be fulfilled; may we know ourselves unsatisfied with all that distorts your truth, and make our hearts attentive to your liberating voice, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

O God our mystery, you bring us to life, call us to freedom, and move between us with love. May we so participate in the dance of your trinity, that our lives may resonate with you, now and for ever. Amen.

O God, the source of all insight, whose coming was revealed to the nations not among men of power but in a woman's lap; give us grace to seek you where you may be found, that the wisdom of this world may be humbled and discover your unexpected joy, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

We turn to you, O God; we renounce evil, we claim your love; we choose to be made whole. Amen

#### *Mark 1:2-8*

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way”—  
“a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.'”

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

<sup>12</sup> Janet Morley has written many inspiring words for worship for the charity Christian Aid. She first compiled *All Desires Known* to support women seeking ordination in the Church of England and who were suffering insults and slander. She produced challenging turns of phrase which make many of her collects (short prayers) memorable and meaningful. From Michael Counsell, *2000 Years of Prayer*, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1999.



Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

*Christological Hymn from Philippians 2:5-11*

Lord, I pray that you would give me the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
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.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

Spend time reflecting on *Nativity* by He Qi. Ink & gouache on rice paper, 1998.



*And he will be called:  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. – Isaiah 9:6*

He Qi mixes medieval, Chinese folk, and modern art forms to create a unique perspective, transcending space, time and culture. In this dream-like painting, Mary and the baby Jesus stand out, largely through He Qi's use of colour. Mary and Jesus are enclosed in a protective circle: a beacon of calm in a slightly chaotic world. Jesus holds an apple, symbolizing his role as the Second Adam who brings life.

1. In the midst of chaos and turmoil, here depicted through movement in line, dominant cool colours, and multiple figures, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Take time to meditate on this comforting thought.
2. In this melange of styles and traditions, the message of the birth of Christ is made accessible to diverse viewers. How does this painting change the way you connect to the nativity story?
3. In He Qi's own words: "The apple is a symbol of the original sin, and baby Jesus was born in order to redeem people in the world. Please look at baby Jesus; he is only holding, not eating. He would not repeat the original sin." What hope do you take from the knowledge that Christ came to redeem us?

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Call to worship*

Come, let us sing to the LORD: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: in the city of our God is his holy hill.

### *Psalm 48:2-7*

Beautiful in its loftiness,  
the joy of the whole earth,  
like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion,  
the city of the Great King.  
God is in her citadels;  
he has shown himself to be her fortress.  
When the kings joined forces,  
when they advanced together,  
they saw her and were astounded;  
they fled in terror.  
Trembling seized them there,  
pain like that of a woman in labor.  
You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish  
shattered by an east wind.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: in the city of our God is his holy hill.

Cyprian of Carthage, a third-century North African bishop, said, "The Lord Christ did not want us to pray by ourselves in private or for ourselves alone. We do not say "My Father, who art in heaven," nor "Give me this day my daily bread." It is not for oneself alone that each person asks to be forgiven, not to be led into temptation or to be delivered from evil. Rather, we pray in public as a community, and not for one individual but for all."

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Spend some dedicated time praying for the communities around you (i.e. family, friends, church community, neighbourhood, city, etc.).*

### *Closing prayer*

Lord, you have woven the threads of creation too finely together for any of us to exist as islands unto ourselves. Teach us to delight in your web of life and to know ourselves in community.  
Amen.

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## Second Tuesday in Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening sentences from Psalm 27:4*

One thing I have asked of the Lord,  
 This is what I seek:  
 That I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
 All the days of my life;  
 To behold the beauty of the Lord  
 And to seek Him in His temple.

#### *Declaration of faith from John 6:68*

To whom shall we go?  
 You have the words of eternal life,  
 And we have believed and have come to know  
 That you are the Holy One of God.

Praise to You. Lord Jesus Christ,  
 King of endless glory.

#### *Matthew 24:42-44*

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *Magnificat (Mary’s Song in Luke 1:46-55)*

Lord, make me like your servant Mary who responded to your call with humble servant-heartedness:

My soul glorifies the Lord  
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
 for he has been mindful  
 of the humble state of his servant.  
 From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
 holy is his name.  
 His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
 from generation to generation.  
 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
 He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
 but has lifted up the humble.  
 He has filled the hungry with good things  
 but has sent the rich away empty.

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He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

Spend some time reflecting on this reading by D. A. Carson, *The difficult doctrine of the love of God*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), pp. 9–16.

### A. WHY THE DOCTRINE OF THE LOVE OF GOD MUST BE JUDGED DIFFICULT

There are at least five reasons.

(1) If people believe in God at all today, the overwhelming majority hold that this God—however he, she, or it may be understood—is a loving being. But that is what makes the task of the Christian witness so daunting. For this widely disseminated belief in the love of God is set with increasing frequency in some matrix other than biblical theology. The result is that when informed Christians talk about the love of God, they mean something very different from what is meant in the surrounding culture. Worse, neither side may perceive that that is the case.

Consider some recent products of the film industry, that celluloid preserve that both reflects and shapes Western culture. For our purposes science-fiction films may be divided into two kinds. Perhaps the more popular ones are the slam-bang, shoot-'em-up kind, such as *Independence Day* or the four-part *Alien* series, complete with loathsome evil. Obviously the aliens have to be nasty, or there would be no threat and therefore no targets and no fun. Rarely do these films set out to convey a cosmological message, still less a spiritual one.

The other sort of film in this class, trying to convey a message even as it seeks to entertain, almost always portrays the ultimate power as benevolent. On the border between the two kinds of films is the *Star Wars* series, with its treatment of the morally ambiguous Force, but even this series tilts toward the assumption of a final victory for the “light” side of the Force. *ET*, as Roy Anker has put it, is “a glowing-heart incarnation tale that climaxes in resurrection and ascension.” And now in Jodie Foster’s *Contact*, the unexplained intelligence is suffused with love, wisely provident, gently awesome.

Anker himself thinks this “indirection,” as he calls it, is a great help to the Christian cause. Like the writings of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, these films help people *indirectly* to appreciate the sheer goodness and love of God. I am not nearly so sanguine. Tolkien and Lewis still lived in a world shaped by the Judeo-Christian heritage. Their “indirection” was read by others in the culture who had also been shaped by that heritage, even though many of their readers were not Christians in any biblical sense.

But the worldview of *Contact* is monistic, naturalistic, pluralistic (after all, the film was dedicated to Carl Sagan). It has far more connections with New Age, Pollyannaish optimism than anything substantive. Suddenly the Christian doctrine of the love of God becomes very difficult, for the entire framework in which it is set in Scripture has been replaced.

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(2) To put this another way, we live in a culture in which many other and complementary truths about God are widely *disbelieved*. I do not think that what the Bible says about the love of God can long survive at the forefront of our thinking if it is abstracted from the sovereignty of God, the holiness of God, the wrath of God, the providence of God, or the personhood of God—to mention only a few nonnegotiable elements of basic Christianity.

The result, of course, is that the love of God in our culture has been purged of anything the culture finds uncomfortable. The love of God has been sanitized, democratized, and above all sentimentalized. This process has been going on for some time. My generation was taught to sing, “What the world needs now is love, sweet love,” in which we robustly instruct the Almighty that we do not need another mountain (we have enough of them), but we could do with some more love. The hubris is staggering.

It has not always been so. In generations when almost everyone believed in the justice of God, people sometimes found it difficult to believe in the love of God. The preaching of the love of God came as wonderful good news. Nowadays if you tell people that God loves them, they are unlikely to be surprised. Of course God loves me; he’s like that, isn’t he? Besides, why shouldn’t he love me? I’m kind of cute, or at least as nice as the next person. I’m okay, you’re okay, and God loves you and me.

Even in the mid-1980s, according to Andrew Greeley, three-quarters of his respondents in an important poll reported that they preferred to think of God as “friend” than as “king.” I wonder what the percentage would have been if the option had been “friend” or “judge.” Today most people seem to have little difficulty believing in the love of God; they have far more difficulty believing in the justice of God, the wrath of God, and the non-contradictory truthfulness of an omniscient God. But is the biblical teaching on the love of God maintaining its shape when the meaning of “God” dissolves in mist?

We must not think that Christians are immune from these influences. In an important book, Marsha Witten surveys what is being preached in the Protestant pulpit. Let us admit the limitations of her study. Her pool of sermons was drawn, on the one hand, from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), scarcely a bastion of confessional evangelicalism; and, on the other, from churches belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention. Strikingly, on many of the crucial issues, there was only marginal statistical difference between these two ecclesiastical heritages. A more significant limitation was that the sermons she studied all focused on the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). That is bound to slant sermons in a certain direction. Nevertheless her book abounds in lengthy quotations from these sermons, and they are immensely troubling. There is a powerful tendency “to present God through characterizations of his inner states, with an emphasis on his emotions, which closely resemble those of human beings....God is more likely to ‘feel’ than to ‘act,’ to ‘think’ than to ‘say.’” Or again:

The relatively weak notion of God’s fearsome capabilities regarding judgment is underscored by an almost complete lack of discursive construction of anxiety around one’s future state. As we have already seen, the sermons dramatize feelings of anxiety for listeners over many other (this-worldly) aspects of their removal from God, whether they are discussing in the vocabulary of sin or in other formulations. But even when directly referring to the unconverted, only two sermons press on fear of God’s judgment by depicting anxiety over salvation, and each text does this only obliquely, as it makes the point indirectly on its way to other issues while buffering the audience from negative feelings....The transcendent, majestic, awesome God of Luther and Calvin—whose image informed early Protestant visions of the relationship between human beings and the divine has undergone a softening of demeanor through the American experience of Protestantism, with only minor exceptions....Many of the sermons depict a God whose behavior is regular,

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patterned, and predictable; he is portrayed in terms of the consistency of his behavior, of the conformity of his actions to the single rule of “love.”

With such sentimentalizing of God multiplying in Protestant churches, it does not take much to see how difficult maintaining a *biblical* doctrine of the love of God can be.

(3) Some elements of the larger and still developing patterns of postmodernism play into the problem with which we are dealing. Because of remarkable shifts in the West’s epistemology [*ideas about knowledge, and the source of knowledge*], more and more people believe that the only heresy left is the view that there is such a thing as heresy. They hold that all religions are fundamentally the same and that, therefore, it is not only rude but profoundly ignorant and old-fashioned to try to win someone to your beliefs since implicitly that is announcing that theirs are inferior.

