



Love's Pure Light

 Dwell

An Advent Devotional

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Introduction

Advent is a journey, and like any journey worth taking, it is best taken with friends. In this season, we remember that our Lord drew near to reconcile *the world* to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). We do not journey in isolation, but as the family of God, filled with hope and anticipation. While much of this guide is designed for personal use, it is good to remember that you are joined by fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, people who are filled with similar doubts and struggles, yet who share the same trust in the goodness and mercy of God shown in the Incarnation.

Depending on whom you ask, most experts believe you can form a lasting habit in as few as 21 days. And so, though this Advent guide is a 27-day journey with a de-fined start and finish line, it is meant to form *lasting* routines and patterns of living that persist long after the season ends. For this reason, you may notice a good bit of repetition in the pages that follow. We read the same or similar passages of Scripture several days in a row. Every day we receive classic wisdom from men or women that have gone ahead of us. We repeat the same prayers and reflect upon similar themes, and the recommended daily practices build upon one another and are closely linked. All of this is intentional, inviting us to *slow down* and tend to the work of God in our lives, forging new and lasting habits that draw us ever closer to him.

Over the coming weeks, very few things in your life will naturally encourage you to attentively rest in the presence of God. We are instead encouraged to anxiously rush from one party to the next, from last-minute shopping to family gatherings. And if we aren't intentional, this is exactly what will happen. Instead, amid it all, may we learn this Advent to simply *dwell* with Christ, God with us.



Week 1

DAY 1

A Hidden Coming

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 1
Isaiah 64:1-9 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 Mark 13:24-37

There is a birth from God before the ages, and a birth from a virgin at the fullness of time. There is a hidden coming, like that of rain on fleece, and a coming before all eyes, still in the future.

—ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

This time of year, our culture is bathed in the warm glow of holiday lights. Even the most hardened skeptic's resolve is tested by a steady stream of nostalgic films, music, meals, and customs, and at the center of this sentimentality lies a baby in a manger. At the mention of this babe it is difficult to think of anything other than the traditional nativity scene, with Mary, Joseph, Wise Men, and a smattering of barnyard animals, all reverently paying tribute to the newborn king. Timeless as this picture may be, it is an incomplete and one-sided understanding of the nature and purpose of Christ's birth.

In Advent, we see both the humility and power of God on display. In Christ, we encounter God entering into the chaos and brokenness of our world, taking it upon himself to heal, redeem, and restore. Yet simultaneously, it is a birth that shakes the earth to its very core. The same power that tears the veil in two, splits rocks, and opens tombs is contained in the frailty and vulnerability of an infant child (Mt. 27:51-53).

In Jesus, the prayer of Isaiah 64:1 is definitively answered. "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence." Advent literally means "coming" or "approach," and as the people of God we are invited every year to enter attentively into a season of holy anticipation. As we do, let us never lose sight of the true nature of the king that came, and will come again.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

In a season filled with busyness and distraction, this week you are invited to focus on the practice of **prayer**. To begin, reflect today on *where* you pray. Do you have a dedicated place of prayer in your home? If not, take time to identify a location where you will pray daily during this Advent season, as well as simple ways to make this space reverent and set apart for the Lord.

DAY 2

All Shall Be Well

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 2
Psalm 79 Micah 4:1-5 Revelation 15:1-8

*It is true that sin is cause of all this pain; but all shall be well,
and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.*

—JULIAN OF NORWICH

Advent forces us to confront our brokenness within and the chaos without. Though it defies contemporary logic, sin is a sickness for which we are unable to find a lasting cure. No amount of technological advancement or scientific enquiry will yield a solution to this timeless problem. For this reason, Advent developed in the Church as a penitential season of preparation. As God draws near, we are invited to grieve the way in which sin alienates us from Christ and one another. We acknowledge our need for the mercy and compassion of our Lord. As the Psalmist cries out, “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name’s sake” (Ps. 79:9).

Themes of light and darkness feature heavily in the Scripture readings during this season. In the ancient world, electricity and artificial light were foreign concepts. In-stead, in Scripture we frequently encounter images of the fiery presence of God. It is this wild and untamable light that pierces even the deepest darkness. It is a fire that consumes and burns as it draws near. And confusing as it may seem at first, this is pro-foundly good news!

Christians are meant to be aflame with the life of God. Like the burning bush of old, we are invited to be filled with the fire of God yet not consumed or destroyed by it. The approaching fire of God is meant for our healing, never our harm. The Lord loves us more than we know how to love ourselves, and as we open up to the healing flame of his love, we rest in the promise that all shall be well.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Today, take time to consider *when* you pray. Just like a healthy diet or exercise plan, you need a predictable routine in order to grow in the life of prayer. While we can and should pray anywhere and at all times, our life with God is strengthened when we establish intentional and predictable patterns of prayer.

DAY 3

True Happiness



Open Dwell and listen to Day 3

Psalm 79 Micah 4:6-13 Revelation 18:1-10

You seek a happy life in a land of the dying: it is not there. How could a life be happy where life is missing? Our life, our true Life, descended into the world, took our death upon his back and destroyed it with the superabundance of his life.

—ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Advent is fundamentally a journey of love. In this sense, it is a season of heightened attentiveness, reminding us of what is true in every time and every place. It is the love of God that draws near in Christ, it is the Spirit of God that nourishes and sustains us along our way, and it is perfect union with God the Father that remains the aim and destination of our lives. And while we know this to be true in the core of our being, so often life is lived shortsighted and easily distracted, pulled to one side or the other by lesser loves that promise fulfillment, yet leave us hollow and disfigured.

