

A

ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL



A

ADVENT INTRODUCTION

The Season of Advent

The season of Advent is a centuries old tradition within the Western Church. The word 'advent' comes from the Latin '*adventus*' which means 'coming.' Traditionally, the season was a time of preparation and penance. It is a season of longing, of waiting to celebrate the miracle of the incarnation of Christ, but also for the day God will come again to judge and redeem all things. While the season is less somber today than in the past, it is still seen as a time to prepare and refocus our lives. The season helps us to slow down and get out the busyness of the modern workaday world. It is a season that helps us find a new rhythm in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

In Advent, we wait.

We wait in the darkness of a broken world.

We wait in the angst and imperfections of our lives.

We wait in the chaos and confusion.

We wait in the violence and the strife.

Yet, we wait knowing.

We wait knowing that our *hope* for life is secured in Christ.

We wait knowing that *peace* will have the last say.

We wait knowing that God's love is infinite.

We wait knowing that *joy* is right around the corner.

Let's wait together.

Seasons best,

Reunion Christian Church

Using this Devotion

The weeks of advent are divided into specific themes. No specific list is standard, but this devotional chooses to look at the more traditional themes: hope, peace, love, and joy. The season of Advent is usually associated with the colors purple, a symbol of the darkness of the world as it waits for the coming light. Sometimes the color pink is also used to symbolize the joy we find in Christ.

Each day of the week has four sections: Scripture, Response, Reflection Questions, and Prayer. There aren't any special instructions. These are just guides to help in your own reflection during this season. Use them in whatever way helps you to experience, trust in and live a little bit more like Jesus.

Advent Wreaths and Family Devotional

Advent wreaths have a long history that might even reach back into pre-Christian Germanic traditions. Nonetheless, Christians have used wreaths for centuries in order to mark the progression of the season. Traditionally, wreaths include five candles: three purple (hope, peace, love), one pink (joy), and one white (Christmas). Today, the candle colors are often varied.

The candles are lit on Sunday evenings and they mark the beginning of the advent week. The final candle is usually lit late on Christmas eve or on Christmas day.

At the end of this devotional there are advent wreath lighting devotionals that can be used by you and your family. The sections can be read by various members of the family with everyone joining in to sing together at the end. The Message translation is used for easier reading and comprehension. If you are not comfortable singing acapella, just visit REUNION Christian Church's Spotify account and you'll find all the referenced carols there.

Of course, if you have your own devotional advent rhythm, feel free to use this guide however best helps your family.

1

HOPE SUNDAY

A Curse and a Promise

⁸They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." ¹¹He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹²The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." ¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." ¹⁴The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel."

Genesis 3:8-15

Response

"This is the first promise given after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Theologians call it the *protoevangelium*—or first gospel because these words spoken by God contain the first promise of redemption in the Bible. Everything else in the Bible flows from these words in Genesis 3:15. As the acorn contains the mighty oak, so these words contain the entire plan of salvation. The great English preacher Charles Simeon called this verse "the sum and summary of the whole Bible."

Although you may not see it at first glance, Christ is in this verse. He is the ultimate Seed of the Woman who would one day come to crush the serpent's ugly head. In the process his "heel" would be bruised on the cross."

Ray Pritchard

Reflection Questions

What do I reflect on most, the "curses" in my life or the promise of God's salvation for my life? How do I reconcile those two things?

What does God's hope mean to me today?

Prayer

Creator God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs your light of hope. I also recognize that I have not always lived my life in view of the hope I have in You. Help me to remember that You are in control and that nothing can separate me from Your love. Help me to communicate your hope to a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

1

HOPE MONDAY

The Promise of Salvation

¹ The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:1-4,10-11

Response

"We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order. The Bible tells us that God did not originally make the world to have disease, hunger, and death in it. Jesus has come to redeem where it is wrong and heal the world where it is broken. His miracles are not just proofs that he has power but also wonderful foretastes of what he is going to do with that power. Jesus' miracles are not just a challenge to our minds, but a promise to our hearts, that the world we all want is coming." *Tim Keller*

Reflection Questions

In what ways do I feel depressed or oppressed today?
What does God's promise mean for me in light of those?

Where do I see oppression and broken heartedness in the world today? What could the promise of God's salvation mean for those areas?

Is there anywhere that I can be a light of hope today?

Prayer

Creator God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs your light of hope. I also recognize that I have not always lived my life in view of the hope I have in You. Help me to remember that You are in control and that nothing can separate me from Your love. Help me to communicate your hope to a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

1

HOPE TUESDAY

The Shoot of Jesse

- ¹ A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- ² The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
- ³ His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
- He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
- ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
- ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
- ⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
- ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den
- ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:1-9

Response

“But as soon as we grasp this... we see that if salvation is that sort of thing, it can't be confined to human beings. ... Genuine human beings, from Genesis 1 onward, are given the mandate of looking after creation, of bringing order to God's world, of establishing and maintaining communities. To suppose that we are saved, as it were, for our own private benefit, for the restoration of our own relationship with God (vital though that is!), and for our eventual homecoming and peace in heaven (misleading though that is!) is like a boy being given a baseball bat as a present and insisting that since it belongs to him, he must always and only play with it in private. But of course you can only do what you're meant to do with a baseball bat when you're playing with other people. And salvation only does what it's meant to do when those who have been saved, are being saved, and will one day fully be saved realize that they are saved not as souls but as wholes and not for themselves alone but for what God now longs to do through them.” *N.T. Wright*

Reflection Questions

Isaiah sees God's redemption including nature itself. What are some of the effects of sin on the environment that I see today?