This stance, fueled in the West, now reaches into many parts of the world. For example, in a recent book Caleb Oluremi Oladipo outlines *The Development of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Yoruba (African) Indigenous Church Movement*. His concern is to show the interplay between Christian beliefs and Yoruba traditional religion on the indigenous church. After establishing “two distinct perspectives” that need not detain us here, Oladipo writes:

These two paradigmic [*sic*] perspectives in the book are founded on a fundamental assertion that the nature of God is universal love. This assertion presupposes that while Western missionaries asserted that the nature of God is universal love, most missionaries have denied salvation to various portions of the world population, and in most cases they did so indiscriminately. The book points out the inconsistencies of such a view, and attempts to bring coherency between Christianity and other religions in general, and Yoruba Traditional Religion in particular.

In short, the most energetic cultural tide, postmodernism, powerfully reinforces the most sentimental, syncretistic, and often pluralistic views of the love of God, with no other authority base than the postmodern epistemology itself. But that makes the articulation of a biblical doctrine of God and of a biblical doctrine of the love of God an extraordinarily difficult challenge.

(4) The first three difficulties stem from developments in the culture that make grasping and articulating the doctrine of the love of God a considerable challenge. This fourth element is in certain respects more fundamental. In the cultural rush toward a sentimentalized, sometimes even non-theistic vision of the love of God, we Christians have sometimes been swept along to the extent that we have forgotten that *within Christian confessionality* the doctrine of the love of God poses its difficulties. This side of two world wars; genocide in Russia, China, Germany, and Africa; mass starvation; Hitler and Pol Pot; endless disgusting corruptions at home and abroad—all in this century—is the love of God such an obvious doctrine? Of course that is raising the difficulties from an experiential point of view. One may do the same thing from the perspective of systematic theology. Precisely how does one integrate what the Bible says about the love of God with what the Bible says about God’s sovereignty, extending as it does even over the domain of evil? What does love mean in a Being whom at least some texts treat as impassible [not emotional]? How is God’s love tied to God’s justice?

In other words, one of the most dangerous results of the impact of contemporary sentimentalized versions of love on the church is our widespread inability to think through the fundamental questions that alone enable us to maintain a doctrine of God in biblical proportion and balance. However glorious and privileged a task that may be, none of it is easy. We are dealing with God, and fatuous reductionisms are bound to be skewed and dangerous.

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(5) Finally, the doctrine of the love of God is sometimes portrayed within Christian circles as much easier and more obvious than it really is, and this is achieved by overlooking some of the distinctions the Bible itself introduces when it depicts the love of God. This is so important that it becomes my next major point.



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## EVENING PRAYER

### *Opening prayer*<sup>13</sup>

O sweet Child of Bethlehem, grant that we may share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into our hearts this peace for which we sometimes seek so desperately and which you alone can give us. Help us to know one another better, and to live as children of the same Father. Reveal to us also your beauty, holiness and purity. Awaken in our hearts love and gratitude for your infinite goodness. Join us all together in your love. And give us your heavenly peace. Amen.

### *Confession*

Heavenly Father, you offer your divine mercy to all who turn to you,  
Hear us now as we confess our sins to you and seek your forgiveness:  
Forgive us for our deceitful hearts and crooked thoughts;  
Forgive us for the barbed words we have spoken deliberately;  
Forgive us for the thoughtless words we have spoken hastily;  
Forgive us for our envious and prying eyes;  
Forgive us for the ways we rejoice in worldly enticements and forget your truth;  
Forgive us for greedy hands and hearts that desire the treasures of this world;  
Forgive us for feet that wander from you;  
Forgive us for haughty looks that dishonor others;  
Pour down upon us, gracious Father, your healing and cleansing power so that we may once again lay hold of the new life you have offered us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

### *Thanksgiving*<sup>14</sup>

Loving God, we give thanks for the birth of your Son Jesus Christ, both in human form in Bethlehem and in spiritual form in our hearts. May he reign as king within every human heart, so that every town and village can live according to his joyful law of love.

### *Closing Prayer*<sup>15</sup>

The peace of all peace  
be mine this night  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.  
with the Lord.

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<sup>13</sup> Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) was elected Pope in 1958 on the twelfth ballot. It is said that it was regarded as a safe appointment of an old man who would make no changes before he died. but he called the Second Vatican Council, with an aim of promoting Christian unity, and thereby brought about a massive updating of Roman Catholic attitudes and procedures. From Michael Counsell, *2000 Years of Prayer*, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1999, p439-40.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Munzer (c. 1490-1525) was a priest who became a Protestant preacher under the influence of Luther and other reformers. Yet he lost Luther's favour because of his opposition to infant baptism. He preached revolt against secular authorities, and after being expelled from many towns, he attempted to lead the Peasants' Revolt. After it was defeated, he was executed. The serenity of his prayers is in marked contrast to his troubled life. From Michael Counsell, *2000 Years of Prayer*, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1999, p184.

<sup>15</sup> From the *Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 2002

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## Second Wednesday in Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Collects (Short Prayers)*

God our deliverer, whose approaching birth still shakes the foundations of our world, may we so wait for your coming with eagerness and hope that we embrace without terror the labour pangs of the new age, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God our lover, in whose arms we are held, and by whose passion we are known; require of us also that love which is filled with longing, delights in the truth, and costs not less than everything, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God whose Holy name defies our definition, but whose will is known in freeing the oppressed, make us to be one with all who cry for justice; that we who speak your praise may struggle for your truth, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

O God our disturber, whose speech is pregnant with power and whose word will be fulfilled; may we know ourselves unsatisfied with all that distorts your truth, and make our hearts attentive to your liberating voice, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

O God our mystery, you bring us to life, call us to freedom, and move between us with love. May we so participate in the dance of your trinity, that our lives may resonate with you, now and for ever. Amen.

O God, the source of all insight, whose coming was revealed to the nations not among men of power but in a woman's lap; give us grace to seek you where you may be found, that the wisdom of this world may be humbled and discover your unexpected joy, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

We turn to you, O God; we renounce evil, we claim your love; we choose to be made whole. Amen

#### *Luke 1:26-38*

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

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“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *The Lord’s Prayer*

Our Father, who art in heaven  
Hallowed by your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our trespasses  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

**Reflect on and listen to the Christmas carol “Once in Royal David’s City” by Mrs. CF Alexander (1818-1895), music by HJ Gauntlett.**

[Listen here](#) as it is performed at King’s College Cambridge in 2010. (Hard copy users search “King’s College Cambridge 2010 #1 Once in Royal David’s City”).

Once in royal David’s city,  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her Baby,  
In a manger for His bed:  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ, her little Child.

For He is our childhood's pattern;  
Day by day, like us, He grew;  
He was little, weak, and helpless,  
Tears and smiles, like us He knew;  
And He cares when we are sad,  
And he shares when we are glad.

He came down to earth from heaven,  
Who is God and Lord of all,  
And His shelter was a stable,  
And His cradle was a stall:  
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,  
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And our eyes at last shall see Him,  
Through His own redeeming love;  
For that Child so dear and gentle,  
Is our Lord in heaven above:  
And He leads His children on,  
To the place where He is gone.

This carol helps us understand the great incarnational movement of downward mobility taken by the Lord of all who “came down to earth from heaven” to become a “little, weak, and helpless” infant, so that He might personally share in our human suffering, and show His love for us. (See next page.)

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1. As you listened to the song and read the lyrics, note any phrases that stood out to you.
  2. How do you feel when you consider that Jesus experienced many of the same emotions, thoughts, and patterns of growth and development that you have experienced throughout your life?
  3. We can often be afraid to share the intensity of our emotions with one another and with God. Is there a time in your life when you were too scared to share fully with someone? If so, take some time now and try to share your full experience with Jesus, and receive his “redeeming love.”

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Call to worship*

Come, let us sing to the LORD: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
In the light of the morning, Lord: tune our hearts to sing your praise.

### *Psalm 65:5-8*

You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,  
God our Savior,  
the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas,  
who formed the mountains by your power,  
having armed yourself with strength,  
who stilled the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
and the turmoil of the nations.  
The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;  
where morning dawns, where evening fades,  
you call forth songs of joy.

In the light of the morning, Lord: tune our hearts to sing your praise.

Paschasius Radbertus, a ninth-century Benedictine, wrote, “The apostles took every care not to be drawn from the right path. They kept watch, observing the universal precepts their master had given to his disciples so as to be ready when he came again. Consequently we must always be on the lookout for Christ’s twofold coming, the one when he comes day after day to stir our consciences, and the other when we shall have to give an account of everything we have done. He comes to us now in order that his future coming may find us prepared.”

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Pray that God would keep you ever prepared for Jesus’ coming – both as He stirs your heart, and for His ultimate return.*

### *Closing prayer*

With each new day, help us, Lord, to make our lives a hymn of constant praise to you. Teach us that the sweetest song is stirred when our hands are open in generosity and our feet are quick to bring the good news of your reconciling love to rich and poor alike. Amen.

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## Second Thursday of Advent

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### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening sentences from Psalm 27:4*

One thing I have asked of the Lord,  
 This is what I seek:  
 That I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
 All the days of my life;  
 To behold the beauty of the Lord  
 And to seek Him in His temple.

#### *Declaration of faith from John 6:68*

To whom shall we go?  
 You have the words of eternal life,  
 And we have believed and have come to know  
 That you are the Holy One of God.  
 Praise to You. Lord Jesus Christ,  
 King of endless glory.

#### *Luke 1:39-55*

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord  
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
 for he has been mindful  
 of the humble state of his servant.  
 From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
 holy is his name.  
 His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
 from generation to generation.  
 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
 He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
 but has lifted up the humble.  
 He has filled the hungry with good things  
 but has sent the rich away empty.  
 He has helped his servant Israel,  
 remembering to be merciful  
 to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
 just as he promised our ancestors."

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- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
  - *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
  - *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

*Benedictus (Zechariah's Song in Luke 1:67-79)*

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David  
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),  
salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—  
to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

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## DAILY ACTIVITIES

Reflect on this short excerpt from Henri Nouwen's *Finding My Way Home*.