In order to encounter the love of God this Advent season, you must be willing to turn away from the desires that leave you spiritually blind and numb. As Revelation reminds us, we live in a world, like Babylon of old, drunk on sexual desire, power, and luxury. The solution? “Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

True happiness is not found in absolute freedom but in a life aligned with the virtues and values of the kingdom of God. The ways of the Lord are never for your harm but are for your healing. You are set free to receive a love that makes you truly human, and in turn a love that so transforms your heart and mind that you are *sent*, turned outwards to give your life away as a gift of love for the life of the world. This is the true spirit of Advent, and where happiness is always to be found.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

In the spirit of “heightened attentiveness,” take time today to be *fully* present to God in prayer. It is easy to squeeze prayer in alongside a dozen other activities. Instead, carve out undistracted time with God, learning to listen afresh for his still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-12).

DAY 4

Humble Glory

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 4
Psalm 79 Micah 5:1-5a Luke 21:34-38

A sublime being entering into a relationship with such a lowly being does no harm to his own reputation, yet raises that other being up from its lowliness: this is precisely what was fulfilled in Christ. He did not diminish his divine nature in any way by this lowering of himself, yet we who had been living in darkness and disgrace were raised up to ineffable glory.

—ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

At the heart of the Christian faith lies the belief that God sees, loves, and welcomes the forgotten, the marginalized, and the downhearted. In a world that values and celebrates the strong and powerful, time and time again, in word and deed, Jesus re-minds us that weakness and humility are the way to glory and the path of lasting peace. In this way, Advent is a persistent reminder of the upside down nature of God's kingdom.

The lowliness of the Incarnation was foretold long ago. As Micah reminds us, it is from Bethlehem, "one of the little clans of Judah," that the true king of Israel will come, one who "shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD (Mic. 5:2, 4). From these humble origins, Jesus continues to invite us to tend to that which is of-ten overlooked, neglected, and undervalued. Do not be weighed down by the worries of this life (Lk. 21:34), but learn to see the glory of God breaking in all around you. It is the mustard seed that grows to give shade and rest to all who draw near (Mt. 13:31-32). It is yeast, small and unseen, that leavens the entire loaf (Lk. 13:20-21).

In a season filled with countless distractions and sources of potential stress, it is easy to ignore the humble hope of Advent and the tender

compassion of our Lord. Similarly, we may be tempted to believe that the cares of life are of little interest to our Lord. Surely, he has more important things demanding his time and attention! Yet in the quiet humility of the manger in Bethlehem, we are reminded once again, there is not a single concern that goes unnoticed, nor any sorrow left unhealed.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

The *words* that we use in prayer reveal our assumptions about God and how we relate to him. It is for this reason that Jesus teaches us, first and foremost, that God is “Our Father.” While personal, spontaneous prayers are always appropriate and encouraged, take time today to also pray the words our Lord has taught us to pray (Mt. 6:9-13).

DAY 5

Let Us Return

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 5
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Hosea 6:1-6 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

*Repentance itself is nothing but a kind of circling: to turn to the
One by re-pentance from whom, by sin, we have turned away.*

—LANCELOT ANDREWES

To live as a Christian, one must learn to be comfortable with tension. Though it is not as simple as we might prefer, wisdom is found in holding seemingly contradictory ideas in proximity to one another. Take, for example, the ancient words given to us today from Hosea 6: “Come, let us return to the LORD.” Within this single phrase we are confronted with the reality of our own initiative and responsibility to tend to our life with God, as well as the fact that any genuine return to God is first made possible by his movement towards us.

In Advent, as our Lord draws near, we must actively examine the condition of our lives. Are we ready to greet him upon his arrival? In this way, repentance always lies at the heart of faithful preparation. To repent is to not only to feel sorrow over the effect of sin in your heart and life, but it is equally an act of the will, purposefully turning away from sin and death and taking on habits that lead us into places of peace.

You can passionately pursue God without falling into the trap of anxious toil or self-assured living. In fact, the Incarnation of God is the end of all striving. As we “press on to know the LORD” (Hos. 6:3), we do so knowing that it is God in Christ Jesus who heals us, raises us up, and makes us whole. Advent reminds us that we have work to do, inviting us to take seriously the call to holy and faithful living. Yet this way of life is not of our making, but is a gift to be received, like spring rain that falls to water the parched earth.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

While prayer is meant to be a conversation with God, so often it is a one-way monologue in which we rarely stop to simply *listen* to God. In many ways, a posture of listening is a physical embodiment of a life free from all striving. As you pray today, however long you spend speaking to God in prayer, take at least the same amount of time listening for his still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-12).

DAY 6

True Knowledge

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 6
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Jeremiah 1:4-10 Acts 11:19-26

I beg and beesech you, Lord: grant to all who have gone astray a true knowledge of you, so that each and every one may come to know your glory.

—ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

In keeping with St. Paul's words in Romans 12, Christians in every age are invited to be "transformed by the renewing of the mind." Yet as people who live this side of the printing press, not to mention the internet or the iPhone, how are we to understand these ancient words when endless mental stimulation and information lies just a few swipes or clicks away? While the mind can and should be renewed, it must never be isolated from the holistic transformation of being that is envisioned in and through the Incarnation.

Jesus took on the fullness of humanity so that humanity in its fullness might be re-deemed. We must never forget, God wants to be known! As the Psalms remind us to-day, though we have all gone astray and live in self-made exile, our Lord in his kindness speaks to us and makes us able to hear (Ps. 85:8). True knowledge of God is never the abstract acquisition of facts but is an embodied encounter with the living Christ.

Cliché as it may sound, we must remember that it is possible to live with a wealth of information about God without ever encountering his living presence. Faith must never be reduced to a mental pursuit. Advent teaches us that God loves his creatures in our *creatureliness*, so much so that he takes human nature upon himself. Every sense given to you is a gift from God that is able to lead you closer to him as you journey from this life into glory.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Sometimes in life we need physical reminders that draw us out of our minds and into the world around us. Find ways today to pray using your *entire being*. Perhaps you pray with a lit candle or image of Christ nearby that helps focus your thoughts and prayers. Or, consider going on a walk in nature, giving thanks to God as you do for the beauty and wonder of his creation.

