



Walking in the Light of Christ
Advent Devotions for 2024
Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit

PREFACE

For Advent

Loving God, as we enter this Advent season, we open all the dark places in our lives and memories to the healing light of Christ. Show us the power of HOPE. Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you that we may walk in the light of Christ.

A Prayer for the First Sunday in Advent

Loving God, in this time of preparation and planning, we thank you for the hope and peace you unfailingly offer us. Show us the creative power of hope. Teach us the PEACE that comes from justice. Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you that we may walk in the light of Christ.

A Prayer for the Second Sunday in Advent

Loving God, we open ourselves to you, trusting that this is how you made us: you created us for joy-filled hearts and lives. Show us the creative power of hope. Teach us the peace that comes from justice. Fill us with the kind of JOY that cannot be contained but must be shared. Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you that we may walk in the light of Christ.

A Prayer for the Third Sunday in Advent

Loving God, we open ourselves to you this Christmas season. Light our lives with your imagination. Show us the creative power of hope. Teach us the peace that comes from justice. Fill us with the kind of joy that cannot be contained but must be shared. Magnify your LOVE within us. Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you that we may walk in the light of Christ.

A Prayer for the Fourth Sunday in Advent

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Acknowledgements

The reflections in this Advent book, written by members of our parish, remind us that we are on a journey shaped by our struggles, faith, hope, and love. It is our prayer that these meditations inspire you to engage deeply with your faith and with this community.

Fr. Brandon Mozingo
Billy Jones, Advisor

Cathy Schlecht, Parish Admin.
Alice Bryan, Advisor

Dee Rausin, Editor
Betsey Blimline, Advisor

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Introduction

The world feels like it's in constant motion, full of change and uncertainty. We face challenges that push us to question ourselves, our reality, our future... Yet, in the midst of it all, one thing remains steadfast: God's light guiding us forward.

Advent comes to us as a season of waiting, reflecting, and moving closer to God's promise—a promise of hope, renewal, and love. It invites us to pause and consider how we show up for one another in the body of Christ.

Life in community isn't easy. We each bring our expectations, frustrations, and moments of disagreement. Sometimes those frustrations are valid; other times, they reflect deeper challenges we all carry. Advent reminds us that no one has it all figured out. Yet, in our shared humanity, God calls us to extend grace. Let's consider:

- Are we willing to show up for one another—not perfectly, but with intention and care?
- Can we approach each other with patience, assuming the best even when we feel let down?
- How can we create space for growth, reflection, and the messy work of being in a community?

These aren't easy questions, but they're vital. Advent challenges us to step outside our comfort zones, bear witness to each other's struggles, and hold space for healing and connection. It calls us to reflect on how we receive and extend God's grace.

Advent is a season of waiting, but it's also a season of showing up—not perfectly, but faithfully. As we walk together, let's lean into the grace of this season, remembering the light of Christ that connects us as one body. Let's walk in the Light of Christ together.

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Sunday, December 1

Isaiah 1:1-9

2 Peter 3:1-10

Matthew 25:1-13

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Matthew 25:1-13

Welcome to Advent! As my dad used to ask, "Have you checked your oil?"

Time to check our oil! Keep awake! Prepare!

Each one of us is responsible for being "wise" and filling our own spiritual lamps with oil. How do we refill our spiritual lamps? We refill them with the oil of the Gospel—with the oil of Love—with the oil of meditation and prayer—with the oil of worship and community—with the oil of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

The five bridesmaids made a foolish choice which delayed their arrival to the wedding banquet. When they arrived late the Lord responded, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." Such a rebuke may seem harsh, but it was the most loving response. The foolish bridesmaids learned the importance of being prepared. The wise bridesmaids had planned ahead and checked their oil but they could not fill the lamps of the foolish for it would dim their own.

Advent is the season to refill our lamps with spiritual oil. As the wise bridesmaids pointed out to the foolish ones, the reliance on someone else to refill our lamps will not suffice. We are called to do our own work. The spiritual path is an inside job and the responsibility of each one of us to take a long loving look at the real. With that preparation, we will light our lamps, head to the wedding banquet, the door will open and we will be known.

The One who is, and was, and is to be, is counting on each one of us to keep awake, to be prepared, to be spiritually filled and ready to light the way.

May we journey together lamps a blaze and await the Holy birth of Jesus.

O come, O come Emmanuel

Monday, December 2

Isaiah 1:10-20

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Luke 20:1-8

Isaiah is a favorite prophet of mine because he speaks to me in a way that aligns with what I believe that Jesus expects of us. In these short sentences, Isaiah tells us that the Lord is not pleased with what we offer Him. The Lord no longer wants us to offer empty sacrifices and rituals, because these rituals have become routine and lost meaning and tell us we have forgotten what we truly must do. The Lord wants us to seek justice for those among us who are oppressed and to take care of the widow and the orphan.