# Breaking Through

*He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. – Psalm 25:9*

We fear people with power. They can control us and force us to do what we don't want to do. We look up to people with power. They have what we do not have and can give or refuse to give, according to their will. We envy people with power. They can afford to go where we cannot go and do what we cannot do. But God's power is something entirely opposite. God does not want us to be afraid, distant, or envious. God wants to come close, very close, so close that we can rest in the intimacy of God as children in their mother's arms.

Therefore God became a little baby. Who can be afraid of a little baby? A tiny little baby is completely dependent on its parents, nurses, and caregivers. Yes, God wanted to become so powerless as to be unable to eat or drink, walk or talk, play or work without many people's help. Yes, God became dependent on human beings to grow up and live among us and proclaim the good news. Yes, indeed, God chose to become so powerless that the realization of God's own mission among us became completely dependent on us. How can we fear a baby we rock in our arms, how can we look up to a baby that is so little and fragile, how can we be envious of a baby who only smiles at us in response to our tenderness? That's the mystery of the incarnation. God became human, in no way different from other human beings, to break through the walls of power in total weakness. That's the story of Jesus.

1. *How do you respond to the various forms of power held by people and institutions of our world? How, according to Nouwen, has God responded through Jesus?*<sup>16</sup>

2. *How can we understand the paradox of a theology of weakness that is in reality a theology of power?*<sup>17</sup>

3. *Spend time reflecting on helpless little baby Jesus. Consider the praise and worship He received as an infant and how it contrasts with the cursing and abuse he received as a grown man. Think of how Jesus "broke through the walls of power in total weakness" in birth and in death.*

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<sup>16</sup> Claire S. Merritt, *Discussion Questions for Nouwen Reading Groups*, Henri Nouwen Society, 2012. p.3

<sup>17</sup> Merritt, *Discussion Questions for Nouwen Reading Groups*, p.4

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## EVENING PRAYER

### *Opening prayer*

O sweet Child of Bethlehem, grant that we may share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into our hearts this peace for which we sometimes seek so desperately and which you alone can give us. Help us to know one another better, and to live as children of the same Father. Reveal to us also your beauty, holiness and purity. Awaken in our hearts love and gratitude for your infinite goodness. Join us all together in your love. And give us your heavenly peace. Amen.

### *Confession*

Heavenly Father, you offer your divine mercy to all who turn to you,  
Hear us now as we confess our sins to you and seek your forgiveness:  
Forgive us for our deceitful hearts and crooked thoughts;  
Forgive us for the barbed words we have spoken deliberately;  
Forgive us for the thoughtless words we have spoken hastily;  
Forgive us for our envious and prying eyes;  
Forgive us for the ways we rejoice in worldly enticements and forget your truth;  
Forgive us for greedy hands and hearts that desire the treasures of this world;  
Forgive us for feet that wander from you;  
Forgive us for haughty looks that dishonor others;  
Pour down upon us, gracious Father, your healing and cleansing power so that we may once again lay hold of the new life you have offered us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

### *Thanksgiving*

Loving God, we give thanks for the birth of your Son Jesus Christ, both in human form in Bethlehem and in spiritual form in our hearts. May he reign as king within every human heart, so that every town and village can live according to his joyful law of love.

### *Closing Prayer*

The peace of all peace  
be mine this night  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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## Second Friday in Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Collects (Short Prayers)*

God our deliverer, whose approaching birth still shakes the foundations of our world, may we so wait for your coming with eagerness and hope that we embrace without terror the labour pangs of the new age, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God our lover, in whose arms we are held, and by whose passion we are known; require of us also that love which is filled with longing, delights in the truth, and costs not less than everything, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God whose Holy name defies our definition, but whose will is known in freeing the oppressed, make us to be one with all who cry for justice; that we who speak your praise may struggle for your truth, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

O God our disturber, whose speech is pregnant with power and whose word will be fulfilled; may we know ourselves unsatisfied with all that distorts your truth, and make our hearts attentive to your liberating voice, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

O God our mystery, you bring us to life, call us to freedom, and move between us with love. May we so participate in the dance of your trinity, that our lives may resonate with you, now and for ever. Amen.

O God, the source of all insight, whose coming was revealed to the nations not among men of power but in a woman's lap; give us grace to seek you where you may be found, that the wisdom of this world may be humbled and discover your unexpected joy, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

We turn to you, O God; we renounce evil, we claim your love; we choose to be made whole. Amen

#### *Luke 1:57-79*

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. All the neighbours were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

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“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up a horn[c] of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David  
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),  
salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—  
to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

*Christological Hymn from Philippians 2:5-11*

Lord, I pray that you would give me the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
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.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

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## DAILY ACTIVITY

**Festive Missional Activity** (see [Overview of Guide](#) on page 4).

Show support and bring friends to the University Community Children's Choir Concert, today at 7pm

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Call to worship*

Come, let us bow down and bend the knee: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.  
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God: have mercy on me, a sinner.

### *Psalm 69:6-7; 14-15*

Lord, the LORD Almighty,  
may those who hope in you  
not be disgraced because of me;  
God of Israel,  
may those who seek you  
not be put to shame because of me.  
For I endure scorn for your sake,  
and shame covers my face.

Rescue me from the mire,  
do not let me sink;  
deliver me from those who hate me,  
from the deep waters.  
Do not let the floodwaters engulf me  
or the depths swallow me up  
or the pit close its mouth over me.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God: have mercy on me, a sinner.

Fourth-century poet Ephrem the Syrian wrote, "The word of God is a tree of life that offers us blessed fruit from each of its branches. It is like that rock which was struck open in the wilderness, from which all were offered spiritual drink. Be glad then that you are overwhelmed, and do not be saddened because he has overcome you. A thirsty person is happy when drinking, and not depressed, because the spring is inexhaustible. You can satisfy your thirst without exhausting the spring; then when you thirst again, you can drink from it once more."

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Spend time praying against greed in your life, and in the world.*

### *Closing prayer*

God of abundance, help us live today trusting that there will be enough for tomorrow. Your sources have no end. Teach us to share our resources, believing that the more we give, the more you will provide for all. Amen.

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## Second Saturday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening sentences from Psalm 27:4*

One thing I have asked of the Lord,  
 This is what I seek:  
 That I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
 All the days of my life;  
 To behold the beauty of the Lord  
 And to seek Him in His temple.

#### *Declaration of faith from John 6:68*

To whom shall we go?  
 You have the words of eternal life,  
 And we have believed and have come to know  
 That you are the Holy One of God.

Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ,  
 King of endless glory.

#### *Matthew 1:18-25*

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift it up to God in prayer. Ask Him how it speaks into your life today.*

#### *Magnificat (Mary’s Song in Luke 1:46-55)*

Lord, make me like your servant Mary who responded to your call with humble servant-heartedness:

My soul glorifies the Lord  
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
 for he has been mindful  
 of the humble state of his servant.  
 From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

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holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

### **FAMILY**

Spend intentional time with your family, immediate and/or extended. (See [Overview of the Guide](#) on page 4.)

### **PRAYER**

Spend an extra 15 minutes praying for three people in your family. Pray for each person for 5 minutes. Who will you pray for?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

If you are looking for a way to begin, you can pray the Jesus Prayer for each person:  
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on \_\_\_\_\_, a sinner.

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## EVENING PRAYER

### *Opening prayer*

O sweet Child of Bethlehem, grant that we may share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into our hearts this peace for which we sometimes seek so desperately and which you alone can give us. Help us to know one another better, and to live as children of the same Father. Reveal to us also your beauty, holiness and purity. Awaken in our hearts love and gratitude for your infinite goodness. Join us all together in your love. And give us your heavenly peace. Amen.

### *Confession*

Heavenly Father, you offer your divine mercy to all who turn to you,  
Hear us now as we confess our sins to you and seek your forgiveness:  
Forgive us for our deceitful hearts and crooked thoughts;  
Forgive us for the barbed words we have spoken deliberately;  
Forgive us for the thoughtless words we have spoken hastily;  
Forgive us for our envious and prying eyes;  
Forgive us for the ways we rejoice in worldly enticements and forget your truth;  
Forgive us for greedy hands and hearts that desire the treasures of this world;  
Forgive us for feet that wander from you;  
Forgive us for haughty looks that dishonor others;  
Pour down upon us, gracious Father, your healing and cleansing power so that we may once again lay hold of the new life you have offered us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

### *Thanksgiving*

Loving God, we give thanks for the birth of your Son Jesus Christ, both in human form in Bethlehem and in spiritual form in our hearts. May he reign as king within every human heart, so that every town and village can live according to his joyful law of love.

### *Closing Prayer*

The peace of all peace  
be mine this night  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Third Sunday in Advent

### Saint John of the Cross Day

John of the Cross (1542-1591) is traditionally recognized on December 14<sup>th</sup>. Born into poverty in sixteenth-century Spain, Juan de la Cruz joined the Carmelite order at the age of twenty-one. Four years later, he met Teresa of Avila, who was impressed by the young friar and recruited him to help her restore a spirit of radical simplicity to the Carmelites. Their reforms were not welcomed in the days of Spain's Inquisition, and Juan suffered a great deal of persecution at the hands of his religious brothers. One of the great mystics of the Christian tradition, he teaches us how to draw closer to God during the "dark night of the soul."<sup>18</sup>

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening Prayer*<sup>19</sup>

O holy child of Bethlehem,  
 Descend to us, we pray;  
 Cast out our sin, and enter in:  
 Be born in us today.  
 We hear the Christmas angels  
 The great glad tidings tell:  
 O come to us, abide with us,  
 Our Lord Emmanuel.

#### *Micah 5:2*

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
 though you are small among the clans<sup>[a]</sup> of Judah,  
 out of you will come for me  
 one who will be ruler over Israel,  
 whose origins are from of old,  
 from ancient times.

#### *Luke 2:1-7*

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*

<sup>18</sup> From From Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove & Enuma Okoro, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 2010, p65.

<sup>19</sup> Philips Brooks (1835-93) was rector of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Holy Trinity, Boston, and later Bishop of Massachusetts. After the civil war he visited the Holy Land in search of peace, and when he rode out from Jerusalem to Bethlehem at night, he wrote the carol "O little town of Bethlehem" for his Sunday school class. From Michael Counsell, *2000 Years of Prayer*, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1999, p423.