DAY 7

Becoming Human

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 7
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Ezekiel 36:24-28 Mark 11:27-33

Maintain the conviction that our disorderliness is not natural to us, and do not listen to those who say, 'It is no use talking about it, because that is just how we are made, and you cannot do anything about it.' That is not how we are made, and if we undertake to cure ourselves, then we will be able to do some-thing about it.

—ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

To live as a follower of Jesus is to believe that transformation is possible. It is to profess through word and deed that we are not finished products, neither has our journey reached its final destination. Whatever keeps you up at night or leaves you anxious during the day does not have to forever define who you are or who you will be, yet it is remarkably easy to fall into this way of thinking, is it not? “I’ve always been this way,” we say, throwing our hands up in defeat. Though common and understandable, we must begin to see that there is nothing inherently *Christian* about this way of viewing the world, or our place within it.

It is possible to live your entire life and never become truly human. In many ways, this is one of the primary insights we are meant to glean from this season of preparation. Though we may eat, sleep, laugh, and cry, we are capable in the process of missing the end for which we were created, namely, to share in the very life of God. In taking on flesh and bones, Jesus condescends and speaks to us “at our level.” Yet the heart of his message was, is, and will forever be one of growth, becoming something we previously were not.

As God promises in Ezekiel 36:26, "I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Fundamentally, this is a promise of transformation. It is a reminder that one can live without being truly alive. In short, it is an invitation to become fully human.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

If you don't have one already, consider beginning a *prayer journal* this Advent. As we journey through this life, it is important to remember where we've been along the way, and more significantly, who we have become in the process. A simple record of your life with God can serve as a source of encouragement and a reminder of his faithfulness in your life, especially in seasons when you may be prone to forget or doubt his goodness and love for you.



Week 2

DAY 8

Pointing to Christ

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 8
Isaiah 40:1-11 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 2 Peter 3:8-15a Mark 1:1-8

*Where there is no fear, in like manner there is no amendment;
where there is no amendment, repentance is of necessity vain, for
it lacks the fruit for which God sowed it; that is, man's salvation.*

—TERTULLIAN

Have you ever looked at an ancient icon or historic Christian painting and struggled to tell what's going on? If so, you're in good company! While appreciating the beauty and reverence of these timeless works, the modern viewer is often left in the dark, unclear on who and what is depicted, and by extension, how to properly engage and appreciate such artwork. However, there is one figure that can always be easily identified: John the Baptist. How, you may ask? By his finger.

Though commonly remembered for his unique diet and dramatic dress, John the Baptist's *finger* is in many ways his most defining feature, for with it he fulfills his primary role in the story of salvation. John *points* us to Christ, showing us where to go when we are disoriented. He helps us look afresh to Christ when we are confused and cannot see a way forward. In short, he reminds us, often with great passion and urgency, where our focus is meant to be.

In this second week of Advent, we focus on the themes of *preparation* and *repentance*. As Isaiah 40:3 reminds us, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." In the busyness of this holiday sea-son, your focus is likely scattered and pulled in a dozen different directions. Yet into this noise, each year Christians are invited again to tune their hearts to the ancient words of the prophet who proclaimed "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk. 1:4).

Our Lord is coming. May he find us ready and waiting.

Prayer for the Week

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

It is impossible to give ourselves fully to multiple passions or pursuits. As such, we will take time this week to practice **fasting**, a timeless discipline that encourages *attentiveness* by eliminating distraction. To this end, consider today fasting from *noise* in a way that makes sense for your context. Perhaps you take a break from TV, music, or podcasts. Go for a walk. Drive in the car with the radio off. Be creative, but remember, we say “no” in order to say “yes” to something better!

DAY 9

Heavenly Peace

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 9
Psalm 27 Isaiah 26:7-15 Acts 2:37-42

Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved.

—ST. SERAPHIM OF SAROV

As countless carols, films, and family customs fill the season, it is easy to pass through these weeks bathed in a warm, nostalgic glow. As we sing each year, “All is calm, all is bright.” And while we can joyfully celebrate this season as one of “heavenly peace,” we shouldn’t too quickly associate this peace with undisturbed tranquility. In truth, the Incarnation of Christ was anything but calm, with earthly powers immediately disturbed and outraged by the birth of this newborn king (Mt. 2).

Peace is not the absence of conflict but is the presence of God in the midst of chaos. The psalmist reminds us of this, saying, “Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident” (Ps. 27:3). They knew in their bones something we are daily prone to forget: peace is not circumstantial but is given freely by God as a gift. It is therefore possible to live in deeply painful and disorienting seasons and yet remain a person of profound peace.

There is a persistent temptation to tie inner peace to outer calm. And while some chapters of life are simpler or less stressful than others, we can never *guarantee* a life free from all conflict or distress. As Jesus himself reminds us, “In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world” (Jn. 16:33)! It does us no good to anxiously worry about the challenges we face in life. Instead, we are invited daily to live free from all fear, not as a form of blind optimism, but instead deeply rooted in the victory of God won in Jesus.

Prayer for the Week

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Often, anxiety manifests itself through a life of constant *hurry*. We are free from hurry when we learn to rest in the peace of God. So today, choose to fast from hurry. If you share a meal with others, make it a point to be the last to finish. Or, if making a purchase in a store, intentionally choose the longest line and learn to resist the urge to rush to the next thing!

DAY 10

All Things New

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 10
Psalm 27 Isaiah 4:2-6 Acts 11:1-18

For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.

—ST. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS

Repentance is a reminder that God loves to heal that which is sick and restore all that is disfigured. If there is no possibility for renewal, then why bother with repentance in the first place? To repent is not only to acknowledge one's sin and shortcomings, but it is to look ahead with hope and the unshakable belief that God will not leave us as we are but will make us by grace what Jesus is by nature.

In fact, this is one of the most helpful ways to reflect upon the Incarnation during this Advent season. Jesus did not enter our world because he was lonely, neither was he forced to do so by some divine decree. Love has been and always will be the only lens through which the birth of Christ can be properly understood. To truly love is to desire the good of the other. When God sees humanity suffering and lost in sin, he looks upon us with compassion, longing to free us from “the sin that clings so closely” (Heb. 12:1).