When we hear the gospels, we hear this over and over again. This is Jesus' command to us. All four Gospels tell us this.

As Christmas approaches, we all get wrapped up in rituals. And although these rituals may bring us happiness in a secular way, because who doesn't like Christmas carols, hot chocolate and maybe making a snowman (I know, wishful thinking), sometimes we do these rituals because we've always done them and because we feel like we 'should' do them.

There are some rituals, however, that I love such as Midnight Mass, the Christmas pageant, and visits with family and friends, and I will continue to include them in my life.

I hope especially this year that we think about the importance of love in our community which includes not those just in our church or town, but our nation and the world; that we seek for common goals such as working towards justice for all human beings, for ways to support and honor the dignity of all, especially the oppressed, the marginalized and all vulnerable people.

Isaiah says that when we do this, we will be redeemed.

This is my Christmas wish for all of us.

Tuesday, December 3

Isaiah 1:21-31

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Luke 20:9-18

A line in today's readings caught my attention: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." It's a powerful reminder of how easily we dismiss what we don't fully understand. In the parable, the tenants reject the messengers sent to them and even the son, believing the vineyard belongs to them. But the truth is, they missed the bigger picture. They forgot who the vineyard truly belonged to and what their role was meant to be.

I've been reflecting on this because we sometimes engage with others. It's so easy to focus on what we think others are doing wrong. Our brains are wired to seek out problems—it's a survival instinct. We notice imperfections, confusion, or things we don't understand and let that frustration or anger take over. But how often does that prevent us from seeing the bigger picture of God's actions in those very situations?

Today's readings remind us of something crucial: God often works through what we see as insufficient, confusing, or even broken. Isaiah speaks of a city lost to corruption, but God doesn't abandon it. Instead, He promises restoration—bringing back righteousness and faithfulness. Paul reflects on his ministry in Thessalonica not as an exercise in perfection but as one rooted in honesty, gentleness, and the hard work of serving others. And Jesus, the ultimate cornerstone, was rejected by many—but that rejection didn't stop Him from fulfilling God's purpose.

Advent invites us to see beyond the flaws and apparent missteps, and to look for the bigger picture of what God is doing. It doesn't mean we ignore real problems or stop working toward justice. But it does call us to temper our criticisms with grace, patience, and a willingness to understand and admit when we misunderstand and misjudge. What if, instead of dwelling on what's wrong, we asked: How is God working even in the messiness? How can I contribute to building something faithful and good rather than tearing others down?

As we prepare for the coming of Christ this Advent, let's also prepare our hearts to see one another differently. Let's be people who look for God's hand at work in the imperfect places and imperfect people around us. And when we speak, let it be with kindness and a genuine desire to understand—remembering that the same God working in us is also working in them. After all, the cornerstone was once rejected, but the whole structure would fall without it.

May we all have the grace to see that bigger picture.

Wednesday, December 4

Isaiah 2:1-11

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Luke 20:19-26

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords in plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. Isaiah 2:4 (NRSV)

Oh, that we may live to see that day! The human race has historically resorted to war to settle differences or to show superiority. So much more could be developed for the good of all mankind if we could live peaceably together. The leaders of nations initiate the wars and conscript their people to fight them.

Every day, if you watch the news channels, you hear of attacks of neighboring nations. How many innocent people suffer injury, death, or homelessness in these attacks? I can't help but feel that if the decisions were to be left up to the citizens of the nations, the attacks would stop and the people could live in peace.

What can we do on a local level to steer our leaders toward gestures of peace? The least we can do is to accept all people as our neighbors and live in harmony within our own borders. Lend a hand and a leg up. Demonstrate love at every turn.

Almighty God our heavenly Father, guide the nations of the world into the way of justice and truth, and establish among them that peace which is the fruit of righteousness, that they may become the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen (BCP, p. 816)

Thursday, December 5

Isaiah 2:12-22

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Luke 20:27-40

There's something humbling about these readings that forces me to confront how much I hold onto things that will not last. Pride, accomplishments, and the systems I rely on for stability feel sturdy. Isaiah reminds me that even the tallest redwood, the most fortified building, or the most impressive thing -- insert whatever here -- will fail. The day of the Lord brings everything to its knees, and I'm left wondering how much of my life is built on things that will be swept away because, ultimately, they don't matter.

I know what it is to plan. I anticipate things going wrong, and I look for ways to respond when they do...it's easier than flying by the seat of my pants. But today, these readings ask me to consider whether I trust too much in what I can measure, manage, or control. They push me to see beyond the limitations of what I can see and to place my hope in something eternal—something beyond you and me.