- *What about these passages grab your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

*Benedictus (Zechariah's Song in Luke 1:67-79)*

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
 because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
 in the house of his servant David  
 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),  
 salvation from our enemies  
 and from the hand of all who hate us—  
 to show mercy to our ancestors  
 and to remember his holy covenant,  
 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
 and to enable us to serve him without fear  
 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
 for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
 to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
 through the forgiveness of their sins,  
 because of the tender mercy of our God,  
 by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
 to shine on those living in darkness  
 and in the shadow of death,  
 to guide our feet into the path of peace.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

### **Sunday Worship – 10am or 7pm**

- Come early to prepare your hearts for worship and/or the role in which you are serving this morning.
- Ask God to help you greet each person you encounter as though you are greeting Christ Himself.
- How did God speak to you through the acts of communal worship?

### **Sabbath Rest**

- Make a point to rest. See [Overview of the Guide](#) for some ideas on how to rest.
- As you rest remember Christ, try not to allow yourself simply to become numb, rather as you rest, remember the God who became a man and chained himself to the cycles of busyness and tiredness, rest and restoration that we humans experience. Remember Christ's work done for you and experience His refreshing.



## EVENING PRAYER

### THE IGNATIAN EXAMEN

*Consolation – The basis for thanks and re-orienting your life.*

What was life-giving for me today? This past week?  
Where/when did I sense God's presence?  
What was nurturing, soothing, refreshing to my soul?  
What drew me closer to God?

*Desolation – The basis for confession, drawing on God and re-orienting your life.*

What was life-draining for me today? This past week?  
Where/when did I feel alone, far from God?  
What was stressful, joyless, dark, cold?  
Was there evil or sin – mine or another's?

### PRAY

Spend 15 minutes praying through the issues that arose during the Examen. This may include giving thanks, asking for guidance, restoration, reconciliation, hope, joy, peace, etc.

#### *Expressions of faith*

Lord, You have always given  
bread for the coming day;  
and though I am poor,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given  
strength for the coming day;  
and though I am weak,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given  
peace for the coming day;  
and though of anxious heart,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always kept  
me safe in trials;

and now, tried as I am,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always marked  
the road for the coming day;  
and though it may be hidden,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always lightened  
this darkness of mine;  
and though the night is here,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always spoken  
when time was ripe;  
and though you be silent now,  
today I believe.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Third Monday in Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Preparing for prayer*<sup>20</sup>

Enable me, O God, to collect and compose my thoughts before an immediate approach to you in prayer. May I be careful to have my mind in order when I take upon myself the honour to speak to the Sovereign Lord of the universe, remembering that upon the temper of my soul depends, in very great measure, my success. You are infinitely too great to be trifled with, too wise to be imposed on by a mock devotion, and abhor a sacrifice without a heart. Help me to entertain an habitual sense of your perfections, as an admirable help against cold and formal performances. Save me from engaging in rash and precipitate prayers and from abrupt breaking away to follow business or pleasure as though I had never prayed. Amen.

#### *Luke 2:8-14*

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Christological Hymn from Philippians 2:5-11*

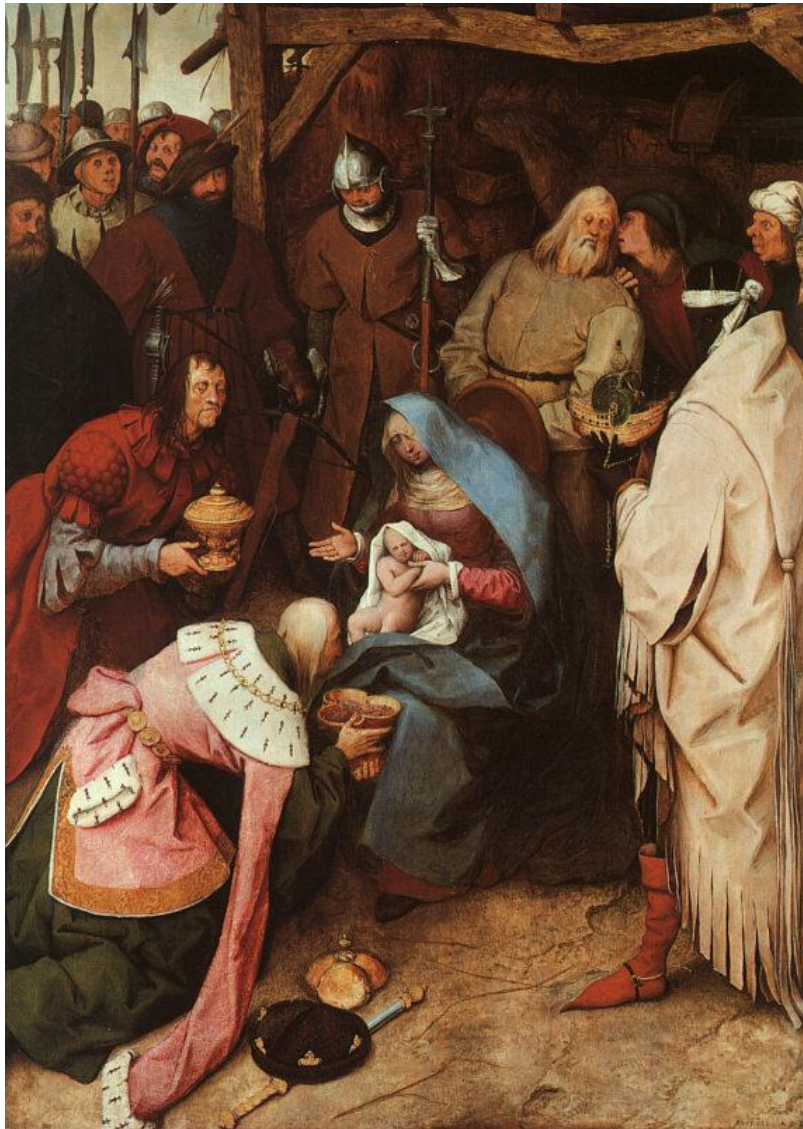
Lord, I pray that you would give me the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being 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.

*Pray about the day ahead of you.*

<sup>20</sup> *Susanna Wesley (1669-1742) was the wife of Rev Samuel Wesley, and the mother of John and Charles. From Michael Counsell, 2000 Years of Prayer, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1999, p312.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

Spend time reflecting on *The Adoration of the Magi* by Pieter Bruegel. Oil on panel, 1564.



*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” – Matthew 2:1-2*

Unlike his Renaissance contemporaries from Italy, Flemish painter Bruegel avoided painting idealized beauty. In this case, he also uses exaggerated features to make a point and evoke a reaction. The sleeve of the king in the foreground is overlong, representing extravagance and wealth. But this king has humbled himself by discarding his crown and sceptre at the feet of Jesus. There are no shepherds in this scene. Instead, armed men, and a few other disinterested bystanders, surround Mary, Jesus and the magi.

1. How does this fit with your image of the three wise men? How do these caricatures change the way you view their lives, their journey, and their worship of an unknown, foreign (to them) baby king?

2. The king in the foreground has cast off his crown, his symbol of status and power, at the feet of Jesus. What might you need to put aside in order to live a truly humble and fully worshipful life?
3. There is much tension here: weapons dominate the upper left corner, bystanders whisper, and Jesus strains to get away from the magi. How does this fit with your image of the birth of Christ?

Additional activity: For a musical take on the adoration of the Magi, [listen to "King of Kings"](#) by [Ordinary Time](#), a musical group formed of Regent College alumni dedicated to making "original and rediscovered hymns for the journey." (Hard copy users: search visit [music.ordinarytimemusic.com](http://music.ordinarytimemusic.com) and choose "In the Town of David.")

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Call to worship*

Come, let us bow down and bend the knee: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.  
Where there is no love, let us put love: and so, by your power, draw love out.

### *Psalm 73:14-18*

All day long I have been afflicted,  
and every morning brings new punishments.  
If I had spoken out like that,  
I would have betrayed your children.  
When I tried to understand all this,  
it troubled me deeply  
till I entered the sanctuary of God;  
then I understood their final destiny.  
Surely you place them on slippery ground;  
you cast them down to ruin.

Where there is no love, let us put love: and so, by your power, draw love out.

John of the Cross wrote, "The soul that is attached to anything, however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of divine union. For whether it be a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds the bird, it matters not, if it really holds it fast; for until the cord be broken, the bird cannot fly."

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Ask God to help you let go of anything that holds you back from whole devotion and commitment to Him.*

### *Closing prayer*

Lord, help us not to despair when you seem far away or when our walk with you proves treacherous. Give us grace to trust your presence even when we feel your absence. Amen.

## Third Tuesday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening Prayer*

O holy child of Bethlehem,  
 Descend to us, we pray;  
 Cast out our sin, and enter in:  
 Be born in us today.  
 We hear the Christmas angels  
 The great glad tidings tell:  
 O come to us, abide with us,  
 Our Lord Emmanuel.

#### *Matthew 24:3; 30-31*

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Jesus answered... "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Magnificat (Mary's Song in Luke 1:46-55)*

Lord, make me like your servant Mary who responded to your call with humble servant-heartedness:

My soul glorifies the Lord  
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
 for he has been mindful  
 of the humble state of his servant.  
 From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
 holy is his name.  
 His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
 from generation to generation.  
 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
 He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
 but has lifted up the humble.  
 He has filled the hungry with good things  
 but has sent the rich away empty.  
 He has helped his servant Israel,  
 remembering to be merciful  
 to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
 just as he promised our ancestors.

*Pray about the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

Spend some time reflecting on this reading by Whitney, D. S. (1991). *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (pp. 237–239). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

# THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Wherever the Holy Spirit dwells, His presence creates a hunger for holiness. His office is to magnify Christ, and it is He who gives the believer a desire to be like Christ. The natural man has no such passion. But in the Christian, the Spirit of God begins to carry out the will of God to make the child of God like the Son of God (Romans 8:29). And He who began this good work in the life of the believer “will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

So it is the role of the Holy Spirit to produce within us the desire and the power for the Disciplines that lead to Godliness. That He develops this in every believer is evident from 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” Therefore, whether or not your natural temperament or personality inclines toward orderly and disciplined habits, the presence of the Holy Spirit within you equips you with enough of a supernatural “spirit of ... self-discipline” for you to obey the command to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”

That’s why even though there are days when you are tempted to quit Christianity altogether, or to give up on the people of God, or to abandon the Spiritual Disciplines as a waste of time, you still hang in there. It is the Holy Spirit who is causing you to persevere. In those times when you are lazy and have no enthusiasm for any Spiritual Discipline, or when you haven’t practiced a particular Discipline as you habitually do, it is the Holy Spirit who prompts you to pick it up in spite of your feelings. Left to yourself you would have forsaken these means of sustaining grace long ago, but the Holy Spirit preserves you by granting to you the grace to persevere in them.