What is one thing I can do today to help God's righteousness take shape in the world?

Prayer

Creator God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs your light of hope. I also recognize that I have not always lived my life in view of the hope I have in You. Help me to remember that You are in control and that nothing can separate me from Your love. Help me to communicate your hope to a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

1

HOPE WEDNESDAY

Bethlehem's Coming Ruler

² But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of
the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;

Micha 5:2-4

Response

"The resurrection is the revelation to chosen witnesses of the fact that Jesus who died on the cross is indeed king - conqueror of death and sin, Lord and Savior of all. The resurrection is not the reversal of a defeat but the proclamation of a victory. The King reigns from the tree. The reign of God has indeed come upon us, and its sign is not a golden throne but a wooden cross." *Leslie Newbigin*

Reflection Questions

Bethlehem was a backwater and the cross a punishment, no one looked to these places for hope. What are some of the places I think are hopeless?

Can I imagine God's victory in those hopeless places?
What would it look like?

What does the Kingship of Jesus look like for me today?

Prayer

Creator God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs your light of hope. I also recognize that I have not always lived my life in view of the hope I have in You. Help me to remember that You are in control and that nothing can separate me from Your love. Help me to communicate your hope to a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

1

HOPE THURSDAY

The Suffering Servant

²For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. ⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ⁸By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. ⁹They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. ¹¹Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:2-11

Response

"We must force ourselves to remember that the Savior has submitted Himself to this work. Jesus fully knew the punishment that was necessary to bear for atonement to be earned. The pleasure that comes from crushing the Savior is not in the judgment meted out but in the atonement that is accomplished. It is here that we see the Savior—that no one thought worthy to give a second look—stands with the beauty of our salvation. The pleasure of God's crushing hatred toward sin has given us atonement through the Savior's loving death." *Phillip Nation*

Reflection Questions

Isaiah foresees the day where Jesus would suffer for our sins so that we could find healing. What are some of the times I can see God's healing in my own life?

What areas do I still need to let God heal? Where have I gone astray?

Hope isn't cheaply bought. Have I embraced the significance of what Jesus did for me today?

Prayer

Creator God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs your light of hope. I also recognize that I have not always lived my life in view of the hope I have in You. Help me to remember that You are in control and that nothing can separate me from Your love. Help me to communicate your hope to a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

1

HOPE FRIDAY

The Prophet to Come

¹ See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

⁴ Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.

Malachi 4:1-6

Response

"From the beginnings of Israelite religion the belief that God had chosen this particular people to carry out His mission has been both a cornerstone of Hebrew faith and a refuge in moments of distress. And yet, the prophets felt that to many of their contemporaries this cornerstone was a stumbling block; this refuge, an escape. They had to remind the people that chosenness must not be mistaken as divine favoritism or immunity from chastisement, but, on the contrary, that it meant being more seriously exposed to divine judgment and chastisement."

Abraham Heschel

Reflection Questions

I often picture other people as deserving God's judgment. How might I be deserving of judgement? In what ways have I refused to live a life that reflects God's hope?

How can I help people experience the reality of God's healing righteousness today?

Prayer

Creator God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs your light of hope. I also recognize that I have not always lived my life in view of the hope I have in You. Help me to remember that You are in control and that nothing can separate me from Your love. Help me to communicate your hope to a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

1

HOPE SATURDAY

The Light Has Come

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.

³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
for the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

¹⁹ The sun shall no longer be
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give light to you by night;
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

²⁰ Your sun shall no more go down,
or your moon withdraw itself;
for the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended.

Isaiah 60:1-5,19-22

Response

“For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day *give* us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on* the splendor of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth of prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get *in*.” *C.S. Lewis*.

Reflection Questions

Do I truly believe God's light has come into the world through the birth of Jesus? What in my life communicates that to the world?

Isaiah talks about how all peoples will one day come to God and experience His light. Today, what would it look like for me to help my neighbors see the glory of God? How can I help others find hope in Him?

Prayer

Creator God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs your light of hope. I also recognize that I have not always lived my life in view of the hope I have in You. Help me to remember that You are in control and that nothing can separate me from Your love. Help me to communicate your hope to a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

2

JOY SUNDAY

The Birth of Jesus

¹ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Luke 2:1-15

Response

"The Son of God made man was invited to enter His own world through a back door. Exiled from the earth, He was born under the earth, in a sense, the first Cave Man in recorded history. There He shook the earth to its very foundations. Because He was born in a cave, all who wish to see Him must stoop. To stoop is the mark of humility. The proud refuse to stoop and, therefore, miss Divinity. Those, however, who bend their egos and enter, find that they are not in a cave at all, but in a new universe where sits a Babe on His mother's lap, with the world poised on his fingers." *Fulton Sheen*

Reflection Questions

Jesus took on flesh as a poor baby in a nation under colonial domination. There wasn't too much to be happy about then, and there is still a lot wrong now. How is it still possible to find joy when so much is not right about the world?

