



# PREPARE THE WAY

REFLECTIONS FOR ADVENT 2024

pre·pare  
/prēˈper/

to make ready  
beforehand for some  
purpose, use, or  
activity





# PREPARE

In this season of lengthening nights and shortening days, it seems contradictory to look for light breaking into our world. We feel and fear the burden of the world's problems weighing heavily upon our shoulders. We hear of war and rumors of war and the chaos grows ever more noisy. Why would we look for the coming of light? Why would we in this season of expectation seek out hope, peace, joy, and love? The questions are so many, and the answers are so few.

Yet it is precisely when things are at their thinnest, when the gloom of the world encroaches, and the shadow threatens to overcome that God breaks into our world. Not to shatter the darkness, but to enter the darkness. God's most profound manifestations occur not in the light but in the dark. God seems to have an affinity with transformation in the darkness. In this season of Advent, we are invited to leave behind the familiar, to slow ourselves down, and take notice of where God is poking, prodding, and praying us into deepening our relationship with ourselves, our neighbors, and with God.

The invitation this Advent season is to hold back the mad dash towards the manger and spend some time along the path of expectant waiting. Read the scriptures, engage with the reflections, live the questions, pray the prayers, and join in the journey with God. Jesus is coming!

-Bishop Deon K. Johnson

The image features a dark background with several lit candles. The flames are out of focus, creating a bokeh effect of warm, glowing orange and yellow circles. In the foreground, the vertical wicks and some of the candle bodies are visible, though slightly blurred. A large, white rectangular box is centered on the page, containing the text.

HOPE

PEACE

**JOY**

LOVE

# JOY

My friend Beth is always happy! No matter what is going on in her life she usually has a smile on her face and a song on her lips. She has had times of loss and pain in her life of course, as we all do. But even through the heartbreak and hurt she is the picture of joy. She often says, "I am blessed by the best and highly favored." That is not a Pollyanna-ish sense of joy, but a deep abiding joy that is untouched but the rigors of the world.

I imagine that that was the same joy that permeated Mary as you waited for the coming of Jesus. Like Beth, Mary knew the soul-crushing pain of heartbreak and heartache. Mary the Godbearer was not exempt from the horrors of Roman occupation and brutality. She lived in the same oppressive system as anyone else in her day, yet she possessed an indomitable joy in God's promised future. She was certainly blessed by the best and highly favored. Her joy in the anticipation of God's act of liberation and justice in the form of the child growing inside her is the same indomitable joy we find amid adversity and struggle.

God invites us into Mary's joy even as we struggle with the brokenness of our world. "My soul proclaims the greatness of God and heart rejoices in God my savior." We are blessed by the best, and highly favored.



O Eternal Dawn, whose joy shone radiantly through Mary the Godbearer and who nourishes us in the joy of unfenced love; ensnare us, like Mary, towards the fulfilling of your purpose and your promise of salvation found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**How will you be an agent of joy today?**



# ADVENT WEEK THREE

## MONDAY: BEING

### SCRIPTURE Colossians 3:16

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”*

### REFLECTION

“Art Thou in the darkness? Mind it not, for if thou dost it will feed thee more, but stand still and act not, and wait in patience, till Light arises out of darkness and leads thee.” The Quaker preacher James Naylor invites us into a stillness that is often unknown in our busy world. With the demands of doing and producing, we can feel at times like we need to program ourselves, our families, and our churches into usefulness. I know that at times when my life is chaotic and my calendar is full the last thing I think of is being still.

We live in a culture that values doing. We want to think, pray, walk, or run toward a new solution or a new answer. Sometimes we are called to simply stay in that place of unknowing. Standing in a place of uncertainty and waiting for the light to illuminate our darkness is difficult. Jesus’ coming into the world invites us to let space come in, to stay present, and to be open to the guidance of the light as it comes.

### PRAYER

O God, our lives are often pulled in many directions and we are called to serve many masters in our busyness. Give us the grace and the courage to find our worth not in the doing, but in the being. Help us to wait with patience the coming the One who enters our humanity and raises us to divinity. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will you lean into being today?



# ADVENT WEEK THREE

## TUESDAY: WAIT

### SCRIPTURE Isaiah 40:31

*“But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”*

### REFLECTION

Have you ever called a utility company or the doctor’s office only to be greeted with the saccharine voice of impending waiting? “Your call is important to us and will be answered in the order it was received. Please enjoy the music while we try to avoid talking to you or getting you to a real person who can answer your question.” That is often my interpretation of the infinite loop of being on hold. Waiting. I don’t like to wait and I dread having to sit on hold.

