

First Week in Advent

Jeremiah 33:14-16 - Jeremiah's words are written to individuals living in exile. Their lives were in disorder. Anguish, desolation, and uncertainty were a real part of their world. He reminds them that Yahweh would raise up the legitimate successor to the throne: The LORD our righteousness.

I Thessalonians 3:9-13 - Paul's letter to the Thessalonians reminds them of his deep love and joy because of their growth in grace. Like Jeremiah's audience, they too were living in adverse times.

Luke 21:25-36 - Jesus' words, according to the gospel of Luke, are an apocalyptic portrayal of what seems to be happening in our own world.

Light Your Home With An Advent Wreath

This week, we pray for "grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." It's amazing how much hope a little light can produce! The words of Jeremiah gave a glimmer of hope to those living in darkness and desolation. In our own homes and hearts, we can shine the light of Christ and the hope of His coming throughout this season of Advent.

Since the Middle Ages, Christians have used Advent wreaths as part of their spiritual preparation for Christmas. The evergreens and circular shape of the wreath represent the everlasting, unending love of God. The four candles mark the progression of the four weeks in Advent and the growth of light. Traditionally, three candles are purple and one is pink. The first purple candle represents hope, the second purple candle signifies love, the third pink candle stands for joy, and the fourth purple candle symbolizes peace.

Make your own Advent wreath and use it in your home as a center of prayer and reflection. Simply place an evergreen wreath on your dining table and use four candlesticks to hold the four candles of Advent. Some families choose to decorate their wreaths with dried flowers or fruit, so go ahead – be creative! Each week, light the corresponding candle during dinner, reflecting on the light of Christ and his gifts of hope, love, joy, and peace. On Christmas Day, light all four candles, celebrating the Light of the World.

Prayer when lighting first candle of the Advent wreath

"God of light, your hope illuminates the darkness of our world. You call us to walk in your light, casting off the works of darkness. Fill our home and hearts with the light of Christ. Help us reflect the hope found in Him to a world waiting for His appearing. Blessed be God forever. Amen."

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Second Week in Advent

Malachi 3:1-4 - Malachi speaks to people who had slipped into the practice of calling evil things good.

Accommodating and winking at sin will eventually be confronted. Malachi reminds the people that the LORD is coming. And when He comes it will be a time of purification. In fact, the LORD will be like a “refiner’s fire” which removes impurities, and a stiff “fuller’s brush,” which cleanses.

Philippians 1:3-11 - Paul’s heart-felt love for the believers in Philippi is expressed – not only for their participation with him in the gospel – but because of an underlying desire that at the appearance of Christ, they would be found pure and blameless.

Luke 3:1-6 - The Gospel reading reminds us that John the Baptist (like Malachi), confronted people with a message that demanded repentance and the forgiveness of sins. He echoed the voice of the prophet Isaiah in both a call to repentance and the promise of all flesh seeing the salvation of God!

The Advent message is one that calls us to purity, requiring us to acknowledge and repent of our sins.

Plant Seeds of Love for Christmas

The prophets planted seeds of repentance, cultivating the hearts of God’s people for the forgiveness of sins. They pointed to a coming harvest where God mends what is broken, when “the crooked will be made straight and all flesh will see the salvation of God.”

Advent is the perfect season to plant the seed of God’s love in our homes and the world around us. When gathered with your family to light the candles on the Advent wreath, take a moment to cultivate the hearts of those present with a special prayer of blessing on each one. Adopt a family in need or a local charity and, as a family, gather food, blankets, clothes, and toys that can be shared in time for Christmas.

Working together with your family to construct an Advent Chain can deepen family prayer times. This paper chain is made out of alternating loops of red and green construction paper, 50 loops long. Write the names of friends and family members to pray for on the red loops and the blessings God has given on the green ones. Each day during Advent, take off one red and green loop and use them to guide the prayers for the day.

Prayer when lighting the second candle of the Advent wreath

God of light, in love, you call us to repentance and reconciliation through the gift of your Son, Jesus. As we wait for your appearing, help us sow seeds of your love in the lives of everyone we meet. Blessed be God forever. Amen.

*Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

Third Week in Advent

Zephaniah 3:14-20 - The prophet Zephaniah sees the coming of the LORD. However, he reveals that when the LORD comes, Jerusalem will experience true “shalom.” Gladness and happiness will fill the hearts of the people. The LORD is thoroughly delighted with His people. It is a time of salvation and restoration.

Philippians 4:4-7 - Paul’s letter to the Philippians is an exhortation and reminder. He reminds us that the LORD is near, and as a result... we do not have to worry about anything and we can rejoice.

Luke 3:7-18 - John’s words, recorded by Luke, are straightforward, piercing the hearts of his hearers. His message is simple. There must be a change in your hearts. God is about to act; judgment is coming. And you must have a new life! He calls them to repent and be baptized – a public demonstration of a choice to turn from sin. He then reminds them that there must be a whole new lifestyle, one lived in harmony with God, goodwill toward others, and with holiness. Finally, John points them to the Savior-Messiah, reminding them that He is coming... the One who would make all this possible.

Share the Joy

Throughout Scripture, the admonition of the prophets to repent is quickly followed by the promise of resulting joy – and that joy is seen and felt by all who hear and respond to the gift of God’s Son, Jesus. Like the crowds who followed John the Baptist, we often find ourselves asking, “What then should we do?” John’s answer to live a life of generosity is just as relevant to our lives today.

Which person in your life needs to experience the joy of the Lord this week? Who is praying for the steadfast love and salvation of the Lord? Perhaps it’s a package of Christmas cards made by your children or grandchildren that will bring joy to the residents of a senior center. Maybe it’s a plate of cookies or a gift card to a local grocery store that will brighten the face of a single mother. It might even be the gift of yourself – listening intently over a cup of cocoa – that helps a child feel connected to the love of Christ.

Prayer when lighting the third candle of the Advent wreath

God of light, we take joy in the gift of your Son, Jesus. We ask you to make us mindful of those who still cry for ‘good tidings of great joy.’ Through us let them know the joy of your salvation. Blessed be God forever. Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Fourth Week in Advent

Micah 5:2-5a - The Old Testament reading expresses hope for Israel – and for the world. Micah speaks of a coming ruler who would fulfill all the ideals about kingship, which the people of Israel held dear. Micah's prediction went as far as to identify that the birthplace of the Messiah would be in Bethlehem.

Hebrews 10:5-10 - The author of Hebrews reminds us that with the coming of the Messiah, the sacrificial offerings, required by Levitical law, would no longer be necessary or efficacious. The incarnation of Christ would become the means by which the ultimate sacrifice of Christ's body upon the cross established a new covenant.

Luke 1:39-45 - From the beginning of time God has been at work in bringing forth Jesus Christ so he could be one with his people. Now, in this final annunciation story, found in our Gospel reading according to Luke, God's purpose will be fulfilled. God will act to save his people. The child is to be born to a humble peasant girl, Mary, for the saving of the world! We join our voices with Mary's song: "... For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His Name."

Make Ready Your Heart and Home

Advent means "to come." It is a season of waiting... preparation... expectation. We remember His coming 2,000 years ago and we wait for His return when He gathers His people into a joyful embrace. In the meantime, we celebrate the coming of Christ in our own hearts and lives through His daily visitation. We recognize Jesus as the light of the world – sharing His light with those who still cry, "O come, o come, Emmanuel..."

In the 16th century, the Spanish began lighting bonfires along the roads and churchyards to guide people to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. European missionaries introduced the tradition to the native people of Mexico, along with a reenactment of the story of Mary and Joseph's search for lodging in Bethlehem. Over the centuries, the tradition spread throughout Mexico and the Southwest with bonfires replaced by candlelit brown paper bags called luminarias.

Today, luminarias are a Southwestern holiday tradition of hospitality. Lighting sidewalks, walls, rooftops, and driveways, these simple decorations offer the warm light of welcome, guiding travelers and guests to their destination.

Gather your family and make your own luminarias to light the way to holiday gatherings. Simply fold down the edges of brown paper lunch bags and fill with enough sand to weigh them down. Place a votive candle in each bag and line your driveway and sidewalk with them before lighting.

Prayer when lighting the fourth candle of the Advent wreath

God of light, we're thankful for the peace of Christ which graces our hearts and home. Make us instruments of your peace in our world, shining your light into the hearts of those around us. Blessed be God forever. Amen.

*Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C