In what ways is the news of Jesus a joy for me today?

How can I be a herald of joy today?

Prayer

Glorious God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of joy. **It's easy to be happy when everything is going well, but the world still needs the healing You bring.** Help me to not be overcome by the brokenness of the world. Today, help me to know the joy of Your Gospel and help me to let others know that joy as well. Amen

2

JOY MONDAY

The Visit of the Magi

¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Matthew 2:1-12

Response

From *Journey of the Magi*

"...All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and
death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death."
T.S. Eliot

Reflection Questions

Imagine the wise men's long journey and the joy they felt when it came to an end. What was my journey to Jesus like? Have I felt the joy of finding God?

Jesus' birth was a moment of joy, but He was also born so He could die for us, and that in His death we could die to ourselves and find new life. Have I allowed God to help me die to myself so that I could experience a life of love and joy?

Prayer

Glorious God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of joy. **It's easy to be happy when everything is going well, but** the world still needs the healing You bring. Help me to not be overcome by the brokenness of the world. Today, help me to know the joy of Your Gospel and help me to let others know that joy as well. Amen

2

JOY TUESDAY

Flight and Massacre

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." ²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."

Matthew 2:13-23

Response

"It was not so much that His birth cast a shadow on His life and thus led to His death; it was rather that the Cross was there from the beginning, and it cast its shadows backward to His birth... Before Christ was two years of age, there was a shedding of blood for his sake. It was the first attempt on His life. A sword for the Babe; stones for the Man; the Cross at the end. That was how his own received him." *Fulton Sheen*

Reflection Questions

Matthew records so much tragedy around the birth of Christ. What does it mean for me to know that joy took root in even the darkest of tragedies?

What is one area in my life that is overwhelming? What would it be like if God's joy invaded that area? What's stopping me from experiencing joy now?

How can I help other people find joy today?

Prayer

Glorious God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of joy. It's easy to be happy when everything is going well, but the world still needs the healing You bring. Help me to not be overcome by the brokenness of the world. Today, help me to know the joy of Your Gospel and help me to let others know that joy as well. Amen

2

JOY WEDNESDAY

The Coming Word

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

John 1:1-9

Response

"The leap of divine joy: God knows that the time has come when the mystery of salvation, hidden from the beginning of the world, will shine into human darkness and confusion. It is as if I can hear the Divine Persons saying, "Let us work the redemption of the whole human race; let us respond to the groaning of all creation."

Ignatius of Loyola

Reflection Questions

Ignatius calls this Incarnation the "leap of divine joy." Do I think of God's life, death, and resurrection as an expression of joy? How would it change my perspective of God if I did?

Joy seems impossible when darkness is everywhere, but God would not give up. Have I celebrated God's relentless love lately?

Where are the places in my surrounding community where it feels like darkness is overcoming the light? How can I help to keep the light shining?

Prayer

Glorious God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of joy. **It's easy to be happy when everything is going well, but the world still needs the healing You bring.** Help me to not be overcome by the brokenness of the world. Today, help me to know the joy of Your Gospel and help me to let others know that joy as well. Amen

2

JOY THURSDAY

The Word Enfleshed

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John 1:10-18

Response

“What a wonder that two natures infinitely distant should be more intimately united than anything in the world . . . that the same person should have both a glory and a grief; an infinite joy in the Deity, and an inexpressible sorrow in the humanity; that a God upon a throne should be an infant in a cradle; the thundering Creator be a weeping babe and a suffering man; [the incarnation astonishes] men upon earth, and angels in heaven”

Stephen Charnock

Reflection Questions

Doesn't God coming in human form actually sound pretty un-glorious? Why is “glory” a good way to talk about Incarnation?

How can I live today so that people can know about the joy and glory of Jesus?

Prayer

Glorious God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of joy. It's easy to be happy when everything is going well, but the world still needs the healing You bring. Help me to not be overcome by the brokenness of the world. Today, help me to know the joy of Your Gospel and help me to let others know that joy as well. Amen

2

JOY FRIDAY

The Testimony of John

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²²Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said,

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”

as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

John 1:19-28

Response

“John the Baptizer was a man of Joy because he was a man of true humility! Humility is a powerful weapon when wielded by a soldier of love like John. He was a man who understood that life wasn't all about him. He emptied himself willingly and was thus able to reveal Jesus to others. He was the “best man” at the wedding. His humility opened a space within him for true joy to take root and set him free! John is a sign of contradiction for this age, drunk on self worship and lost in narcissistic self absorption. John points us along the path to true freedom, a lifestyle of self emptying. “He must increase and I must decrease”. *Keith Fournier*

Reflection Questions

What are some of the ways I might be deceiving myself in regards to my own importance? Was there ever a time I didn't decrease when I should have? What were the results?

What is one thing I can do to foster a joyful humility today?