Through our love of self and pursuit of comfort, we walk in alienation from God and one another. We are, like the Israelites of old, covered in filth and our hands are stained with blood (Is. 4:4). Harsh as this may sound, this realization is the beginning of true repentance. Only when we see our sickness for what it is can we begin to appreciate the healing medicine offered to us by our loving Lord.

Prayer for the Week

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

As today's reflection reminds us, we must learn to be free from love of self. Choose today to fast from *self-interest*. It has been said that true humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking about yourself less. Put this into practice by going the entire day without looking at yourself in a mirror!

DAY 11

Ready and Waiting

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 11
Psalm 27 Malachi 2:10-3:1 Luke 1:5-17

Idleness is the enemy of the soul.

—RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

If you've ever hosted guests for a meal, you know the routine. For hours prior to their arrival, you diligently prepare the food, meticulously clean your home, and make yourself ready to welcome them when they arrive. If you succeed, all of this will *appear* effortless, as though you just happened to throw it all together at the last minute! The aim is to be ready and *waiting*. With the preparation and hard work behind you, all that is left is to turn your attention fully to the guest of honor.

In many ways, Advent is the cooking and cleaning that must be done to properly welcome our guest. This is not work for work's sake, busy just to be busy, or a superficial concern with appearance. No, it is paradoxically the path to true freedom and rest. When proper preparations are made, we can live with a *singular* focus and devotion, not concerned with the weight of the world or duties of our lives.

Preparation of heart and mind allows us to attend to Christ at his coming. We lay aside all earthly cares in order to offer him our full attention and devotion. Do not mistakingly conflate busyness with faithfulness, nor idleness with peace of soul. We must learn to be perfectly at rest while remaining fully attentive. Only then, in the words of Luke 1, will we be “a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk. 1:17).

Prayer for the Week

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

It is impossible to focus on Christ and judge others at the same time! Today, fast from *gossip* and resist the urge to speak ill of your brother or sister. Instead, when you feel tempted to give voice to your criticism, pray The Jesus Prayer, remembering your own need for mercy and forgiveness. “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

DAY 12

Keep Watch

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 12
Psalm 126 Habakkuk 2:1-5 Philippians 3:7-11

Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously.

—ST. JOHN CLIMACUS

In yesterday's reflection we spoke of the necessity of attentiveness, faithfully waiting for our Lord to arrive. To extend this image further, what do we do when our guest seems delayed? Do we eat without him? Do we anxiously call or repeatedly send messages asking for an update? Or perhaps we cancel the meal entirely and head to bed. Rarely do we do the one thing we are meant to do: keep on looking!

The inability to patiently wait and trust the Lord's timing has plagued his people from the very beginning. What did the Israelites do when Moses was delayed on Mount Sinai? They took matters into their own hands and made a golden calf to worship as a god (Ex. 32). What do we do when our expectations and God's timing seem out of sync? So often, we quickly assume God to be either uninvolved or uninterested in the cares and concerns of life, and therefore believe we must become masters of our own destiny.

Extended seasons of waiting allow impatience, weariness, and even bitter resentment to take root in our hearts and lives. It is a daily struggle to keep watch amid such great pain and sorrow, and often we fail. Yet Advent is not a time to dwell upon our failures but to rejoice in the goodness and faithfulness of God. Hard as it may be, we press on courageously, looking for the day when God will finally set the world right. As he promises through the prophet Habakkuk, "(If that final day) seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2:3).

Prayer for the Week

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

We struggle with unscheduled time, choosing to pursue constant distraction and stimulation rather than waiting attentively in the moment. In light of this, fast today from *inattentiveness* by using your phone only for essential tasks. Resist the urge to pull it out and scroll whenever there is a gap in your day or lull in the conversation. Re-claim that time and wait attentively for the Lord in prayer.

DAY 13

Like Those Who Dream

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 13
Psalm 126 Habakkuk 3:2-6 Philippians 3:12-16

As the Wise Men offered him gifts from their treasure chests that were mystical symbols, let us too draw forth gifts worthy of God from within our hearts. He is without a doubt the giver of all good, yet he desires the fruits of our labors

—ST. LEO THE GREAT

Dreams, by their very nature, have an unobtainable quality to them. This is what differentiates them from a task or goal. No amount of careful planning or skill acquisition can guarantee the success of a dream. The vision is simply too big, the hopes too grand. Therefore, if and when a dream does come to pass, rarely can we contain our sense of amazement or the depths of our wonder. It is such moments that give birth to the phrase, “never in my wildest dreams!”

Psalm 126 is one such moment in the life of Israel. “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream” (Ps. 126:1). As a people suffering under the weight of exile, never could Israel redeem their story or reclaim their future. Yet in Scripture, we encounter the extravagant love of God extended to helpless people in great need. What Israel was unable to do for themselves, God did (Rom. 8:3). The restoration of their fortunes was nothing short of a dream come true. It is no different for us.

The birth of Christ is a dream we didn't even know to dream. It is a love so selfless no human could possibly imagine it, let alone bring it to pass. It is pure grace, the life of God given for the life of the world. How do we respond to such a remarkable gift? What gift can we possibly offer in return? We offer nothing less than our very lives, poured out in thanksgiving and

praise. Mouths filled with laughter and tongues that shout for joy (Ps 126:2). These are the gifts we bring the newborn king who has done “abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20).

Prayer for the Week

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

It is easy to rush into a feast without taking the time to first prepare. As we draw nearer to Christmas Day, the temptation is to short-circuit our time of preparation. Remember, the feast is coming, but is not here yet. As such, today we fast from *feasting*, avoiding foods that are typically enjoyed at a celebratory meal (meat, alcohol, chocolates, etc. etc.).

DAY 14

Faithful Obedience

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 14
Psalm 126 Habakkuk 3:13-19 Matthew 21:28-32

When we yield to discouragement or despair, it is usually because we give too much thought to the past and to the future.

—ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

There stands before us today, and every day, an invitation into faithful obedience. This entry into the way of Jesus is for all who read these words, regardless of where you were yesterday, or where you may find yourself tomorrow. Though we may have failed countless times before, the gospel call to repentance can still be heard, received, and obeyed.

In many ways, this is the gift of the Christian year. Advent is an annual reminder and encouragement to renew our commitment to hear and obey the commands of Christ. Though our Lord only once entered this world bodily, *our* need for him to be born anew within us is unending. Like a misaligned car that pulls to the left or right, we as humans face a lifelong temptation to deviate from the path that lies before us. We are, as an old hymn says, “prone to wander.”

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 21 that faithfulness is found, not simply in the words we speak, but in and through the lives we live. The will of the father is done by the son who obeys, even though he first resisted the command given to him. It is not how you begin that defines you, but ultimately, how you end. As we read yesterday, we must forget what lies behind and instead strain forward to what lies ahead (Phil 3:13). To forget the past is not to pretend it didn't happen but is to remove its *power* over your life. In Christ, your past is redeemed and transformed into a glorious future as you faithfully follow him in the present.

Prayer for the Week

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Fasting is meant to cultivate a hunger for God by consuming less in other areas of life. In order to do this, we must fast from excess, learning to live with less and allow our hunger to move us into spaces of greater fidelity towards Christ. To do this today, as you prepare food to eat, consume *half* of the food you would typically eat.



Week 3

DAY 15

Lasting Joy

▶ Open Dwell and listen to Day 15
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 Psalm 126 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 John 1:6-8, 19-28

Love seeks one thing only: the good of the one loved. It leaves all the other secondary effects to take care of themselves. Love, therefore, is its own reward.

—THOMAS MERTON

This time of year, gift giving is top of mind. Likely, you have been busily working through a list, making sure everyone is accounted for and that no one slips through the cracks. Similarly, we often speak of Jesus as the “gift of Christmas.” Rightly understood, we should celebrate this great truth. However, there is a danger before us if we too quickly think of him as a modern Christmas gift, wrapped in the manger and placed gently beneath the tree.

In our culture, Christmas gifts are, by design, not *essential* to our well-being or daily life. In truth, you do not need a new gaming console, perfume, or an electric toothbrush, yet these are precisely the types of gifts we give and receive in this sea-son. It is highly unlikely that you will ever wake up on Christmas morning to find a prepaid utility bill wrapped and waiting for you! No, Christmas gifts are meant to do the opposite: they distract from the otherwise difficult and often painful realities of “normal life.” As such, though they may bring momentary joy or delight, rarely do they bring with them *lasting* joy or genuine transformation of being.

The gift of God in Jesus is not a momentary fix but is a lasting cure. He sees us as we truly are and offers himself as a gift of love to heal our greatest need. Love neither pacifies nor distracts, but always renews and restores. Isaiah reminds us of this, pointing to a day of unspeakable joy in which the broken-hearted are restored, mourners consoled, and captives set free (Is.

61:1-3). This is undoubtedly the greatest Christmas gift that could ever be given.

Prayer for the Week

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

As we take time this week to reflect upon the joy of Advent, we must remember that this joy is not simply for our own good but is a *shared* joy, one that we receive and ex-tend to others. In this vein, this week we will enter into the historic practice of **alms-giving**, which in its most basic form is showing mercy to others in need. As we pre-prepare for this practice, take time today to reflect upon your relationships and spheres of influence, identifying possible ways in which you can extend the mercy, and joy, of God this week.

DAY 16

God With Us

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 16
Psalm 125 1 Kings 18:1-18 Ephesians 6:10-17

Best of all, God is with us.

—JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley devoted his entire life to God, preaching countless sermons, penning well-loved hymns of praise, and inviting everyone around him to live a life of holy devotion to Christ. Yet for all that can be said about his life and ministry, his final words, spoken with great effort as lay upon his deathbed, may be the most important he ever uttered: “Best of all, God is with us.”

There are no easy answers to the suffering we see in our world or why God allows such evil to persist. Though we remain a joyful people of hope, we know all is not as it should be. Just as we reflect upon the first Advent of Christ, in this season we also long for his return, his second Advent, praying with Christians through the ages, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20)! The second Advent reminds us that things will not always be as they are today, and that is very good news. All will one day be made right. Night will give way to day, darkness will yield to the light of Christ. As the Psalmist says, “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Ps. 30:5).

Joy is found in the presence of God, not in the absence of pain. We are not promised a life free of suffering or loss, but are assured that God is with us in these places of great need. As Psalm 125:2 reminds us today, we are surrounded and comforted by a God who is with us and will never leave us. “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore.”

Prayer for the Week

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

It is easy to be overcome by the weight of our own pain and suffering. And without discounting the reality of our own need for healing, if we are defeated by our own concerns, it becomes increasingly difficult to give our lives away for the sake of others. As a step in the right direction, take time today to *call* at least one friend and ask how they are doing and how you can pray for them this week.

DAY 17

Shared Joy

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 17
Psalm 125 2 Kings 2:9-22 Acts 3:17-4:4

You cannot put straight in others what is warped in yourself.

—ST. ATHANASIUS

Christians often talk about living “on mission” or “transforming society” for Christ. And as good and beautiful as these visions undoubtedly are, we must never forget that outer transformation can never move faster than inward renewal. We cannot share with the world something we ourselves have not received and encountered in the depths of our soul.

Acts 3 holds forth a vision of refreshment in and through the presence of God, yet it directly ties this refreshment to our own turning away from sin and towards our Lord in humility. This is the first and primary call of Christ given to every disciple, and though it is clear and easy enough to understand, it is far more difficult to receive and obey. Instead, we often prefer to direct the spiritual lives of others rather than tend to our own life with God!