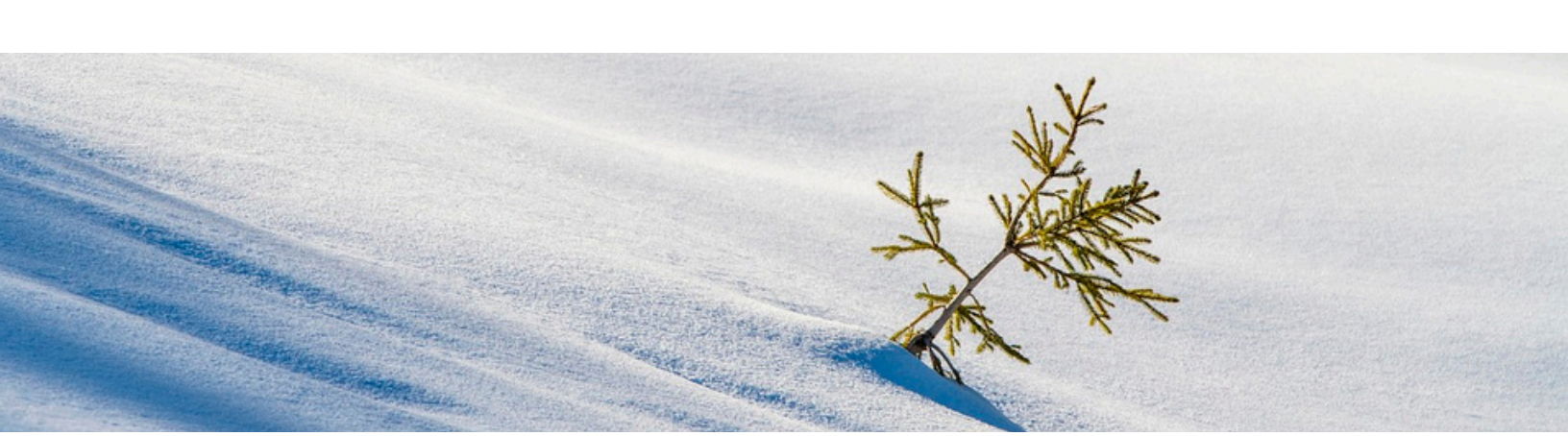
A friend of mine shared with me that she prays or sings when she is put on hold. I do not. I would rather get a person on the phone, solve my problem, and get on with my day. But waiting is just a part of life, even if I don’t necessarily like it. Jesus comes to a long-waiting world. I may not like to wait but waiting is as sacred as the fulfillment of God’s promised grace. I may not like to dwell in the waiting place, but God lives there. So perhaps I might try saying a prayer or two the next time I have to wait on hold. Perhaps I might not. But I know that God enters the waiting spaces of our lives and dwells there.

### PRAYER

O God of time and space, who dwelling is beyond our comprehending, who holds the wellspring of eternity, grant us the grace to wait patiently for you to be revealed among in the Child of Christ which transcends all time with your infinite love. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will you find time to wait today?



# ADVENT WEEK THREE

## WEDNESDAY: IMAGINE

### SCRIPTURE Joel 2:28

*"Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."*

### REFLECTION

This season calls for imagination. It is the season of angels bearing Good News of great joy, wandering stars, and visitors from far-off lands. It is the season for cherishing these treasures in our hearts, longing for the world to be made new as the familiar falls away, and seeking to go home by another way.

The journey to the manger is a pilgrimage of imagining God's presence among us. This season calls us to recapture the whimsy of imagination because only a vivid imagination is able to recognize the improbable and dream of the seemingly impossible.

But often our imagination fails us. We would rather seek certainty than stargazing. We want our angels safely nestled atop trees or in heaven far away where they make no great demands of us and we can ignore their divine message. God calls us in this season of expectation to join the Divine imagining, because to imagine with God is to act for a world transformed one small step at a time.

### PRAYER

O Divine Imaginator, who cast the stars and craft the cattails, who stretched the heavens and sang the seas. So inspire our imaginations that we may see beyond the horizons of what is, to behold in beauty what could be. For the sake of Christ. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will you join the Divine imagination today?