Self-control, according to Galatians 5:23, is a direct product, or “fruit,” of the Spirit’s control in a believer’s life. And when the Christian expresses this Spirit-produced self-control by the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines, the result is progress in Godliness.

To illustrate the role of the Holy Spirit in helping the child of God to persevere in the Disciplines of Godliness, one contemporary writer tells of his struggle and success with the Discipline of prayer.

Recently I read again of a woman who simply decided one day to make such a commitment to pray, and my conscience was pricked. But I knew myself well enough to know that something other than resolve was being called for. I began to pray *about praying*. I expressed to God my frustrated longings, my jaded sense of caution about trying again, my sense of failure over working at being more disciplined and regular. I discovered something surprising happening from such simple praying: I was drawn into the presence of One who had, far more than I did, the power to keep me close. I found my focus subtly shifting away from my efforts to God’s, from rigor to grace, from rigidity to relationship. I soon realized that this was happening *regularly*. I was praying much more. I became less worried about the mechanics and methods, and in turn I was more motivated. And God so cares for us, I realized anew, that He Himself helps us pray.

When we “do not know what we ought to pray for ... the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Rom. 8:26).

The Bible doesn't explain the mechanics of the mystery of the Spirit's ministry to us. How prayer (or the practice of any other Spiritual Discipline) is prompted and produced by Him on the one hand, and yet on the other hand is our responsibility, is unfathomable. But these two things are clear: (1) He will be ever faithful to help each of God's elect to persevere to the end in those things which will make us like Christ, and (2) we must not harden our hearts, but instead respond to His promptings if we would be Godly.

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Opening prayer*

O sweet Child of Bethlehem, grant that we may share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into our hearts this peace for which we sometimes seek so desperately and which you alone can give us. Help us to know one another better, and to live as children of the same Father. Reveal to us also your beauty, holiness and purity. Awaken in our hearts love and gratitude for your infinite goodness. Join us all together in your love. And give us your heavenly peace. Amen.

### *Confession*

Heavenly Father, you offer your divine mercy to all who turn to you,  
Hear us now as we confess our sins to you and seek your forgiveness:  
Forgive us for our deceitful hearts and crooked thoughts;  
Forgive us for the barbed words we have spoken deliberately;  
Forgive us for the thoughtless words we have spoken hastily;  
Forgive us for our envious and prying eyes;  
Forgive us for the ways we rejoice in worldly enticements and forget your truth;  
Forgive us for greedy hands and hearts that desire the treasures of this world;  
Forgive us for feet that wander from you;  
Forgive us for haughty looks that dishonor others;  
Pour down upon us, gracious Father, your healing and cleansing power so that we may once again lay hold of the new life you have offered us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

### *Thanksgiving*

Loving God, we give thanks for the birth of your Son Jesus Christ, both in human form in Bethlehem and in spiritual form in our hearts. May he reign as king within every human heart, so that every town and village can live according to his joyful law of love.

### *Closing Prayer*

The peace of all peace  
be mine this night  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Third Wednesday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Preparing for prayer*

Enable me, O God, to collect and compose my thoughts before an immediate approach to you in prayer. May I be careful to have my mind in order when I take upon myself the honour to speak to the Sovereign Lord of the universe, remembering that upon the temper of my soul depends, in very great measure, my success. You are infinitely too great to be trifled with, too wise to be imposed on by a mock devotion, and abhor a sacrifice without a heart. Help me to entertain an habitual sense of your perfections, as an admirable help against cold and formal performances. Save me from engaging in rash and precipitate prayers and from abrupt breaking away to follow business or pleasure as though I had never prayed. Amen.

#### *Matthew 2:1-2*

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *The Lord's Prayer*

Our Father, who art in heaven  
 Hallowed by your name,  
 Your kingdom come,  
 Your will be done,  
 On earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread,  
 And forgive us our trespasses  
 As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
 And lead us not into temptation,  
 But deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
 Forever and ever. Amen.

*Pray about the day ahead of you.*



## DAILY ACTIVITIES

Reflect on and listen to the “Huron Carol” by Jean de Brebeuf, translated into English by Jesse Edgar Middleton.

[This version of the carol](#) is performed by Canadian artist Heather Dale in three languages: Wendat, English & French. (Hard copy users, search for Huron Carol Heather Dale).

'Twas in the moon of winter-time  
When all the birds had fled,  
That mighty Gitchi Manitou  
Sent angel choirs instead;  
Before their light the stars grew dim,  
And wandering hunters heard the hymn:  
"Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born,  
In excelsis gloria."

Within a lodge of broken bark  
The tender Babe was found,  
A ragged robe of rabbit skin  
Enwrapp'd His beauty round;  
But as the hunter braves drew nigh,  
The angel song rang loud and high...  
"Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born,  
In excelsis gloria."

The earliest moon of wintertime  
Is not so round and fair  
As was the ring of glory  
On the helpless infant there.  
The chiefs from far before him knelt  
With gifts of fox and beaver pelt.  
Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born,  
In excelsis gloria.

O children of the forest free,  
O sons of Manitou,  
The Holy Child of earth and heaven  
Is born today for you.  
Come kneel before the radiant Boy  
Who brings you beauty, peace and joy.  
"Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born,  
In excelsis gloria."

Saint Jean de Brebeuf (1593-1649) was a French Jesuit missionary who travelled to New France (Canada) in 1625. He worked primarily with the Huron First Nation, learning their language and culture. He wrote the Huron Carol (“Jesous Ahatonhia” is the Huron title meaning “Jesus, he is born”) to connect the nativity story with a context that the Huron people would understand, changing the surroundings, gifts, and people. To stay true to this spirit, the English translator Jesse Edgar Middleton uses “Gitchi Manitou,” which means “Great Spirit” in many Algonquian languages, to refer to God. Brebeuf brought the gospel to the Huron people in a way they could understand it; he contextualized the gospel. To do so, is to follow the example of Jesus Himself, who contextualised the gospel by becoming a human being in order to save all human beings.

1. How does reading and listening to this carol make you feel and why?
2. How would you contextualise the gospel to reach your family and people from your ethnic heritage?
3. Try re-writing the Huron Carol to make sense for our lives today in Vancouver 2014.

## EVENING PRAYER

*Advent Antiphon*<sup>21</sup> (the second stanza is from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," which may be sung)

O Wisdom,  
You come forth from the mouth of the Most High.  
You fill the universe and hold all things together  
in a strong yet gentle manner.  
O come teach us the way of truth.

O come, O come, Thou wisdom from above;  
the universe sustaining Thy love.  
Thou springest forth from the Almighty's mouth.  
Subdue us now, and lead us in Thy truth.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

### *Call to worship*

Come, let us sing to the LORD: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
Rise up, O Lord, and rule the earth: every inch of it is yours.

### *Psalm 82:1-5*

God presides in the great assembly;  
he renders judgment among the "gods":  
"How long will you defend the unjust  
and show partiality to the wicked?  
Defend the weak and the fatherless;  
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.  
Rescue the weak and the needy;  
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.  
"The 'gods' know nothing, they understand nothing.  
They walk about in darkness;  
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

Rise up, O Lord, and rule the earth: every inch of it is yours.

Seattle, chief of the Suquamish, asked, "How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. We are part of the earth and it is part of us."

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Spend some time dedicated to praying for God's good creation, and asking Him to reveal how you can be a better steward of creation.*

### *Closing prayer*

Lord, we forget that we do not create our world. Help us remember creation as a gift we are called to serve and watch over. Free us from habits that dishonour the land, and teach us to revel in its bounty with gratitude. Amen.

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<sup>21</sup> Advent antiphons are ancient prayers traditionally used between December 17 and 23. The Advent Carol, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is based upon the antiphons. From *The Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002, 231-4.

## Third Thursday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening Prayer*

O holy child of Bethlehem,  
 Descend to us, we pray;  
 Cast out our sin, and enter in:  
 Be born in us today.  
 We hear the Christmas angels  
 The great glad tidings tell:  
 O come to us, abide with us,  
 Our Lord Emmanuel.

#### *Matthew 2:3-8; 12-15*

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
 are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
 for out of you will come a ruler  
 who will shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Benedictus (Zechariah's Song in Luke 1:67-79)*

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
 because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
 in the house of his servant David  
 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),  
 salvation from our enemies  
 and from the hand of all who hate us—

to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

Reflect on this short excerpt from Henri Nouwen's *A Spirituality of Living*.

### Faithful Discipline

*This is what the LORD says—  
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:  
“I am the LORD your God,  
who teaches you what is best for you,  
who directs you in the way you should go. – Isaiah 48:17*

Our lives are full. There are things to do, people to meet, activities to pursue. We want to be fully occupied, to know that because we are busy people something important is happening in our lives. And if we are not occupied then we are at least preoccupied – filled with concern about things that have not yet come about or have already happened. And beneath our worry and our guilt there is a deep fear of empty spaces... This is where discipline in the spiritual life becomes important...