Tempting as this may be, this is not the missional call of God. We are not called to judge others, but to give our lives away in service as we seek their good (Mt. 7:1). A life free from the power of sin is never for our own benefit alone, neither is it meant to isolate us from those in need. Instead, our hearts are set free and are moved by a compassionate longing to enter into their weakness as fellow sinners in need of grace. As we do, the life of God is multiplied in others, and we together enter into the joy of our Lord.

Prayer for the Week

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Charity requires an attentive *preparation*. We must be prepared and ready to give, anticipating the needs of others before they are even known to us. Today, purchase a few small gift cards from a local gas station or restaurant and place them in your car, ready to give one away to the next homeless person you encounter.

DAY 18

Overcome by Joy

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 18
Psalm 125 Malachi 3:16-4:6 Mark 9:9-13

A sure sign of a lukewarm and proud soul is to listen carelessly and negligently to the saving medicine of words which are too zealously and too constantly uttered to it.

—ST. JOHN CASSIAN

When was the last time you were truly overcome by joy? Perhaps it was upon seeing a dearly loved friend or family member after months apart. Or, you received news of a long-desired promotion or acceptance into the school of your dreams. For others, it was when a prolonged illness found surprising relief and lasting healing. Whatever it may be, this type of joy, one that overpowers and comes upon us with great force, can never be contrived or conjured up. It surprises, overwhelms, and shines light into even the darkest moments of life.

At Christmas, we are meant to be overcome by this kind of joy. The birth of Christ is nothing less than the very life of the world, hope and peace that meets us in our weak and weary state. As Malachi 4:2 reminds us today, “the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”

The joy of the Lord is stronger than your greatest fears. It can handle your greatest doubts. It is saving medicine that cures even the most cynical of souls. And though it comes upon us as a gift, it is a gift that must be accepted. We must open our hearts and lives to receive the saving medicine offered to our sin-sick souls. Let us not neglect the healing on offer!

Prayer for the Week

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

You cannot give to others what you have not first received yourself. Prayerfully reflect today on the goodness of God in your life and ask him for the gift of joy in his presence, and the strength to share that *gift* with others.

DAY 19

Encountering Beauty

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 19
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 2 Samuel 6:1-11 Hebrews 1:1-4

We do not merely want to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words — to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.

—C.S. LEWIS

In a culture consumed with image and appearance, beauty is almost always thought of as something to see, rather than to *encounter*. Yet true beauty never leaves us unaffected, for it is active and engaging, taking hold of our deepest desires and longings. We are changed and profoundly affected simply by the presence of beauty, for all beauty ultimately points beyond itself and invites us to encounter God as its true source.

Beauty, then, evokes a response, for it is impossible to remain passive in the presence of beauty. And once we have tasted it, we will pursue it with all that we have, for within it, we find our longings not only awakened, but fulfilled. As the psalmist says, “One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD” (Ps. 27:4).

In Jesus, the beauty of God is on full display. His mercy and kindness is neither distant nor abstract, but can be known, touched, and encountered. No longer do we hear and see from a distance as our ancestors did, but instead God speaks to us through his Son who is “the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb. 1:1-3a). In Jesus, we encounter the “one thing” the psalmist sought after: the beauty of God. May

we dwell with Christ as he daily transforms us by the beauty of his love.

Prayer for the Week

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

While financial gifts are a wonderful way to support people in need, they can never replace the gift of being face to face with others. Today, give the gift of your *time* and be physically present to someone in need, hearing their story and reminding them that they are dearly known and loved by God.

DAY20

The New Eve

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 20
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 2 Samuel 6:12-19 Hebrews 1:5-14

Ultimately, we understand that he became man of a virgin so that the disobedience that started with the serpent would be stopped through the very same path by which it began.

–ST. JUSTIN MARTYR

In many ways, the Advent and Christmas seasons can be understood through the story of two births, Eve, who gave birth to death and sin, and Mary, who gave birth to life and hope. In both stories, we encounter a virgin woman living in the favor of God, each presented with a situation that demanded of them a response. For one, a temptation to seize forcefully that which can only be given as a gift. For the other, an announcement received with great joy and trust in the faithfulness of God. As such, while Eve is the mother of humanity that ushered sin into the world, Mary, through her “yes” to God, becomes the mother of our Lord, and the true mother of us all.

The journey from Eve to Mary, understood through this lens, is one that every Christian must take. Through her response of faith, Mary models for us the way we also must respond as God draws near. In this way, Mary is one of the pivotal players of the Advent season, embodying the hopes of Israel as she receives and proclaims the faithfulness of God.

Today we read Psalm 89, which is itself an inspiration for the Song of Mary found in Luke 1. “I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will pro-claim your faithfulness to all generations” (Ps. 89:1). Every follower of Jesus is invited to receive the word of God spoken to them, rejoice in his faithfulness, and proclaim his goodness to future generations. Though we, like Eve, alienate ourselves from our source of life, we all the more powerfully, with Mary, magnify the Lord and rejoice in God our Savior.

Prayer for the Week

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Every single person has a God given *talent* that can be used to uniquely support and encourage others. What do you know how to do that can bless someone else today? Though caring for the poor is a central act of Christian charity, we also extend the mercy of God to others in countless ways, such as tutoring children, fixing a leaky pipe, or designing a website.

DAY 21

The Mystery of Christ

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 21
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 Judges 13:2-24 John 7:40-52

If he was not flesh, who was lying in the manger? And if he was not God, whom did the Angels come down and glorify? If he was not flesh, who was wrapped in swaddling clothes? And if he was not God, whom did the shepherds worship?

—ST. EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

Familiarity breeds contempt, or so the saying goes. Perhaps you have found this to be true in your own life and close relationships, struggling to maintain the same level of trust, respect, and intimacy that you once had. And as broken and sinful creatures, this struggle is real and understandable, yet we must be wary of ever seeing our life with Christ through a similar lens. Anytime that we believe we have exhausted our understanding of Jesus, it is undoubtedly our shortcomings, not his, with which we must contend.