Luke's account of the Sadducees challenging Jesus about the resurrection forces me to wrestle with my assumptions. The resurrection isn't just life as I know it stretched out into infinity; it's something entirely different. Jesus says that in the resurrection, we'll neither marry nor die but will live as children of God. It's a kind of life I can't fully understand, and I guess that's okay. Eternal life isn't about what I can plan or anticipate. It's about trusting that God is not only the God of the living but the God of the life I can't yet imagine.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians brings this all together for me: stand firm, hold onto faith, and love even when life feels unsteady. The world is constantly shifting, always shaking, and it's tempting to cling to what I can see or prove. But Paul's prayer that God would strengthen hearts in holiness and prepare us to be blameless before God reminds me that life isn't about securing control. It's about being ready for God, trusting, and letting go of everything that limits my vision of who God is.

Advent asks me to prepare, sure, but not by clinging harder to what I know; instead, it's by letting God humble the proud parts of me (and there are a lot of proud parts of me). Letting Christ strip away the idols of security and success I've built. Ultimately, I will allow Christ to transform my limits into something eternal—something alive in Christ's presence. It's uncomfortable, but it is the only way to prepare for the life Christ promises.

Friday, December 6

Isaiah 3:8-15

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Luke 20:41—21:4

Isaiah 3:8-15 The sufferings of the people are of their own wrongdoing. The prophet tells of the punishment to come of the male leaders of the city and nation because they confiscate the lands of the poor and have indentured servants.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 This is Paul's letter to the Christian community in Thessalonica. "Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as in fact you are doing), you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus."

Luke 20:41—21:4 Jesus is in the temple after much questioning by the priests and scribes, speaking to his disciples so all can hear, "Beware of scribes (hypocrites) who care only about themselves." He then goes on to describe the many ways they aggrandize themselves. Following this interaction, he notices rich people donating into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she has to live on."

These three readings are urging us and all Christians to reach out to the poor and needy and live the teachings of Jesus Christ. I love the story of the widow's mite since that Bible story has been with me since childhood. I also love that Jesus notices that a woman is giving all she has while the wealthy give only a portion. In those days and in some places today, women were not regarded in high esteem and yet Jesus sets her apart as an example to all of us for honesty, faithful giving and living.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, Paul praises them for living in such a way as they please God. But, wait, there's more to do ! Even though, we please God, we are called on to continue to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and as we learn, we grow in faith and true community with each other.

Lord, keep us mindful of the needs of others and in true love and charity with our neighbors. Help us to live the life you would have us lead in honesty, integrity and Christian love. May our community grow to glorify you as those Thessalonians so long ago. Open our hearts and energies to serve you and others in fellowship with one another. In Jesus name, Amen.

Saturday, December 7

Isaiah 4:2-6

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Luke 21:5-19

“But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.”

Luke 5:18-19 (NIV)

The days leading up to Christmas can feel like a battle at times. You may be fighting deadlines, cranky relatives and children, sold-out items with never-ending waitlists, worries about making the holiday “perfect”, and so much more! It is the busiest time of year. Our minds and hearts are so easily frazzled; it can begin to weigh on our souls too. We may start to lose this battle and become short-tempered, irritable – a regular ole Ebenezer Scrooge.

Jesus warns us that believers will face many trials and challenges in our lifetimes. But He also promises us that we are His; we will never be left or forsaken. This time of year is a perfect time for reflection on His mercies and promises. He brings us HOPE; let us take this gift and remember it always — no matter what battles we face in the year. Our faith gives us strength and courage.

Holy Spirit, guide us in the travels of this life — the joys, the hardships, the battles, and the victories. Help us remember to stay firm in our faith and grateful for the gifts we have been given.

Sunday, December 8

Isaiah 5:1-7

2 Peter 3:11-18

Luke 7:28-35

¹ Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

² He dug it and cleared it... he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

³ And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard... ⁶ I will make it a waste;

⁷ For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry! Isaiah 5:1-7

Why is **this** a love song? In Advent we always start with Amos and Isaiah raining down the wrath of God, the God of Noah, even Moses. But Advent, to me, is a season of reflection, of moving through the dark of solstice toward a promising new light...

Funny, though, I've never thought it, but Advent, too, is the beginning of a song, the song of a father's love. Thinking of Israel's early life with God, then these verses, God's response as voiced in the gospels is amazing: **Emanuel!** He is **with** us, he is **for** us - can it be? If Christmas indeed **is** a love song, how then should we respond? I'm reminded, somehow, of *Those Winter Sundays*:

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

Our mortal fathers, dear God, do this. If Christmas **is** a father's love, what a lovely thing!

Monday, December 9

Isaiah 5:8-12, 18-23

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Luke 21:20-28

“Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, And sin as if with a cart rope; That say, “Let Him make speed and hasten His work, That we may see it; And let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, That we may know it.” Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight! Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away justice from the righteous man! Isaiah 5:18-23 (NKJV)

When I read these holy scriptures, based on my thoughts and reflections in this day and time, our country and world are experiencing chaos due to many changes and activities. There is vanity and conceit in our election candidates; there is sin and crime in areas of our immigration system; there are issues of woes and gains in our economy; and let's not forget about our American citizens who are suffering from Helene and Milton who are struggling for access to home, health, and family. I must pray continuously.