Prayer

Glorious God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of joy. It's easy to be happy when everything is going well, but the world still needs the healing You bring. Help me to not be overcome by the brokenness of the world. Today, help me to know the joy of Your Gospel and help me to let others know that joy as well. Amen.

2

JOY SATURDAY

The Lamb of God

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³²And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

John 1:29-36

Response

“Lamb of God! our souls adore Thee,
While upon Thy face we gaze;
There the Father’s love and glory
Shine in all their brightest rays;
Thine Almighty pow’r and wisdom
All creation’s works proclaim;
Heav’n and earth alike confess Thee
As the ever great “I AM.”

Lamb of God! When we behold Thee
Lowly in the manger laid,
Wand’ring as a homeless stranger
In the world Thy hands had made;
When we see Thee in the garden
In Thine agony of blood,
At Thy grace we are confounded,
Holy, spotless Lamb of God! “
James Deck

Reflection Questions

John announced to anyone who could hear that Jesus comes to take away the sins of the world. Have I celebrated what Jesus could mean for my neighbor?

John said Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Do I see the fruits of the Spirit in my life?

How can live so as to announce the good new of Jesus’s arrival today?

Prayer

Glorious God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of joy. It’s easy to be happy when everything is going well, but the world still needs the healing You bring. Help me to not be overcome by the brokenness of the world. Today, help me to know the joy of Your Gospel and help me to let others know that joy as well. Amen

3

PEACE SUNDAY

The Binding of Isaac (The Akedah)

¹ After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Genesis 20:1-14

Response

“When God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man's godforsakenness. In Jesus he does not die the natural death of a finite being, but the violent death of the criminal on the cross, the death of complete abandonment by God. The suffering in the passion of Jesus is abandonment, rejection by God, his Father. God does not become a religion, so that man participates in him by corresponding religious thoughts and feelings. God does not become a law, so that man participates in him through obedience to a law. God does not become an ideal, so that man achieves community with him through constant striving. He humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him.” *Jürgen Moltmann*

Reflection Questions

Jesus experienced God's abandonment on the cross. How have I felt abandoned by God recently? What does it mean to me that Jesus understands that feeling too?

Imagine the peace Abraham must have felt to know that God provided something else to sacrifice in place of Isaac. Have I experienced that sort of peace knowing God provided Jesus to die for me?

Prayer

Loving God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of peace. People are so divided and hatred and violence seems like a normal part of life, but I know that is not what You desire for the world. I can't wait until Your peace fills the earth. Until then, help me to know Your peace today, and help me be a peacemaker wherever I go. Amen.

3

PEACE MONDAY

Saved for the Law

¹ Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹² Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder. ¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ You shall not steal. ¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Genesis 20:1-7

Response

“In the Old Testament tradition, to obey means to listen to, or to pay attention to the Word of God. The Old Testament considers obedience a blessing because it is the foundation of the Covenant between Yahweh and the people. To listen to Yahweh, to pay attention to God's voice, is to follow God's statutes or to do God's will... [Obedience] is not a condition of being “Yahweh's “own possession”; rather, it is the characterization of *being* Yahweh's possession. Being the Covenant People *is* living as a redeemed people—in obedience (in submission and in a state of alert) to the Word of God. “ *Orlando E. Costas*

Reflection Questions

Sometimes “obedience” sounds like a dirty word. In what ways have I resisted being obedient to the life God has called me to? Why?

In what ways have I seen obedience to God's ways be a blessing in my life? Has it brought peace or trouble?

Prayer

Loving God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of peace. People are so divided and hatred and violence seems like a normal part of life, but I know that is not what You desire for the world. I can't wait until Your peace fills the earth. Until then, help me to know Your peace today, and help me be a peacemaker wherever I go. Amen.

3

PEACE TUESDAY

Comfort for Jerusalem

¹ Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord **has spoken.**"

¹⁰ See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Isaiah 40:1-5. 10-11

Response

“When do we receive real comfort and consolation? Is it when someone teaches us how to think or act? Is it when receive advice about where to go or what to do? Is it when we hear words of reassurance and hope? Sometimes, perhaps. But what really counts is that in moments of pain and suffering someone stays with us. More important than any particular action or word of advice is the simple presence of someone who cares.

[This] offers only a glimpse of what we mean when we say that God is a God-with-us, a God who came to share our lives in solidarity. It does not mean that God solves our problems, shows us the way out of our confusion, or offers answers to our many questions. He might do all of that, but his solidarity consists in the fact that he is willing to enter with us into our problems, confusions and questions.”
Henri Nouwen

Reflection Questions

What areas of my life do I feel worn-down, run-ragged?
What does God's promise of comfort mean for me in those areas today?

Who do I know needs some comforting today? What can I do to help them experience the comfort and peace of God?

Prayer

Loving God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of peace. People are so divided and hatred and violence seems like a normal part of life, but I know that is not what You desire for the world. I can't wait until Your peace fills the earth. Until then, help me to know Your peace today, and help me be a peacemaker wherever I go. Amen.