Once we have made the choice to say, “Yes, I want to follow Jesus,” the question is, “What discipline will help me remain faithful to that choice?” If we want to be disciples of Jesus, we have to live a disciplined life. By discipline, I do not mean control. If I know the discipline of psychology or of economics, I have certain control over a body of knowledge. If I discipline my children, I want to have a little control over them. But in the spiritual life, the word discipline means “the effort to create some space in which God can act.” Discipline means to prevent everything in our life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere we’re not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that we hadn’t planned or counted on. Discipline helps us to follow the

voice of the Spirit, who wants to lead us to new places, new people, and new forms of service. (Henri Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Living*)

1. *In what ways is your life “full”? There are obviously good things that fill our lives. Jot some of them down and give thanks to God for his goodness!*
2. *What about the meaningless things that fill your life right now. Make a list, check it twice! What are the things that are taking up “space in which God can act”?*
3. *What is one way you can become a more disciplined follower of Jesus? How will you “prevent everything in your life from being filled up”?*
4. *What spiritual practices in your life have allowed you to follow the voice of the Spirit of God? How has His voice led you to new places, people, and forms of service?*

## EVENING PRAYER

*Advent Antiphon (the second stanza is from “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” which may be sung)*

O Adonai and leader of Israel,  
You appeared to Moses in a burning bush  
and You gave him the law on Sinai.  
O come and save us with Your mighty power.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,  
who to Thy tribes on Sinai’s height,  
in ancient times didst give the law  
in cloud, and majesty and awe:  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

### *Confession*

Almighty God you are Lord of all creation. We desire to submit ourselves to you yet in the depth of our souls we find ourselves resistant to your ways. Forgive us our sins and deliver us from them.

Set us free from the power of willfulness within our hearts;  
Set us free from rebellious shrinking of necessary duty;  
Set us free from cowardly avoidance of necessary suffering;  
Deliver us from discontentment with our place in life;  
Deliver us from jealousy of those whose lot seems easier than our own;  
Protect us from thinking lightly the talent you have given us, because you have not given us more;  
Set us free from creaturely pride;  
Protect us from undisciplined thoughts;  
Set us free from unwillingness to learn and unreadiness to serve;  
By the power of your Spirit at work within us grant that we may see the triumph of your will over our own for the sake of your eternal purposes. To you O Lord we commend our souls through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

*In awe of the Incarnation*<sup>22</sup>

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!  
Eternity shut in a span.  
Summer in winter, day in night.  
Heaven in earth, and God in Man;  
Great little one! whose all-embracing birth  
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heav'n to earth.

*Closing Prayer*<sup>23</sup>

The peace of God  
be over me to shelter me,  
under me to uphold me,  
about me to protect me,  
behind me to direct me,  
ever with me to save me.

Be the peace of the Spirit mine this night.  
Be the peace of the Son mine this night.  
Be the peace of the Father mine this night.  
The peace of all peace be mind this night  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>22</sup> From "The Nativity" by Richard Cranshaw (c. 1613-49), son of Puritan poet and clergyman William Cranshaw. Richard eventually converted to Roman Catholicism and lived in great poverty.

<sup>23</sup> From the *Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 2002, p29.

## Third Friday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Preparing for prayer*

Enable me, O God, to collect and compose my thoughts before an immediate approach to you in prayer. May I be careful to have my mind in order when I take upon myself the honour to speak to the Sovereign Lord of the universe, remembering that upon the temper of my soul depends, in very great measure, my success. You are infinitely too great to be trifled with, too wise to be imposed on by a mock devotion, and abhor a sacrifice without a heart. Help me to entertain an habitual sense of your perfections, as an admirable help against cold and formal performances. Save me from engaging in rash and precipitate prayers and from abrupt breaking away to follow business or pleasure as though I had never prayed. Amen.

#### *Luke 2:25-35*

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
 you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
 For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
 and the glory of your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Christological Hymn from Philippians 2:5-11*

Lord, I pray that you would give me the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
 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.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

**Festive Missional Activity** (see [Overview of Guide](#) on page 4.)

From Isaiah 6:8, make this your prayer as you spend time with your non-believing friends:

Then I heard a voice in heaven saying  
'Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?'  
Then I said, 'Here am I; send me.'  
I will go, Lord, if You lead me: I will hold your people in my heart. Amen.

## EVENING PRAYER

*Advent Antiphon (the lyrics of the Advent Carol "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" may be sung)*

O Stock of Jesse,  
you stand as a signal for the nations.  
kings fall silent before You whom the peoples acclaim.  
O come to deliver us, and do not delay.

O come, Thou rod of Jesse, free  
thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell Thy people save,  
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave:  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

*Call to worship*

Come, let us sing to the LORD: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
May your justice be a light to guide us: and your mercy a help on the way.

*Psalm 101:1-4*

I will sing of your love and justice;  
to you, LORD, I will sing praise.  
I will be careful to lead a blameless life—  
when will you come to me?  
I will conduct the affairs of my house  
with a blameless heart.  
I will not look with approval  
on anything that is vile.  
I hate what faithless people do;  
I will have no part in it.  
The perverse of heart shall be far from me;



I will have nothing to do with what is evil.

May your justice be a light to guide us: and your mercy a help on the way.

Desmond Tutu, a South African bishop and leader in the movement to end apartheid, said, "I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned for the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said, 'I feed you.' Because the good news to a hungry person is bread."

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Pray that God would help you remove any blinders you may have about what it means to share the good news of Jesus, and ask Him to help you preach the gospel with both word and deed.*

*Closing prayer*

Lord, we pray that rather than picking apart your gospel to suit ourselves, we would pick apart the twisted assumption that bread is only for the fortunate, water only for the lucky, and freedom only for the strong. Amen.

## Third Saturday in Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening Prayer*

O holy child of Bethlehem,  
 Descend to us, we pray;  
 Cast out our sin, and enter in:  
 Be born in us today.  
 We hear the Christmas angels  
 The great glad tidings tell:  
 O come to us, abide with us,  
 Our Lord Emmanuel.

#### *Luke 2:36-38*

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Magnificat (Mary's Song in Luke 1:46-55)*

Lord, make me like your servant Mary who responded to your call with humble servant-heartedness:  
 My soul glorifies the Lord  
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
 for he has been mindful  
 of the humble state of his servant.  
 From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
 holy is his name.  
 His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
 from generation to generation.  
 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
 He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
 but has lifted up the humble.  
 He has filled the hungry with good things  
 but has sent the rich away empty.  
 He has helped his servant Israel,  
 remembering to be merciful  
 to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
 just as he promised our ancestors.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

### FAMILY

Spend intentional time with your family, immediate and/or extended. (See [Overview of the Guide](#) on page 4.)

### PRAYER

Spend an extra 15 minutes praying for three people in your family. Pray for each person for 5 minutes. Who will you pray for?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

If you are looking for a way to begin, you can pray these words from Psalm 119:105 over each person:

May your word be a lamp for \_\_\_\_\_'s feet, a light on his/her path.

## EVENING PRAYER

*Advent Antiphon (the second stanza is from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," which may be sung)*

O Key of David and sceptre of Israel,  
what You open, no one can close again;  
what You close, no one can open.  
O come to lead the captive from prison;  
free those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery:  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

### *Confession*

Almighty God you are Lord of all creation. We desire to submit ourselves to you yet in the depth of our souls we find ourselves resistant to your ways. Forgive us our sins and deliver us from them.

Set us free from the power of willfulness within our hearts;  
Set us free from rebellious shrinking of necessary duty;  
Set us free from cowardly avoidance of necessary suffering;  
Deliver us from discontentment with our place in life;  
Deliver us from jealousy of those whose lot seems easier than our own;  
Protect us from thinking lightly the talent you have given us, because you have not given us more;  
Set us free from creaturely pride;  
Protect us from undisciplined thoughts;

Set us free from unwillingness to learn and unreadiness to serve;  
By the power of your Spirit at work within us grant that we may see the triumph of your will over  
our own for the sake of your eternal purposes. To you O Lord we commend our souls through  
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

*In awe of the Incarnation<sup>24</sup>*

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!  
Eternity shut in a span.  
Summer in winter, day in night.  
Heaven in earth, and God in Man;  
Great little one! whose all-embracing birth  
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heav'n to earth.

*Closing Prayer<sup>25</sup>*

The peace of God  
be over me to shelter me,  
under me to uphold me,  
about me to protect me,  
behind me to direct me,  
ever with me to save me.

Be the peace of the Spirit mine this night.  
Be the peace of the Son mine this night.  
Be the peace of the Father mine this night.  
The peace of all peace be mind this night  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>24</sup> From "The Nativity" by Richard Cranshaw (c. 1613-49), son of Puritan poet and clergyman William Cranshaw. Richard eventually converted to Roman Catholicism and lived in great poverty.

<sup>25</sup> From the *Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 2002, p29.

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer*<sup>26</sup>

Let your goodness, Lord, appear to us, that we, made in your image, conform ourselves to it. In our own strength we cannot imitate your majesty, power and wonder; nor is it fitting for us to try. But your mercy reaches from the heavens, through the clouds, to the earth below. You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal love. Caress us with your tiny hands, embrace us with your tiny arms, and pierce our hearts with your soft, sweet cries.

#### *Matthew 2:9-12*

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Benedictus (Zechariah's Song in Luke 1:67-79)*

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
 because he has come to his people and redeemed them.  
 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
 in the house of his servant David  
 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),  
 salvation from our enemies  
 and from the hand of all who hate us—  
 to show mercy to our ancestors  
 and to remember his holy covenant,  
 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
 and to enable us to serve him without fear  
 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
 for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
 to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
 through the forgiveness of their sins,  
 because of the tender mercy of our God,  
 by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

<sup>26</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was a Cistercian monk whose austerity of life coupled with his charm of personality won him many supporters. His writing *On the Love of God* show him to be a deeply loving man of prayer. From *Saint Bernard on the Christian Year*, translated by a Religious of CSMV (i.e. Sister Penelope), Mowbray & Co, London, 1954 in Michael Counsell, *2000 Years of Prayer*, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1999, p117.

to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

*Pray about the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

### Sunday Worship – 10am or 7pm

- Come early to prepare your hearts for worship and/or the role in which you are serving this morning.
- Ask God to help you greet each person you encounter as though you are greeting Christ Himself.
- How did God speak to you through the acts of communal worship?

### Fellowship – UC Christmas Dinner, 6pm

- Enjoy an evening of fellowship.

### Sabbath Rest

- Make a point to rest. See [Overview of the Guide](#) for some ideas on how to rest.
- As you rest remember Christ, try not to allow yourself simply to become numb, rather as you rest, remember the God who became a man and chained himself to the cycles of busyness and tiredness, rest and restoration that we humans experience. Remember Christ's work done for you and experience His refreshing.

## EVENING PRAYER

*Advent Antiphon (the second stanza is from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," which may be sung)*

O Rising Sun,  
You are the splendour of eternal light  
and the sun of justice.  
O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness  
and in the shadow of death.