Unlike other prophets, Isaiah does not prophesy about our times, or the end times. He focuses much on people of his day, who were about to be exiled, if they did not straighten out, in the times of Christ. Isaiah was a prayerful man.

So I pray that my *Eyes* are open to all things good and evil, right or wrong; that my *Ears* for hearing and balance do not weaken as I grow older; that my *Nose* helps my curiosity without becoming nosy; and that my *Heart* not become heavy with sadness and emotions, but joyful with the trust in you, Lord, for You are ever with me.

In God I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, December 10

Isaiah 5:13-17, 24-25

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Luke 21:29-38

Three lessons and three admonitions. **First**, Isaiah warns of the punishment, exile and death of Israel and Judah, for not following God's commandments. **Second**, Paul exhorts the people of Thessalonica, who had leadership issues, to rejoice always, pray without ceasing and to give thanks in all circumstances, to hold fast to what is good and to abstain from every form of evil. The **third** lesson in Luke comes with a warning in previous verses of the destruction of the Temple, the persecution of the disciples, the desolation of Jerusalem, and description of the coming of the Son of Man. Then in today's reading, it entreats us to look for the coming of the Kingdom of God and to be alert so that our heart is not weighed down at the coming. There should be a label with these lessons that says "WARNING: GOD TALKING — LISTEN."

So what do these passages say to me? For me it means to ***straighten up and fly right!!*** Regardless of what Facebook, X, the news—both TV and newspapers, and what those around me are saying, I must look to what is good and right, and do it to the best of my ability. I need to tune out the noise of the world and tune into the peace and quiet that only God can offer. WE need to create as best as we can the joining of heaven and earth, The Kingdom of God, right now, right here!!!! How, you ask? By being "alert" for ways we can encourage, enrich, and assist one another on our life journey. To be the hand that helps those reaching out, to love each other with abandon, and to LOVE GOD with all our might.

And when we do that:

"And they will know we are Christians by our love, by our love.

Yes, they will know we are Christians by our love."

Amen

Wednesday, December 11

Isaiah 6:1-13

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

John 7:53—8:11

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”
John 8:11 (NIV)

The darkness of sin might not be the first thing that pops into your mind during the hustle and bustle of this season. The bright lights and glad tidings feel joyous and exciting; we are swept away in a frenzy of preparation for the holiday season. Reflecting on sin, past transgressions, and hurt seems more like a Lenten activity—not an Advent one. However, the readings reminded me that Jesus came to us to redeem humanity from our sin—He is *Emmanuel*—God with us. He encourages us to forgive others and to turn away from our sin—that which separates us from God. As we prepare to celebrate His birth, it is a perfect time to contemplate our choices in the past year and to leave our sins behind.

Pope Francis explained that “Advent is the time we are given to welcome the Lord who comes to encounter us, and also to verify our longing for God, to look forward and prepare ourselves for Christ’s return.” Now is the time for fresh starts and mending the hurts of the past.

Holy Spirit, create in us clean hearts full of wonder, reflection, and hope as we move towards the Christmas Season and the New Year.

Thursday, December 12

Isaiah 7:1-9

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Luke 22:1-13

To you who feel overwhelmed: God sees you. Just as God saw King Ahaz trembling in fear, God saw the storms pressing in on you. The promise to Ahaz is the promise to you: stand firm, not because you are strong, but because God is. You don't have to carry the weight alone. Let God steady you, root you, and remind you that His presence is enough to hold you through the storm.

To you who feel uncertain: Christ is the truth that never shifts. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians speaks to the chaos of deception, the lies that swirl and unsettle us. But God's truth isn't about confusion—it's about clarity. It's the steady light that shines even when the world feels dark. When you don't know what to hold onto, hold onto this. God will not let you go.

To you who feel betrayed: Jesus knows what it is to be hurt by someone close. He knows the sting of Judas's betrayal, the ache of being let down. But even in that pain, He kept moving forward, trusting that God's plan was bigger than the betrayal. To you who feel that ache, know this: God is still working. Betrayal doesn't get the final word—love does.

To you who feel small: Advent reminds us that God works through what the world often overlooks: a baby born in a manger, quiet trust in the face of chaos, and a whisper of hope in the middle of despair. If you feel like your faith or your voice doesn't matter, let this season remind you that God delights in working through the small and the fragile to bring about His greatest miracles.