3

PEACE WEDNESDAY

John the Baptist's Birth Foretold

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. ¹⁰ Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹ Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." ¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." ¹⁹ The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

²¹ Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. ²² When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³ When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

Luke 1:8-23

Response

"Sometimes when we speak before great things we shrink them down to size. When we speak of great things sometimes we swallow them whole, when instead we should be swallowed by them. Before all greatness be silent, in art, in music, and above all in faith. " *Von Hügel*

Reflection Questions

Zechariah doubted God's ability to do what he said. In what ways do I doubt in God's ability to bring peace and salvation into my life?

What concerns and questions do I have for God? Have I ever asked them and then taken time to be silent? Have I given God a chance to respond? If not, maybe I should try.

Prayer

Loving God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of peace. People are so divided and hatred and violence seems like a normal part of life, but I know that is not what You desire for the world. I can't wait until Your peace fills the earth. Until then, help me to know Your peace today, and help me be a peacemaker wherever I go. Amen.

3

PEACE THURSDAY

The Annunciation

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38

Response

“Such ‘consent,’ given by Mary, is not merely private, but expresses the willing participation of man, of humanity, in the work of salvation. In the freedom of Mary, at that instant, were contained all the desires, fears, and hopes of man in need of redemption. And the New Eve spoke her full, total yes to the angel of light, just the first Eve had once spoken her yes to the angel of darkness. Moreover, the response given by Mary to the angel also expresses, in addition to her consent, a humble and unconditional dedication to the plan of God entrusted to her.”

Settimio M. Manelli

Reflection Questions

Mary's consent meant her life was being turned up side down. In what ways did Mary's acceptance of God's plan threaten her peaceful existence? Do you think she could still find peace in the midst of these challenges?

In what ways have I not participated in God's plan because I was afraid of the consequences?

Do I trust in God's promise of peace for myself today?

Prayer

Loving God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of peace. People are so divided and hatred and violence seems like a normal part of life, but I know that is not what You desire for the world. I can't wait until Your peace fills the earth. Until then, help me to know Your peace today, and help me be a peacemaker wherever I go. Amen.

3

PEACE FRIDAY

Joseph's Vision

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

Response

“There was a conflict raging in Joseph’s soul, Whether he believed Mary’s story or not, others would definitely not believe it, and he would live with gossip about an unfaithful wife for the rest of his life. But Joseph was both a godly man and a gracious man, and although his heart was breaking, he was leaning toward quietly terminating the relationship and sparing her any public embarrassment. **At least he was open to the Lord’s direction, but this angel, unlike the one who came to Mary, appeared in a dream.**

Could it have been a dream inspired by wishful thinking, or was this really a message from God? We have no doubt that it was from God, for Scripture plainly says so. But Joseph did not know that. He may have doubted it at first. But a growing assurance began to sweep over him and trust solidified in his searching soul. The issue was settled—it mattered not what wagging tongues would say; Joseph believed! It was probably the greatest act of trust ever exhibited between a man and woman.”

Richard L. Strauss

Reflection Questions

God’s plan didn’t make Joseph’s life easier. How can I find peace when life takes unexpected turns?

Joseph made a leap of faith and trusted in God. What might God be asking me to trust Him for today?

Prayer

Loving God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of peace. People are so divided and hatred and violence seems like a normal part of life, but I know that is not what You desire for the world. I can’t wait until Your peace fills the earth. Until then, help me to know Your peace today, and help me be a peacemaker wherever I go. Amen.

3

PEACE SATURDAY

The Birth of John the Baptist

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." ⁶¹ They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." ⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Luke 1:57-67, 76-79

Response

“Here and there an individual or group dares to love, and rises to the majestic heights of moral maturity. So in a real sense this is a great time to be alive. Therefore, I am not yet discouraged about the future. Granted that the easy-going optimism of yesterday is impossible. Granted that those who pioneer in the struggle for peace and freedom will still face uncomfortable jail terms, painful threats of death; they will still be battered by the storms of persecution, leading them to the nagging feeling that they can no longer bear such a heavy burden, and the temptation of wanting to retreat to a more quiet and serene life. Granted that we face a world crisis which leaves us standing so often amid the surging murmur of life's restless sea. But every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities. It can spell either salvation or doom. In a dark confused world the kingdom of God may yet reign in the hearts of men.” *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Reflection Questions

John's life was bent on a mission: to prepare the dark for the light. Is it possible to find peace in a world that is so dark?

What, right now, is making it hard to find peace in my life? Have I invited God to help me face it?

What does the struggle to prepare the way for peace mean for me today?

Prayer

Loving God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of peace. People are so divided and hatred and violence seems like a normal part of life, but I know that is not what You desire for the world. I can't wait until Your peace fills the earth. Until then, help me to know Your peace today, and help me be a peacemaker wherever I go. Amen.

4

LOVE SUNDAY

A New Heaven and a New Earth

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Revelation 21:1-8

Response

“There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impentetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.” C.S. Lewis

Reflection Questions

God promises a day when He will once again take up residence with mortals. Coupled with the Incarnation, what does that say about the nature of God's love?

Lewis defines Hell as a life divorced from the dangers of love. In what ways have I created a mini-Hell for myself by choosing not to love?

If I decided to choose to love someone better today, what concrete thing would I do? What's stopping me from doing that?