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer  
our spirits by Thine advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight:  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

### THE IGNATIAN EXAMEN

*Consolation – The basis for thanks and re-orienting your life.*

What was life-giving for me today? This past week?  
Where/when did I sense God's presence?  
What was nurturing, soothing, refreshing to my soul?  
What drew me closer to God?

*Desolation – The basis for confession, drawing on God and re-orienting your life.*

What was life-draining for me today? This past week?

Where/when did I feel alone, far from God?

What was stressful, joyless, dark, cold?

Was there evil or sin – mine or another's?

**PRAY**

Spend 15 minutes praying through the issues that arose during the Examen. This may include giving thanks, asking for guidance, restoration, reconciliation, hope, joy, peace, etc.

*Expressions of faith*

Lord, You have always given  
bread for the coming day;  
and though I am poor,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given  
strength for the coming day;  
and though I am weak,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given  
peace for the coming day;  
and though of anxious heart,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always kept  
me safe in trials;

and now, tried as I am,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always marked  
the road for the coming day;  
and though it may be hidden,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always lightened  
this darkness of mine;  
and though the night is here,  
today I believe.

Lord, You have always spoken  
when time was ripe;  
and though you be silent now,  
today I believe.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Fourth Monday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Celtic Blessing*<sup>27</sup>

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever he may send you;  
 May he guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm;  
 May he bring you home rejoicing at the wonders he has shown you;  
 May he bring you home rejoicing, once again into our doors.

#### *Matthew 2:16-18*

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,  
 weeping and great mourning,  
 Rachel weeping for her children  
 and refusing to be comforted,  
 because they are no more.”

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Christological Hymn from Philippians 2:5-11*

Lord, I pray that you would give me the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
 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.

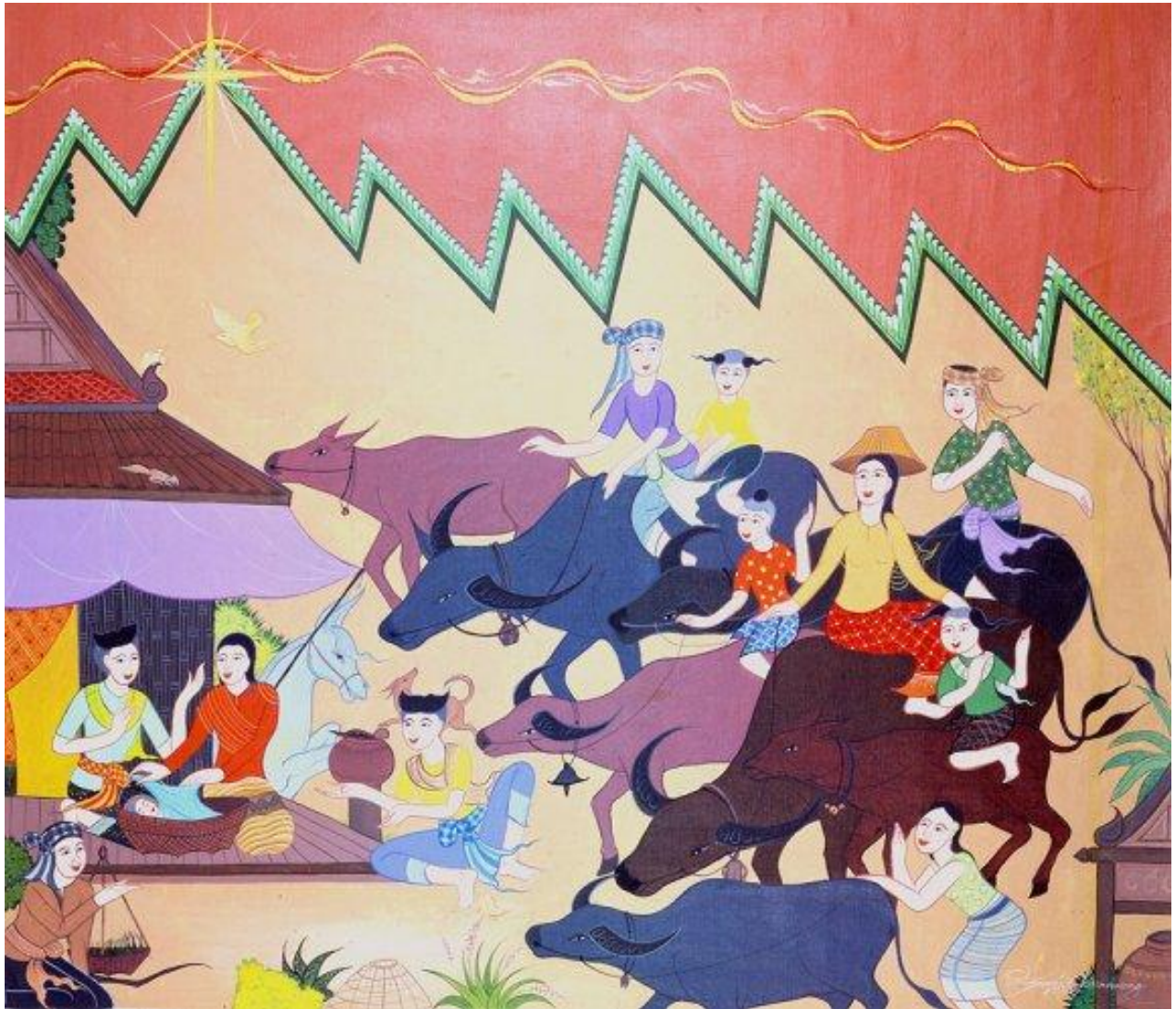
*Pray about the day ahead of you.*

<sup>27</sup> From the *Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 2002



## DAILY ACTIVITY

Reflect on *Nativity*, by Sawai Chinnawong. Acrylic on canvas, 2004.



*I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. – Luke 2:10-11*

Jesus came for “all the people,” and throughout the ages, numerous cultures have depicted Jesus in their own historical and cultural context, most famously in Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Here, Thai painter Chinnawong envisions a traditional Asian setting. Notice how everything in the painting directs your eye to Jesus: all creatures in the painting – both human and animal – are moving in toward the baby. Even the mountains seem to be leaning in. The face and posture of each person in the image reflects a universal sense of joy and delight.

1. This image challenges many of us to de-westernize the Christmas story. How do you react to it? How does it resonate with you?

2. This painting is delicate, graceful, and joyful. Look carefully at the movement of the creatures and the faces of the people. What emotions do they evoke in you? Do these reflect the feelings you have when you ponder the birth of Christ?
3. How does this change the meaning of Christmas – the magnitude of God made flesh – for you today?

Additional activity: [Listen to O Come Let Us Adore](#) by Canadian Christian band [Capstone](#). In this recording, there is a wonderful communal feel. (Hard copy users: visit [www.grooveshark.com](http://www.grooveshark.com) and search “Capstone O Come Let Us Adore.”)

## EVENING PRAYER

*Advent Antiphon (the lyrics of the Advent Carol “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” may be sung)*

O King whom all the peoples desire,  
You are the cornerstone which makes all one.  
O come and save us whom you made from clay.

O come, Desire of Nations, bind  
all peoples in one heart and mind.  
Bid the strife and quarrels cease.  
Fill all the world with heaven’s peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

*Call to worship*

Come, let us sing to the Lord: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
Christ is coming. Christ has come: Christ will come again.

*Psalm 104:31-35*

May the glory of the Lord endure forever;  
may the Lord rejoice in his works—  
he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains, and they smoke.  
I will sing to the Lord all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.  
May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
as I rejoice in the Lord.  
But may sinners vanish from the earth  
and the wicked be no more.  
Praise the Lord, my soul.  
Praise the Lord.

Christ is coming. Christ has come: Christ will come again.

Bishop NT Wright of Durham has written, “The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term in the future. And what he was promising for the future and doing in the present was not saving souls for a disembodied eternity but

rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal of creation which is God's ultimate purpose – and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in that large project.”

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Spend some dedicated time asking God to show you where and how he wants you to partner with Him in the work of mission and ministry.*

*Closing prayer*

Thank you, Lord, that your promises are not for some distant future but are to be claimed right now, today. Teach us what we must do and say in our local communities and in our larger world to participate in your promise. Amen.

## Fourth Tuesday of Advent

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Opening prayer*

Let your goodness, Lord, appear to us, that we, made in your image, conform ourselves to it. In our own strength we cannot imitate your majesty, power and wonder; nor is it fitting for us to try. But your mercy reaches from the heavens, through the clouds, to the earth below. You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal love. Caress us with your tiny hands, embrace us with your tiny arms, and pierce our hearts with your soft, sweet cries.

#### *Luke 2:15-20*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

- *Read today's scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *Magnificat (Mary's Song in Luke 1:46-55)*

Lord, make me like your servant Mary who responded to your call with humble servant-heartedness:

My soul glorifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.

*Pray for the day ahead of you.*

## DAILY ACTIVITY

Spend some time reflecting on this reading by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Christ's Incarnation: The foundation of Christianity*, ( Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009). p. 30–35.

### *Christ's Incarnation, Joyous and Personal*

TO the shepherds the angel said, "Behold, I bring you *good tidings of great joy*, which shall be to all people;" and, truly, the angelic message is still the source of joy to all who hear it aright: "*Unto you is born ... a Saviour.*" Rejoice, then, ye who feel that ye are lost; for Christ Jesus the Saviour comes to seek and to save you. Be of good cheer, ye who are in the prison-house of sin, for He comes to set you free. Ye who are famished and ready to die, rejoice that Christ Jesus the Lord has consecrated for you a better Bethlehem, a true "house of bread," and that He has Himself come to be the bread of life to your souls. Rejoice, O sinners, everywhere, for the Restorer of the castaways, the Saviour of the fallen, is born!

Join in the joy, ye saints, for He is also the Preserver of the saved ones, delivering them from innumerable perils, and He is the sure Perfecter of all whom He preserves. Jesus is no partial Saviour, beginning a work, and never completing it; but, saving and cleansing, restoring and upholding, He also perfects and presents the saved ones, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, before His Father's face. Rejoice, then, all ye people; let your hills and valleys ring with joy, for a Saviour, who is mighty to save, is born among you.