To you who feel hopeless: Hope doesn't have to be loud to be real. Even a tiny flicker of hope is enough for God to work with. Advent is a season of waiting, but it's also a season of promise—a promise that light is coming, that love has already come, and that God's kingdom is still breaking into this world. Hold on, even if it's just by a thread. God is holding you.

To all of us who feel: Advent invites us to step into the waiting, not with perfect faith, but with a willingness to trust that God is with us. Emmanuel—God with us—is the promise that holds us steady, the light that leads us forward, and the love that will never let us go. This is the hope of Advent. May we all lean into it together.

Friday, December 13

Isaiah 7:10-25

2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5

Luke 22:14-30

For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us either by word of mouth or by our letter. 2 Thessalonians 2:14-15 (RSV)

Tradition is the foundation of our society, the bedrock on which our relationships with family, friends and institutions are built. We learn the traditions that we live by from our families, schools, social and religious groups. They influence our attitudes and behavior for our entire life. The memories connected with our traditions are strong and emotional.

One of my childhood memories is of sitting underneath the quilting frame as my great-grandmother and her friends sat and sewed on quilt tops they had pieced for their families, loved ones and charity. I learned to sew from my mother and grandmother and the classes they encouraged me to take. They continued a family tradition and gifted me with a sewing machine when I got married.

Many years later after I moved to Georgia and had retired, I bought a new sewing machine and took a class to piece my first quilt. It brought back memories of my great-grandmother and gave me great feelings of peace. I have since made many quilting friends and now go on four quilting retreats a year with them. We go to the FFA Campground in Covington for a week. I come home renewed and refreshed, at peace with myself and remembering the family traditions.

May you find the traditions that bring peace to your heart and comfort to your soul.

Saturday, December 14

Isaiah 8:1-15

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Luke 22:31-38

I've walked through seasons of disbelief, skepticism, and frustration with faith. There were times when I looked at passages like these and saw judgment, fear, and contradiction instead of grace. I've learned, though, that these texts often carry more nuance and invitation than they first seem to.

It's easy to see the harshness in Isaiah's prophecy of God's promise to humble the proud and expose false securities. What if this prophecy isn't about punishment, but instead about liberation? The things we cling to — power, wealth, pride — often enslave us. Isaiah's vision shows a God who wants to strip away what ultimately harms us so we can build our lives on something unshakable. It's not about tearing us down but giving us freedom from the things that keep us from pursuing what matters most.

Paul's message to the Thessalonians might feel rigid or judgmental at first glance. Is it possible that Paul isn't dismissing those who struggle but reminding the Thessalonian Christians of their shared responsibility instead? Paul knows the dangers of idleness, not just in terms of work but in how it affects relationships and care for others. His message isn't exclusionary; it's an encouragement for everyone to contribute to the health of the whole. It's about grace paired with accountability.

Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial and telling the disciples to prepare for what's ahead might seem like a setup for failure, but what if it's actually profoundly compassionate? Jesus knows our limits and failures better than we do, but He prays for us just as He did for Peter. Jesus' prayer is about accepting when failure comes and staying committed to the path.

I'm still learning that faith doesn't demand the absence of questions, but it does invite us to bring those questions along. Wherever we are in our collective and independent journeys, I believe God is there, patiently ready to meet us in our wrestling.

Sunday, December 15

Isaiah 13:6-13

Hebrews 12:18-29

John 3:22-30

In Isaiah 13, the prophet speaks of God's fierce anger and a time when stars will not give their light, the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will shed no light. In Hebrews 12, someone speaks of God once more shaking the earth and also heaven. In John 3, John the Baptist tells a rabbi whoever disobeys the Son will not see life but must endure God's wrath.

When we look through our Advent eyes, we look through eyes of peace and love, of hope and joy. We do not seek a kingdom that is shaken but a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We do not seek God's fierce anger but rather God's fierce love.

We see through Advent eyes that we are moving not toward a night when the stars don't shine, but a night when the brightest star shines through darkness. With Advent in our hearts, we see not God's wrath, but the peace of God's gift, the coming of the one in which He has placed all things and to whom He has given a Spirit without measure.

Through Advent may we look through gentle eyes toward where God is leading us. Let us go to a small manger with a bright star above, with a baby boy asleep surrounded by God's fierce love.

God of the strong and the weak, God of the proud and the humble, come to us as a small baby bringing hope and peace. Give us always Advent eyes and hearts that we may know your fierce love and gentle heart. Amen

Monday, December 16

Isaiah 8:16—9:1

2 Peter 1:1-11

Luke 22:39-53

The readings inspired me to consider a hopeful situation in a time when people were highly encouraged to live well until the fulfillment of God's promises. The passages from Luke specifically reminded me of the powerful practice of prayer. I feel closest to my relationship with God when I pray and have found that daily devotional time helps me to center my focus on that relationship while also teaching me about my purpose as a Christian. Advent is a time when we often feel closer to the story of Jesus and how His life has transformed the world and us in it.