Greater familiarity with Christ should simultaneously awaken us to our need *and* deepen in us an awareness of the goodness and mercy of God. Only when we try to fit Jesus neatly into our pre-determined categories do we fall into a trap of familiarity, assuming we know all that can be known, or perhaps more honestly, all that we *want* to know. We face a persistent temptation to reimagine God in our own image. However, true discipleship is always found in our transformation into *his* life and likeness.

Advent plunges us into the depths of the mystery of Christ, fully God and fully man, able in every way to identify with us in our humanity, yet uniquely deserving of our singular praise and adoration. The crowd in John 7 wanted to set the terms and manage their expectations of what and who the Messiah would be. And tempting as this may be for us as well, we

must remember that true joy is found in a humility and power that is more glorious than anything we could possibly imagine!

Prayer for the Week

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

As the name implies, there is a proactive reality to almsgiving. It is a gift we give to those in need. However, sometimes the gift is found in our use of restraint and self-control, especially as it relates to things not going our own way! Today, give the gift of *not having the final word*. As you give up your preferences and need for control, you create space for others to shine through!



Week 4

DAY 22

Ponder These Things

▶ Open Dwell and listen to Day 22
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38

Mary was comparing these things which she had read were to occur with those which she recognized as already having occurred. Nevertheless she did not bring these things forth from her mouth but kept them closed up in her heart.

—THE VENERABLE BEDE

Do you have a private life with God? As we increasingly live every aspect of our lives on display, posted far and wide for the world to see, it becomes difficult to retain a *hidden* self, especially in a true and redemptive sense. We may be quick to hide things that cause us shame or guilt, yet do we know how to cultivate a life of holy silence and solitude, learning to hear the voice of God as we do?

With Christmas just a few days away, everything in your life is likely ramping up. Nothing about this week feels settled, calm, or quiet! Yet this final week of Advent invites us to resist that chaotic impulse towards anxious hurry and instead listen *and reflect* upon the Word of God given to us.

As Mary cultivated the life of a faithful follower of God, including regular times of private prayer and devotion, she found herself present and attentive, and therefore ready to receive the Word of God. Yet as this Word drew near, we see today that it left her disoriented, overcome by its weight and glory. What does she do? She ponders it in her heart (Lk. 1:29; see also Lk. 2:19). This Advent, the Lord is drawing near, speaking words of hope and love over his people. Resist the urge to fill the day with endless activities and external concerns, choosing instead to receive and prayerfully ponder the Word of God spoken to you.

Prayer for the Week

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

As we enter into this fourth and final week of Advent, each day brings its own unique practice, inviting us into a heightened anticipation and preparation for the glory of Christmas Day. Today, you are invited to ponder God's word to you through the practice of *silence and solitude*. Carve out at least 15 minutes of uninterrupted and undistracted time with God. No people, no screens, no agenda. Simply present to God and his word spoken over you.

DAY 23

Magnify the Lord

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 23
Luke 1:46b-55 1 Samuel 1:1-18 He-breus 9:1-14

Each one of us shapes his soul into the image of Christ and makes either a larger or smaller image of him. The image is either dingy and dirty, or it is clean and bright and corresponds to the form of the original.

—ORIGEN

As we enter into the final days of our Advent journey, we arrive today at one of the most beloved hymns of praise in the whole of Scripture, the Magnificat. Here, with the Psalms and the Song of Hannah on her heart and mind, Mary embodies the hopes and dreams of the whole of Israel: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Lk. 1:46-47). As we, thousands of years later, hear and receive these words, what does it mean for us to do the same? How do we, with Mary, magnify the Lord?

Throughout the ages, Christians have often referred to the *reflective* quality of the human soul. At our best, we are meant to reflect the life of God in and through the way we live our lives. Another common way to speak of this same idea is through the lens of an icon. Yet at our best, we are not simply images to behold but are windows that open to a vast horizon beyond, or perhaps more helpfully, mirrors that reflect the light of God with each turn.

One of the chief effects of sin upon the soul is it darkens and dirties that mirror, removing our ability to live lives that magnify the Lord. Is Mary an end or destination in and of herself? Of course not. Yet through a life of faithful living, of obedience to God and openness to his call upon her life, does the Lord clean the mirror of her soul and shine brightly through her

witness in every generation? Undoubtedly! May we, like her, live lives that magnify and image God in and through our lives, for his glory and the salvation of the world.

Prayer for the Week

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Though we all begin our journey of faith weighed down and darkened by sin, as we walk with the Lord, he is faithful to cleanse the mirror of our souls, freeing us to reflect his light. Today, take time to *journal* and recount the significant ways God has done this work in and through your life over the years.

DAY 24

Filling All Things

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 24
Luke 1:46b-55 1 Samuel 1:19-28 He-brews 8:1-13

The Self-revealing of the Word is in every dimension — above, in creation; be-low, in the Incarnation; in the depth, in Hades; in the breadth, throughout the world. All things have been filled with the knowledge of God.

—ST. ATHANASIUS

One of the most beautiful prayers of the ancient church reminds us that God is “everywhere present and filling all things.” There is not a single spot in creation left unaffected or untouched by the glory of God, neither is there a corner of the human heart that does not long for God and to live in the light of his love. God’s love extends into every part of the world, and as St. Paul reminds us, he is reconciling it, and us, to him-self (2 Cor. 5:9).

The author of Hebrews, quoting from Jeremiah, reminds us today that God has long promised to fill the hearts and lives of his people. As God reveals himself to his creation, he does so by filling it with his very presence, and this great promise is uniquely fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ. How, one might ask, does God go about writing his law “on their hearts” (Heb. 8:10)? Though couched in legal language, this is fundamentally a promise of intimacy, a promise of communion. “And they shall not teach one another or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for *they shall all know me*, from the least of them to the greatest” (Heb. 8:11).

Jesus enters the brokenness of our existence so that we can know God in the depths of our being. He fills all things so that we can find our fulfillment and true home in him. As St. Irenaeus famously said, “The glory of God is man fully alive.” Christ’s birth reminds us afresh that we become truly and fully alive as we encounter God’s glory in *all* of life.