Prayer

Powerful God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of love. Fear of the other, lack of trust, and the disdain of difference clouds the world's eyes with hate. And even though I try to resist it, hate still seeps into my own heart at times. Today, I ask that you help me to know the clarity of Your compassion—to see as You see and love as Jesus loved. Amen.

4

LOVE MONDAY

The Mountain of the Lord

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, ² and many nations shall come and say:

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ³ He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; ⁴ but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

⁵ For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

⁶ In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted. ⁷ The lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore.

Micah 4:1-7

Response

“As long as we see salvation in terms of going to heaven when we die, the main work of the church is bound to be seen in terms of saving souls for that future. But when we see salvation, as the New Testament sees it, in terms of **God’s promised new heavens and new earth and of our promised resurrection to share in that new and gloriously embodied reality—what I have called life after life after death—then the main work of the church here and now demands to be rethought in consequence.**” *N.T. Wright*

Reflection Questions

The “mountain of the Lord’s house” is an image of the new heavens and the new earth. What sort of world is God promising we will be part of?

Do I believe God wants me to be part of that world? How does that make me feel?

Wright thinks the work of the new heaven and earth has already begun in Jesus, and that we can join in now. What is one thing I could do today that would communicate the love of God as expressed in Micah 4:1-7?

Prayer

Powerful God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of love. Fear of the other, lack of trust, and the disdain of **difference clouds the world’s eyes with hate. And even though I try to resist it, hate still seeps into my own heart at times.** Today, I ask that you help me to know the clarity of Your compassion—to see as You see and love as Jesus loved. Amen.

4

LOVE TUESDAY

A Song of Victory

¹ O sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm
have gotten him victory.

² The Lord has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of nations.

³ He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

⁴ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

⁵ Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.

⁸ Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy

⁹ at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

Psalm 98

Response

"There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, *we are infinitely loved*. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet **firm trust, even amid the greatest distress**"

Jorge Mario Bergoglio

Reflection Questions

In what ways do I feel like I am currently suffering or grieving? Does God's promise of love and faithfulness change how I experience suffering and grief?

The world is full of chaos, and that can make it hard to be vulnerable enough to love. What is keeping me from loving God and others today? How can Jesus help me be open to love?

Prayer

Powerful God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of love. Fear of the other, lack of trust, and the disdain of **difference clouds the world's eyes with hate. And even though I try to resist it, hate still seeps into my own heart at times.** Today, I ask that you help me to know the clarity of Your compassion—to see as You see and love as Jesus loved. Amen.

4

LOVE WEDNESDAY

A Song of Incarnation

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

Response

“God travels wonderful ways with human beings, but he does not comply with the views and opinions of people. God does not go the way that people want to prescribe for him; rather, his way is beyond all comprehension, free and self-determined beyond all proof. Where reason is indignant, where our nature rebels, where our piety anxiously keeps us away: that is precisely where God loves to be. There he confounds the reason of the reasonable; there he aggravates our nature, our piety—that is where he wants to be, and no one can keep him from it. Only the humble believe him and rejoice that God is so free and so marvelous that he does wonders where people despair, that he takes what is little and lowly and makes it marvelous. And that is the wonder of all wonders, that **God loves the lowly.... God is not ashamed of the lowliness of human beings.** God marches right in. He chooses people as his instruments and performs his wonders where one would least expect them. God is near to lowliness; he loves the lost, the neglected, the unseemly, the excluded, the weak and broken.” *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Reflection Questions

Is there anything keeping me from experiencing the love of God on God's terms? Pride? Piety? Fear?

What is one concrete thing I can do today to cultivate that same sort loving humility I see in Christ?

Prayer

Powerful God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of love. Fear of the other, lack of trust, and the disdain of **difference clouds the world's eyes with hate.** And even though I try to resist it, hate still seeps into my own heart at times. Today, I ask that you help me to know the clarity of Your compassion—to see as You see and love as Jesus loved. Amen.

4

LOVE THURSDAY

Redeemed and Purified

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all,¹² training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly,¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you.

^{3:1} Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 2:11– 3:7

Response

“But the man who is not afraid to admit everything that he sees to be wrong with himself, and yet recognizes that he may be the object of God’s love precisely because of his shortcomings, can begin to be sincere. His sincerity is based on confidence, not in his own illusions about himself, but in the endless, unfailing mercy of God.”

Thomas Merton

Meditation

What areas of my life do I act like God’s love can’t make a difference? Where am I still disobedient?

Can I confess those areas to God and invite God to change me in love?

Prayer

Powerful God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of love. Fear of the other, lack of trust, and the disdain of **difference clouds the world’s eyes with hate. And even though I try to resist it, hate still seeps into my own heart at times.** Today, I ask that you help me to know the clarity of Your compassion—to see as You see and love as Jesus loved. Amen.

4

LOVE FRIDAY

The Day of Judgement

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Matthew 25:31-43,46

Response

"I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry.

Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love." *Miroslav Volf*

Reflection Questions

Does my wrath come from my love for others and the world? If not, where does it come from?

We like to think of others as deserving judgment, but sometimes wrathful love has something to say to us. What might God be convicting me of today? Where have I refused to love?