In Luke we see Jesus acting fully human with a range of emotions and some urgency about what is to come while the disciples have yet to fully grasp what is happening. They sleep but Jesus calls them to be ready and alert. How often do we grasp the meaning of what is happening all around us? Even the small things like calling a friend, sending a note card of cheer, or sharing a meal with someone we care about, are all ways to live out our Christian calling to pray. Prayer is not only achieved with words. To me, prayer is an ongoing attention to God in my presence, Jesus in my thinking, and the Holy Spirit in my very act of breathing. What I want to pay attention to this Advent is how I can be ready and alert for God's promises to be fulfilled in my life and how I can honor my faith and devotion to God – Three in One.

Heavenly Father, thank you for hearing our prayers. Giving us the gift of Jesus Christ to redeem us has provided lessons about how to live most fully in your love and guidance. With the Holy Spirit, we honor and praise your holy name! Amen

Tuesday, December 17

Isaiah 9:1-7

2 Peter 1:12-21

Luke 22:54-69

In Isaiah 9:1-7, the part that stands out to me most is when Isaiah says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light". This makes me think about times in my life when I have felt like life is heavy, or my heart felt empty, and suddenly I experienced a moment that lifted me into a new perspective. Whether that light is an unexpected kindness, or just a reminder that I am not alone in what I am facing, this "great light" isn't just a little flicker of hope, but powerful enough to completely fill huge spaces of darkness.

The passage also describes this light and hope as coming from a child as it talks about a humble beginning that will grow to bring peace and joy like nothing else. For me, this reminds me that often God's biggest works start in ways we might overlook. The idea of a "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" coming as a child shows that God brings transformation in ways we might not expect, but the impact might be just what people need.

This Advent, this passage in Isaiah encourages us to look for light and hope, even in small ways and from unexpected places; and to trust that God is at work, bringing peace, justice, and joy even when life seems the darkest.

In 2 Peter 1:12-21, what stands out to me is the image of God's word as a "lamp shining in a dark place." Peter reminds me that the message we have isn't just based on stories or myths, but on something real and reliable. This makes me think of times when life feels a bit confusing, and even familiar things feel new. Like Peter says, this prophetic message is "fully confirmed," giving us something steady to hold onto when things feel uncertain. It's like a light that keeps us moving forward, guiding us until the "day dawns."

This Advent, I'm reminded to hold onto God's promises and to look for those moments of light. They might come in simple ways like a kind word from a friend, or a moment in prayer that brings peace. Even though things might feel unclear at times, God's word is still there, like a steady light, showing us that He is present and guiding us.

In Luke 22:54-69, the moment that stands out to me is Peter's denial of Jesus. Peter's reaction is so human; he's scared, pressured, and ends up doing exactly what he thought he'd never do: deny Jesus. It makes me think of those times when we feel distant from God or let fear get in the way of standing up for what we believe. Even though Peter messes up, there's something hopeful here because we know this isn't the end for him. Later, Jesus forgives him, and Peter goes on to play a big role in spreading the gospel.

This passage reminds me that even when we fall short, God doesn't give up on us. Advent is a time to look forward to the light and hope that Jesus brings. A light strong enough to pull us back, even after our lowest moments.

Wednesday, December 18

Isaiah 9:8-17

2 Peter 2:1-10a

Mark 1:1-8

Isaiah 9:8-17

In this first reading, pride makes people think they (we) can do this thing, whatever it is, by ourselves. God is not happy because we still don't understand that we need Him.

2 Peter 2:1-10a

In this writing, Peter is reinforcing our need for God – no matter how holy we think we are. In doing that, we are missing the point of humility. With our limited knowledge, we think we know it all. Not so! Don't pat yourself on the back just yet and maybe not ever, because this is just the tip of the iceberg for some of us today also. Dare I say all of us?

Mark 1:1-8

Mark shoots right out of the gate – gets right to the point. John the Baptist is baptizing in the Jordan River, and all the while pointing the way towards Jesus' coming. John baptizes with water – Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Thursday, December 19

Isaiah 9:18—10:4

2 Peter 2:10b-16

Matthew 3:1-12

For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke.
Isaiah 9:18 (21st Century King James Version)

“Without Me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain.” For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.
Isaiah 10:4

Beware of false teachers! They slander celestial beings, an example of despising authority. They are shameless peddlers of error. For even good angels, with their greater power, don't accuse lesser angels. The unrighteous will be repaid for the harm they have caused. Daylight carousing, seducing and greed – they are truly accused! They have followed Balaam, Boer's son – lovers of wickedness.

Here we have Matthew's introduction to John the Baptist from Judea, preaching repentance, and to watch for the kingdom of heaven. John went throughout Jerusalem and all Judea, and the whole region of the Jordan. The people confessed their sins and were baptized. But Jesus' ministry was not accepted by the religious establishment. They denied Jesus as the Messiah because of his Sabbath healing and other traditions. Jesus obeys the Scripture.