This joy began with the shepherds, for the angel said to them, "Unto *you* is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Reader, shall the joy begin with you to-day? It avails you little that Christ is born, or that Christ died, unless unto *you* a Child is born, and for *you* Jesus bled. A personal interest in the birth, life, and death of Christ is the main point for each one of us.

"But I am poor," saith one. So were the shepherds. O ye poor, to you this mysterious Child is born! "The poor have the Gospel preached unto them." "He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor."

"But I am obscure and unknown," saith one. So were the watchers on the midnight plain. Who, save God, knew the men who endured hard toil, and kept their flocks by night? And you, unknown of men, are known to God; shall it not, then, be said that "unto you a Child is born"? The Lord regardeth not the greatness of men, but He hath respect unto the lowly.

Possibly, you say that you are illiterate, you cannot understand much. Be it so; but unto the shepherds Christ was born, and their simplicity did not hinder them from receiving Him, but even helped them to do so. Let it be so with yourself; receive gladly the simple truth as it is in Jesus. The Lord hath exalted One chosen out of the people.

No aristocratic Christ have I to commend to you, but the Saviour of the people, the Friend of publicans and sinners. Jesus is the true "poor man's Friend;" He is "a Witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people." Oh, that each one of us might truly say, "Unto me is Jesus born"! If I truly believe in Him, Christ is born unto me, and I may be as sure of it as if an angel announced it personally to me, since the Scripture assures me that, if I believe in Jesus, He is mine, and I am His, and through union with Him I become a partaker in His everlasting life, and in all that He has.

### *Christ's Incarnation the wonder of Angels*

HOW surprised the angels must have been when they were first informed that Jesus Christ, the Prince of life, intended to shroud Himself in clay, and become a human babe, and live and die upon the earth! We know not how the information was first communicated to the angels; but when the rumour began to circulate among the shining hosts, we may imagine what strange wonderment there was in their lofty minds. What! was it true that He, whose crown was all bedight with stars, would lay that crown aside? What! was it certain that He, about whose shoulders was cast the purple robe of universal sovereignty, would become a man, dressed in a peasant's garment? Could it be true that He, who was everlasting and immortal, would one day be nailed to a cross? How their wonderment must have increased as the details of the Saviour's life and death were made known to them. Well might they desire to "look into" these things, which were so surprising and mysterious to them.

And when He descended from on high, they followed Him; for Jesus was "seen of angels," and seen in a very special sense; for they looked upon Him in rapturous amazement, wondering what it could mean when He, "who was rich, for our sakes became poor." Do you see Him as, on that day of Heaven's eclipse, He did, as it were, ungird Himself of His majesty? Can you conceive the increasing wonder of the heavenly hosts when the great deed was actually done, when they saw His priceless tiara taken off, when they watched Him unbind His girdle of stars, and cast away His sandals of gold? Can you conceive what must have been the astonishment of the angels when He said to them, "I do not disdain the womb of the virgin; I am going down to earth to become a man"? Can you picture them as they declared that they would follow Him? They followed Him as near as He would permit them; and when they came to earth, they began to sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Nor would they go away till they had made the shepherds also wonder, and till heaven had hung out new stars in honour of the new-born King.

And now wonder, ye angels, as ye see that the Infinite has become an infant. He, upon whose shoulders the universe doth hang, hangs at His mother's breast. He, who created all things by the word of His power, and who bears up the pillars of creation, hath now become so weak that He must be carried in the arms of a woman! Wonder, ye that knew Him in His riches, whilst ye behold Him in His poverty. Where sleeps the new-born King? Hath He the best room in Cæsar's palace? Hath a cradle of gold been prepared for Him, and pillows of down, on which to rest His head? No; in the dilapidated stable where the oxen stood, and in the manger where they fed, there the Saviour lies, swathed in the swaddling-bands of the children of poverty. Nor doth He rest long there; on a sudden, His mother must carry Him to Egypt; He must go there, and become a stranger in a strange land. When He came back, and grew up at Nazareth, the angels must have marvelled to see Him that made the worlds handle the hammer and the nails, assisting His reputed father in the trade of a carpenter.

## EVENING PRAYER

*Advent Antiphon (the second stanza is from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," which may be sung)*

O Emmanuel,  
You are our King and judge,  
the One whom the peoples await, and their Saviour.  
O come and save us, Lord, our God.

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 thee, O Israel.

### *Confession*

Almighty God you are Lord of all creation. We desire to submit ourselves to you yet in the depth of our souls we find ourselves resistant to your ways. Forgive us our sins and deliver us from them.

Set us free from the power of willfulness within our hearts;  
Set us free from rebellious shrinking of necessary duty;  
Set us free from cowardly avoidance of necessary suffering;  
Deliver us from discontentment with our place in life;  
Deliver us from jealousy of those whose lot seems easier than our own;  
Protect us from thinking lightly the talent you have given us, because you have not given us more;  
Set us free from creaturely pride;  
Protect us from undisciplined thoughts;  
Set us free from unwillingness to learn and unreadiness to serve;  
By the power of your Spirit at work within us grant that we may see the triumph of your will over our own for the sake of your eternal purposes. To you O Lord we commend our souls through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer.*

### *In awe of the Incarnation<sup>28</sup>*

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!  
Eternity shut in a span.  
Summer in winter, day in night.  
Heaven in earth, and God in Man;  
Great little one! whose all-embracing birth  
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heav'n to earth.

*Continued on next page.*

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<sup>28</sup> From "The Nativity" by Richard Cranshaw (c. 1613-49), son of Puritan poet and clergyman William Cranshaw. Richard eventually converted to Roman Catholicism and lived in great poverty.

*Closing Prayer*<sup>29</sup>

The peace of God  
be over me to shelter me,  
under me to uphold me,  
about me to protect me,  
behind me to direct me,  
ever with me to save me.

Be the peace of the Spirit mine this night.  
Be the peace of the Son mine this night.  
Be the peace of the Father mine this night.  
The peace of all peace be mind this night  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>29</sup> From the *Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 2002, p29.



## Fourth Wednesday in Advent Christmas Eve

### MORNING PRAYER

#### *Celtic Blessing*

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever he may send you;  
May he guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm;  
May he bring you home rejoicing at the wonders he has shown you;  
May he bring you home rejoicing, once again into our doors.

#### *Revelation 21:1-5*

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

- *Read today’s scripture through a few more times.*
- *What about this passage grabs your attention?*
- *Lift these things up to God in prayer. Ask Him how they speak into your life today.*

#### *The Lord’s Prayer*

Our Father, who art in heaven  
Hallowed by your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our trespasses  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.

## DAILY ACTIVITIES

**Reflect on and listen to the Christmas carol “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus.” The lyrics are attributed to Charles Wesley (1707-1788).**

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

Born Thy people to deliver  
Born a child and yet a King  
Born to reign in us forever  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring

Israel's strength and consolation  
Hope of all the earth Thou art  
Dear desire of every nation  
Joy of every longing heart

By Thine own eternal spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone  
By Thine all sufficient merit  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne

This hymn poetically captures the longing and expectation we feel as we yearn for Christ’s coming. But sometimes this can be clouded out by the modern rush of the Christmas season, or an expectation for material gifts.

1. As you listened to the song and read the lyrics, note any phrases that stood out to you.
2. Christmas is tomorrow. How do you feel? Excited, rushed, anxious, lonely or something else? Give your emotions over to God in prayer.

## EVENING PRAYER

### *Call to worship*

Come, let us sing to the Lord: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.  
O Word, now wrapped in human skin: speak peace on earth through your children.

### *Psalm 119:89-93*

Your word, Lord, is eternal;  
it stands firm in the heavens.  
Your faithfulness continues through all generations;  
you established the earth, and it endures.  
Your laws endure to this day,  
for all things serve you.  
If your law had not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my affliction.  
I will never forget your precepts,  
for by them you have preserved my life.

O Word, now wrapped in human skin: speak peace on earth through your children.

Leo the Great preached, "Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the incarnation. From the time when Christ came, the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, and the speech of kindness diffused. A heavenly way of life has been implanted on the earth."

*Spend 10-15 minutes praying for others, and in personal prayer. Rejoice in the gift of the incarnation!*

### *Closing prayer*

Lord God, we adore you as the infant Christ. Teach us how to tend to you in your self-imposed vulnerability with us. Prepare us in these tender moments to see what incarnation means in our world. Amen.

## Christmas Day

### PRAYERS FOR THE DAY

#### *Prayer for just after midnight<sup>30</sup>*

Good and gracious God,  
 on this holy night you gave us your Son.  
 The Lord of the universe, wrapped in swaddling clothes,  
 the Saviour of all, lying in a manger.  
 On this holy night  
 draw us into the mystery of your love.  
 Join our voices with the heavenly host,  
 that we may sing your glory on high  
 Give us a place among the shepherds,  
 that we may find the one for whom we have waited,  
 Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,  
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit.  
 in the splendour of eternal light.  
 God for ever and ever.

*Consider reading the whole Christmas story with those who are celebrating with you. The story can be read in either Matthew 1-2, or Luke 1-2:40.*

#### *Prayer for Christmas Day<sup>31</sup>*

This day is born Jesus,  
 Son of the King of glory.  
 This day is born to us  
 The root of our joy.  
 This day gleamed sea and shore together.  
 This day was born Christ,  
 The king of greatness.

Though laid in a manger,  
 He came from a throne;  
 On earth though a stranger,  
 In heaven He was known.

How lowly, how gracious  
 His coming to earth!  
 His love my love kindles  
 To joy in his birth.

Sweet Jesus, King of glory!  
 Now You sleep in a manger,  
 In a stable poor and cold;

<sup>30</sup> From the Roman Catholic *Sacramentary*

<sup>31</sup> Adapted from *The Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002, p236.

But for us You are the highest King,  
Making our hearts into Your palace.

All hail! Let there be joy!  
Hail to the King, hail to the King.  
Blessed is He, blessed is He.

The peace of earth to Him;  
The joy of heaven to Him.  
The homage of a King be His,  
King of all victory!

Deep in the night  
The voice of the waves on the shore  
Announced to us: Christ is born!  
Son of the King of kings  
From the land of salvation,  
The mountains glowed to Him,  
The plains glowed to Him,  
Then shone the sun on the mountains high to Him.  
All hail, let there be joy.

In me, Lord Christ, let there be joy!



WR Watkins, woodcut, 1930