Prayer

Powerful God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of love. Fear of the other, lack of trust, and the disdain of difference clouds the world's eyes with hate. And even though I try to resist it, hate still seeps into my own heart at times. Today, I ask that you help me to know the clarity of Your compassion—to see as You see and love as Jesus loved. Amen.

4

LOVE SATURDAY

New Songs To the Lord

⁶ Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. ⁸ When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ They sing a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; ¹⁰ you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

Revelation 5:6-13

Response

"All the words and events of the Old Covenant had great value, meaning and dignity in and of themselves. But they also pointed forward to a greater covenant, to a person who was the Word made flesh, to a Lamb who saved Israel from a deeper slavery than Pharaoh's, to an event that would be the culminating moment in human history. The Word came as a spotless Lamb to offer the perfect sacrifice of love that would outweigh all human evil and therefore take away all sins. The Shepherd offered his blood for our sins and his body as our new Passover meal, to give his sheep the strength to become lambs like him who offer their lives for the life of the world."

Marcellino D'Ambrosio

Reflection Questions

In my own life, how have I seen people demonstrate love through the sacrifices they made? Have I ever acknowledged that sacrifice?

Jesus was crucified so that I might escape the punishment of my own sin. Have I taken the time to thank Jesus for that sacrifice recently?

We are meant to do our best in imitating Jesus. Do I sacrifice anything for God? If so, what? If not, what sacrifice might God be calling me to make so others can come to know His love?

Prayer

Powerful God! As I wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I recognize how much the world still needs Your light of love. Fear of the other, lack of trust, and the disdain of difference clouds the world's eyes with hate. And even though I try to resist it, hate still seeps into my own heart at times. Today, I ask that you help me to know the clarity of Your compassion—to see as You see and love as Jesus loved. Amen.

C

CHRISTMAS SUNDAY

A Child Is Born

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³ You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴ For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:2-7

Response

“Joy to the World , the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.”

Prayer

Saving God! Today I celebrate the day the light of Jesus came into the world. It proves once and for all that you have not forsaken us and that you are with us even in that darkest of times. Today I celebrate because you have done it, salvation has come, God is with us! Amen!

1

THE WREATH CANDLE OF HOPE

Lighting

Today, we are lighting the first candle Advent, the candle of hope. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we wait in hope for the day God completes what Jesus started, the day God's kingdom restores the world in justice and mercy. Our hope is in Jesus; we know God will do it!

Reading

The Message Isaiah got regarding Judah and Jerusalem:

There's a day coming

when the mountain of God's House

Will be The Mountain—

solid, towering over all mountains.

All nations will river toward it,

people from all over set out for it.

They'll say, "Come,

let's climb God's Mountain,

go to the House of the God of Jacob.

He'll show us the way he works

so we can live the way we're made."

Zion's the source of the revelation.

God's Message comes from Jerusalem.

He'll settle things fairly between nations.

He'll make things right between many peoples.

They'll turn their swords into shovels,

their spears into hoes.

No more will nation fight nation;

they won't play war anymore.

Come, family of Jacob,

let's live in the light of God.

Isaiah 2:1-5

Reflection

Everything is not how it should be. We look around and we know that things should be different. Things like war and hate and even death feel wrong. Isaiah tells us that **this feeling isn't make-believe**. He says that there is a day coming when things will be made right. He sees a time **when God's justice and love will flow over the earth** and all peoples will find reconciliation in Zion. Though we forget, the truth is this vision is already coming true. When Jesus came into the world, he started the ball rolling, and one day he will return to finish the job. As we wait to celebrate the coming of Jesus, we look forward in hope, knowing that he will finish what he started.

Prayer

God, we look around and can see that world is full of darkness, but we wait for Your light of hope to transform it. We pray that those who have lost hope can find it in You, and that we can become vessels of Your hope for the world. Amen.

Singing: O Holy Night

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the Spirit felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born;
O night, O holy night, O night divine!
O night, O holy night, O night divine!

Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

2

THE WREATH CANDLE OF JOY

Lighting

Today, we light the second candle of Advent, the candle of joy. As we wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we wait joyfully because the Christmas story reminds us that God is always with us. Even when life is hard and our feet are tired, we can find joy because Jesus has opened our eyes to see God's never-ending love for us.

Reading

And Mary said,

I'm bursting with God-news;

I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.

God took one good look at me, and look what happened—

I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!

What God has done for me will never be forgotten,

the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.

His mercy flows in wave after wave

on those who are in awe before him.

He bared his arm and showed his strength,

scattered the bluffing braggarts.

He knocked tyrants off their high horses,

pulled victims out of the mud.

The starving poor sat down to a banquet;

the callous rich were left out in the cold.

He embraced his chosen child, Israel;

he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.