O Lord, let us always seek to see the truth, while beset with lies. May we even be able to hear your Word. Let us strive to be like John, and heed God's commandments. We will be rewarded. Thank you for the gift of your Son, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, for Jesus came to seek, and to find the lost. Amen

Friday, December 20

Isaiah 10:5-19

2 Peter 2:17-22

Matthew 11:2-15

There's a moment in today's readings that stands out to me: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see?" That question has been on my mind, and I've been reflecting on how often we approach situations with others looking for what's wrong rather than focusing on what's right and reframing what we perceive as being "wrong." It's almost too easy to notice where others fall short—where they don't live up to God's call or our expectations. We focus on the missteps of others, their imperfections, and what we think they're doing wrong.

But if I'm honest, I've returned to my own "vomit" more times than I care to admit. I've clung to bitterness, pride, and judgment while pleading in the next breath for God's mercy. Advent reminds me that grace doesn't stop with me—it flows through me to others. What would it look like to reflect that grace instead of rushing to critique those whose struggles differ from mine?

When I look at my own life, I see the pride and self-reliance that God has had to strip away and the pride and self-reliance that has not yet been removed. It's all meant to make room for God—not to shame me. What if, instead of dwelling on what needs fixing, we asked God to meet us in our own wilderness and reshape our hearts?

Jesus' response to John the Baptist's doubt is a beautiful example. He doesn't criticize John's questions; He answers with gentleness and assurance, pointing to the evidence of God's work. Advent is a season of waiting and patience with others, ourselves, and the world God is redeeming, and to look inward with true honesty at what God is building in and around us; it's not a time to tear others down.

As I sit in this season of Advent, I feel challenged to ask myself: What am I looking for in the wilderness? Am I searching for what's wrong in others, or am I letting God refine me to see His grace at work—even in the messiness of human relationships? This is a time to let God's love reshape my vision so that when I look at others, I don't see what they lack—I see how deeply they are loved by the One who came to save us all.

Saturday, December 21

Isaiah 10:20-27

Jude 17-25

Luke 3:1-9

“Prepare the way for the Lord” Luke 3:4 (NIV)

The winter solstice, also called the hibernal solstice, occurs when either of Earth's poles reaches its maximum tilt away from the Sun. This happens twice yearly, once in each hemisphere. There are many celebrations of this Midwinter day with festivals around the world. It is also celebrated for the longest night.

Advent should be a quiet season of repentance and reflection, yet our days become frenzied with shopping, cooking, cleaning and attending school and church events. Our homes are decorated to the nines with festive trees and greenery. Shiny new ornaments and favorite old ones, made long ago by the small hands of our children, compete for space on our brightly lit branches. Christmas music blares from every store. The post office is overwhelmed, and the Amazon van has a well-worn path through my neighborhood.

The longest night seems like a gift in the Midwinter busyness. A little more darkness to rest, to pray, to mourn the passing of family and friends, and the years that seem to rush by with lightning speed. Time to make sure our hearts, as well as our houses are ready to greet the Christ Child.

One of my most-loved Advent poems is by Mary Oliver. I believe her beautiful text captures how our Advent should be. The title is “Making the House Ready for The Lord.”

*Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but
still nothing is as shining as it should be
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an
uproar of mice — it is the season of their
many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves
and through the walls the squirrels
have gnawed their ragged entrances — but it is the season
when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard
while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly
up the path, to the door. And still I believe you will
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.*

May God bless you all with a Solstice of reflection, and a Holy and Joyous Christmas.

Sunday, December 22

Isaiah 42:1-12

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 3:16-21

This passage from Ephesians suggests that peace is not passive, that peace within is not a given. Our “heavenly places” may be threatened, but with the “whole armor of God” we find our footing.

...be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything to stand firm. Ephesians 6:10-13 (NRSV)

The image of a warrior evokes strength, valor, and honor. We may visualize a younger person who is physically and mentally trained to be powerful and capable, to be a defender of others. Yet when facing our foes, we ourselves may not feel strong or courageous. We may not have the combat skills required or even the will to fight at all. In these verses, we are given a message of hope and encouragement, a reminder that we do not face spiritual battles (or any other battles) alone.

Our struggle is against “the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” What are the cosmic powers, and what is the present darkness we are facing? Where or what are the heavenly places? Perhaps the answers to these questions are a bit different for everyone.

Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:14-17

Each piece of “armor” is a metaphor for a powerful gift; the fortification of truth, righteousness, salvation. With God’s help we can stand firm on our feet and proclaim the gospel of peace, and our faith offers us a shield. We do not fight this evil with force, but with the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak. Ephesians 6:18-20

Now that we are suited up, may we also remember that we have two powerful resources within us that we are called upon to use: our prayers and our voice.