Prayer for the Week

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

The Incarnation reminds us that God loves our physical world and will redeem us, soul and body. As a reminder of the glory of God that fills all things, take time today to *rejoice in God's creation*, giving thanks to God for the countless ways it speaks his name and draws forth praise.

DAY 25

A Triumphal Entry

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 25
Luke 1:46b-55 1 Samuel 2:1-10 Mark 11:1-11

We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing. Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ, rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation.

—ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

Just two days before Christmas, it may feel strange to dive into Mark 11 and the Triumphal Entry of Christ. You may be wondering if the assigned readings were mixed up and misplaced, and upon first glance this is a fair assumption to make. That said, there is, in fact, profound wisdom in sitting with this story today, for it reminds us that Advent, like the Triumphal Entry, is the story of an approach and an entrance.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, he found himself surrounded by people with clear expectations of who he was and was *not* meant to be as a leader. In their minds, he was a political revolutionary, triumphantly entering in order to overthrow Rome and restore Israel to their rightful place of privilege and power. Yet, just as his entry into Jerusalem shapes and informs our understanding of his birth, the humility of Bethlehem must remind us of the nature of his rule and reign. The babe in the manger is the newborn king, come to free his people, yet he does so, not by force or might, but through the humility and self-giving love of the cross.

And so, at both Christmas and Easter, the approach of God in Jesus shines a light upon the things we love and hold most dear. What does the birth of Christ reveal within you? How does it shine a light upon your

truest loves and deepest affections? It is easy to love a version of God that conveniently conforms to all of our wants and de-sires. As verse 8 says, “*many people spread their cloaks on the road*” (Mk. 11:8). Many people will have Christ on their minds this week. The question before us is whether we will allow him to transform our loves, desires, and assumptions, becoming like him as we do?

Prayer for the Week

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

The way we spend our money is often one of the clearest indicators of what we truly love. To have our loves transformed by the love of God, we must first identify places of misalignment and misdirected desire. Today, take a simple *audit* of your spending, noting over the past week where your funds went, and what that might say about the things you love most dearly.

DAY 26

Love's Pure Light

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 26
Isaiah 52:7-10 Psalm 98 Hebrews 1:1-4 John 1:1-14

Not only is the Word of God indeed truly light, but he is also the giver of light to all whom he infuses with the light of understanding.

—ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

From the beginning, the Jewish people have kept a custom of days beginning in the evening, lasting from sundown to sundown. Christians adapted and continued this tradition, establishing a practice of gathering in prayerful anticipation the night before a significant celebration in their common life, with Christmas Eve serving as the most enduring example of this tradition. Whatever your church background may be, you have likely experienced the joy of gathering with others on this holy night, singing hymns of praise by the warmth of candlelight.

In a season in which light and darkness feature heavily, this evening dramatically ushers our journey into its final chapter. As our reading reminds us, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (Jn. 1:5). Though darkness persists for the whole of our lives, Christmas is the promise that it will never have the final say or last word. No matter how dark it may be, there is always a light to be found. And not only is the light never overcome, but the light reaches us in the darkness and promises that we too shall be enlightened by its light.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the “true light, which enlightens everyone” (Jn. 1:9). He reaches into the darkness and finds us. He illuminates us and enlightens all that is darkened by sin so that we shine with him. The light of Christ does not embarrass or embitter, but exposes places of bondage and oppression, so we are set free. He is “love’s pure light,” a “radiant beam”

coming with healing in his wings. Truly, in the darkness of this night, we look with hope and great anticipation for “the dawn of redeeming grace.”

Prayer for Christmas Eve

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Culturally, Christmas Eve often consists of a cherished meal with family or the wrap-ping of last-minute gifts to discreetly place beneath the tree. In addition to these customs, consider *keeping vigil* this evening with those you love, perhaps reading by candlelight the story of Christ's birth, allowing it to be the final thought on your heart and mind as you fall asleep.

DAY 27

No Room in the Inn

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 27
Isaiah 9:2-7 Psalm 96 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-20

The entire human race had a place, and the Lord about to be born on earth had none. He found no room among men. He found no room in Plato, none in Aristotle, but in a manger, among beasts of burden and brute animals, and among the simple, too, and the innocent.

—ST. JEROME

If Christmas Eve is an entry into the glory, wonder, and majesty of the Incarnation, with the hosts of heaven praising God in the highest, Christmas Day brings with it a certain humility, a homely faith as we gather with the Holy Family in the stable. Jesus Christ is Lord of creation, yet in this world there was no room for him, no place to be found. This is true in a historic sense, yet if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, this is a word spoken to our hearts this very day.

When the inn of our heart is filled to overflowing with arrogance and superiority, self-interest and greed, there is no room for the humble king to enter. Yet enter he will, for he is good and loves us in our blindness, and so he goes and makes his home among the animals and the innocent, the pure and lowly of heart. If we want to meet Christ this Christmas, we too must be willing to enter the lowliness of the stable and there find our true home, the way that leads to life.

If you find there is no room for Christ in the inn, it may be time to leave the inn behind! So often we are in love with the inn, the creature comforts of this life, and simply wait and hope that Christ will come to us in *that* place of waiting. However, we are never called to wait contently in our sins

but are told to go, to lay aside the weight of life that clings so closely (Heb. 12:1). Yes, at Christmas Jesus comes to us, but when there is no place in the inn (Lk. 2:7), we must boldly go to him!

Prayer for Christmas Day

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

Reflective Practice

As the song reminds us, Christmas is not a single day but is a *twelve-day* feasting season! With the hard work of preparation now behind us, enter into the joy and delight of Christmas and *keep the feast* with those you love, recounting each day the hope we have in Jesus Christ, God with us.

Endnotes

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Advent literally means **coming** or **approach**, and as the people of God we are invited every year to enter into a season of holy anticipation. As we do, let us never lose sight of the true nature of the king that came, and will come again.

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to the 27-day scripture
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