It's exactly what he promised,

beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

Luke 1:46-55

Reflection

Mary rejoiced because she recognized the amazing thing God was doing in her life and in the world around her. Things were finally being set right, justice for the poor and oppressed had finally arrived. For some reason, **that's not the reaction a lot of people have to Jesus. People often see Him as this boring, moralistic teacher, but the truth is Jesus was a revolution. He transformed how we thought about God, ourselves and the world. He re-defined who was in and who was out, who had power and who didn't. Jesus showed us that God's salvation is better and more different than we could ever imagine. Yet, the work of Christ's salvation is still not over, the world still needs fixing. We can rejoice because we are in on the secret of the cosmos, that God is making all things new, and that the joy of God can break into our lives no matter what is going on.**

Prayer

God, we look around and can see that world is full of darkness, but we wait for Your light of joy to transform mourning into dancing. Life has ups and downs, but in every moment, Your love for us is there. Help us to experience the joy of the gospel, the good news that nothing can separate us from You. Amen.

Singing: Joy to the World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come.
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart
Prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and heaven and nature sing

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy

3

THE WREATH CANDLE OF PEACE

Lighting

Today, we are lighting the third candle of Advent, the candle of peace. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we remember that like us, Jesus was not born into a world of peace. He knew the pains of violence, anger, poverty, and death. Yet, through Him, we know that these things do not have the final say. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and we wait for his peace to fill the earth.

Reading

A green Shoot will sprout from Jesse's stump,
from his roots a budding Branch.
The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him,
the Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength,
the Spirit that instills knowledge and Fear-of-God.
Fear-of-God
will be all his joy and delight.
He won't judge by appearances,
won't decide on the basis of hearsay.
He'll judge the needy by what is right,
render decisions on earth's poor with justice.
His words will bring everyone to awed attention.
A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.
Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots,
and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.
The wolf will romp with the lamb,
the leopard sleep with the kid.
Calf and lion will eat from the same trough,
and a little child will tend them.
The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God,
a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.

On that day, Jesse's Root will be raised high, posted as a rallying banner for the peoples. The nations will all come to him. His headquarters will be glorious.

Isaiah 11:1-10

Reflection

Peace is a valuable commodity. The kids screaming. The boss grumbling. The people fighting. The planes bombing. The world, from the smallest part of it, to the largest feels pretty unpeaceful. Yet, God promises that a root of Jesse will rise up and fix all of this. Jesus is that root. By coming to live with us, die for us, and then be raised for us, Jesus has experienced all the brokenness and chaos the world has to offer, and He's overcome it! In Jesus the world can come to know the power and glory of God, and find a peace that transcends everything the world can throw at it.

Prayer

God, we look around and can see that world is full of darkness, but we wait for Your light of peace to make the world whole again. The world knows pain and hate too well, but in You there is peace that passes all understanding. Help us to experience that peace today. Amen.

Singing: Silent Night

Silent night, holy night / All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace, / Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night! / Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing "Alleluia"
Christ, the Saviour is born, / Christ, the Saviour is born

Silent night, holy night / Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, / Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth

4

THE WREATH CANDLE OF LOVE

Lighting

Today, we light the fourth candle of Advent, the candle of love. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we long for the love of God to touch every heart. God sent His Son to live and die because He loved the world, but the world could not recognize this kind of love. We pray God would help us to love like Jesus, so the world could recognize God's love in us.

Reading

Upon entering, Gabriel greeted Mary: Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you.

She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus. He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest.' The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; He will rule Jacob's house forever— no end, ever, to his kingdom."

Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."

The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you; Therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God.

"And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God."

And Mary said, Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say. Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:27-38

Reflection

Mary reminds us that God's love for the world isn't just an emotion, it takes flesh and blood and concrete action. God's love took on flesh and came into the world as a baby. God's love wasn't just a feeling, he moved in next door and lived life with us. It is amazing to think that you could have wrapped your arms around the Creator of the Cosmos. But, we should remember we only could because Mary let that love first transform and disrupt her own comfortable life. God's love is something we all have the chance to participate in. The world needs God's love today just as much as it did during her time. The only question is: are we willing to let it transform us?

Prayer

God, we look around and can see that world is full of darkness, but we wait for Your light of love to heal us. Hate is too common in our world. Forgiveness is hard to come by. Let Your love transform our hearts so others might know You through us. Amen.

Singing: O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem, / how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth / the everlasting Light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, / and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.

O morning stars, together / proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all on earth.

5

THE WREATH CANDLE OF CHRISTMAS

Lighting

Today, we light the final candle, the candle of Christmas! God has done it; Jesus has been born; the hope of the world has arrived! Today we celebrate because God has taken on flesh and moved into the neighborhood. God hasn't forgotten us, he's moved in next door and nothing has been the same since! He is Emmanuel, God with us!

Reading

While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger." At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.

Luke 2:6-16

Prayer

God, today we celebrate that the light of the world has come! That darkness does not have the final say, and that we are free to live lives of hope, peace, love and joy. Help us celebrate the good news of Jesus, today and every other day! Amen.

Singing Reflection: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"
Peace on earth, and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled
Joyful all ye nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies
With th'angelic host proclaim
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ, by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting lord
Late in time behold him come
Offspring of the favored one
Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see
Hail incarnate deity
Pleased, as man with men to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

oh, oh, oh, ah

Hail! the heav'n born prince of peace!
Hail! the son of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings
Ris'n with healing in his wings

Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