Peace plans its strategy and encircles the enemy. | Peace, like war, is waged.
Peace marshals its forces and storms the gates. | Peace, like war, is waged.
Peace gathers its weapons and pierces the defense. | Peace, like war, is waged.
But Christ has turned it all around: | the weapons of peace are love, joy, goodness, longsuffering;
the arms of peace are justice, truth, patience, prayer; | the strategy of peace brings safety,
welfare, happiness; | the forces of peace are the sons and daughters of God
–Walker Knight

Monday, December 23

Isaiah 11:1-9

Revelation 20:1-10

John 5:30-47

“The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them.” Isaiah 11:6 (NRSV)

“Happy Christmas Eve Eve.” Have you ever used, or heard, that greeting when addressing one another? Most likely not. How about, “Happy last two days of Advent.” Probably not that one either. These greetings, such as they are, are simple reminders of the season(s) that we are leaving and entering. I hope, for all, this Advent season has been one of contemplation and preparation. AND, I hope the upcoming Christmas season will be one of joy, gladness, and peace. Reflecting on where we are and preparing for what’s to come is what Advent is. Isaiah’s prophecy in the beginning of chapter 11 tells us of a peaceful kingdom. These words, given to him by God, were preparing the world (all of us) for the coming of the Messiah...which we all know did not happen until many, many years later. And, speaking of preparing, the words in our lesson today from the book of Revelation are reminding us to be ready for the second coming of the Messiah. This too, is Advent. As the musician that I am, I offer you the hymn text below which is based on Isaiah’s prophecy. It was so very poignant in ancient times as well as today. “Happy Christmas Eve Eve” and “Happy Last two days of Advent.”

*O day of peace that dimly shines through all our hope and prayers and dreams,
guide us to justice, truth, and love, delivered from our selfish schemes.
May swords of hate fall from our hands, our hearts from envy find release,
till by God’s grace our warring world shall see Christ’s promised reign of peace.*

*Then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb, nor shall the fierce devour the small;
as beasts and cattle calmly graze, a little child shall lead them all.
Then enemies shall learn to love, all creatures find their true accord;
the hope of peace shall be fulfilled, for all the earth shall know the Lord.*

The Hymnal 1982 #597

Words: Carl P. Daw, Jr. (b. 1944)

Music: *Jerusalem*, Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1844-1918)

Tuesday, December 24

Isaiah 35:1-10

Revelation 22:12-17, 21

Luke 1:67-80

"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, 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 1:78-79)

Today is the last day of Advent, the season of preparation. Alongside this holy season is a far more popular and commercial season. Many of us have been caught up in the unfortunate freneticism of this season of excess as we attempt to prepare by decorating and purchasing and acquiring. We add more and more and more until our bodies, our minds, our bank accounts, and our spirits are exhausted.

But, of course, this is not what Christ has asked of us in this season. Quite the opposite, really. Advent is a time of stripping away, of letting go. It is a time of discerning what is really needed, what our souls actually long for.

It is in this Holy Spirit that God spoke through Zechariah, explaining to those who would listen the actual work of preparation.

". . . [For] you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins." (Luke 1:76b-77)

It is not perfect decorations, or an exquisite meal, or an extravagant present that will make someone feel loved and welcomed this season. This can only be accomplished by being truly and fully loving and welcoming. Forgiving others of anything held against them. Mending broken or strained relationships. Choosing the light, and releasing the darkness.

On this Silent Night, this Holy Night, our thoughts turn to peace. Our souls long for peace. So, let us take a deep breath. Let go of your misgivings, and all which you hold against others. Let the Christ child not find us unprepared. Let forgiveness and mercy be the totality of this night for the Prince of Peace has come.

CONTRIBUTORS

First Week in Advent

December 1.....	Melinda Carey
December 2.....	Carmen Smith
December 3.....	Billy Jones
December 4.....	Alice Bryan
December 5.....	Billy Jones
December 6.....	Beth Jones
December 7.....	Ashley McKenna

Second Week in Advent

December 8.....	Putnam Smith
December 9.....	Jacquelyn Kenton
December 10.....	Joanie Anderton
December 11.....	Ashley McKenna
December 12.....	Anonymous
December 13.....	Margaret Osmulski
December 14.....	Billy Jones

Third Week in Advent

December 15.....	Sue Ellen Williams
December 16.....	Jeri Ellis
December 17.....	Alex Blimline
December 18.....	Kay Stine
December 19.....	Jeanie Lipscomb
December 20.....	Billy Jones
December 21.....	Nancy Smith

Fourth Week in Advent

December 22.....	Melanie Webb
December 23.....	Jeff Daniel
December 24.....	The Rev. Brandon Mozingo