# ADVENT WEEK THREE

## THURSDAY: STORIES

### SCRIPTURE Luke 13:18-19

*“Jesus said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”*

### REFLECTION

Collective stories tell us who we are as a nation and a community. They are the narratives of a society of our history of remembering us our history will judge us. Stories are the windows through which we view the past. They are the doorways to how we will live in the future. How then do we shape the stories that surround us? How are we shaped by stories? No matter what we cannot escape stories.

We who are keepers of the story must be willing to tell the whole truth. It is not enough to tell a part of the history a part of the vision of the future we must be willing to tell the whole story because the whole story will set us free. The whole story will give us a clearer vision of where God is calling and cajoling and convincing us to be without the whole story we are not complete.

### PRAYER

O God of Sacred Stories, you hold the past, present, and future. You enter the sacred circle of human time to redeem and remake our stories with the truth of your love. Bless us with a sense of your unfolding promise made real in the person of Jesus Emmanuel. Amen.

### QUESTION

How are you living out the incomplete story of God in you today?



# ADVENT WEEK THREE

## FRIDAY: MUSIC

### SCRIPTURE Psalm 95:1-2

*"Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before the presence of the Lord with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to God with psalms."*

### REFLECTION

In the beginning, God sang! Before the worlds began, before the heavens were formed, before the stars took flight, God sang. God sang a single perfect note in multipart harmony. God sang a story of love that wove through the universe and called all things into being. The voice of the Holy One filled the void of eternity and the melody of creation spread across the cosmos in an all-encompassing love song.

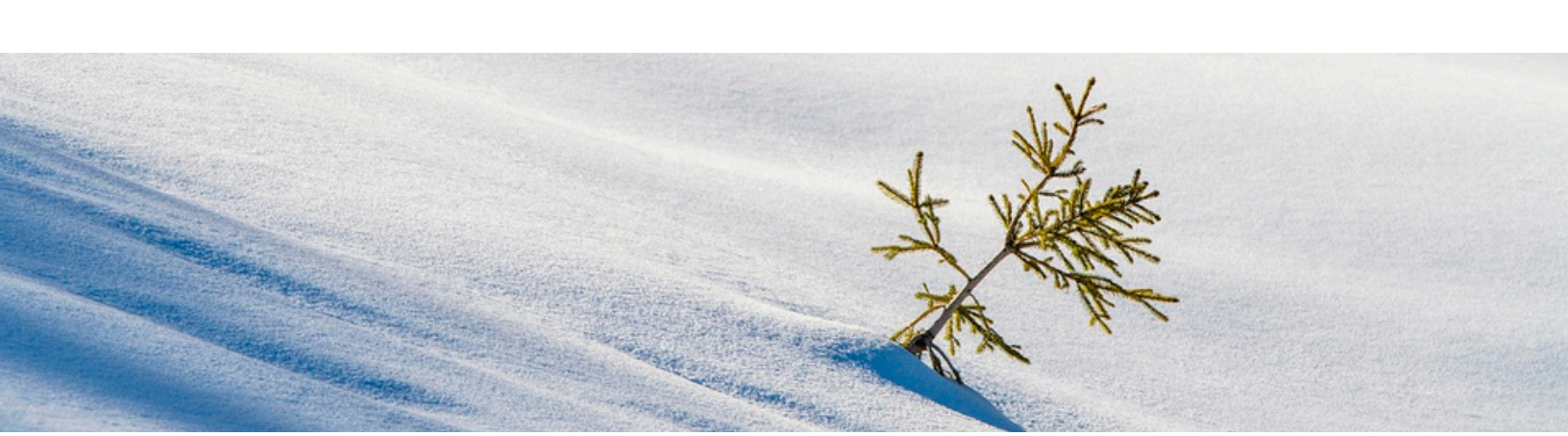
All created things sing with the rhythm of our Creator, who summons us into harmony with God and each other. Each life is a note in the great opus of the Eternal One. And the song goes on. Each aria, each ballad, and each hymn join with the angels' voices to amplify the music of God. The course of all creation has been a symphonic love song from God. As we look to the coming of the Song of God in the Christ Child, how can we keep from singing?

### PRAYER

O God of endless song, from whom flows the melody of creation and the beauty of the cosmos; tune our hearts to the infinite love that permeates and penetrates all life. That our lives may be a love song filled with the radiant symphony of hope found in Jesus Emmanuel. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will your life sing with the beauty of God's love today?



# ADVENT WEEK THREE

## WEDNESDAY: IMAGINE

### SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 29:11

*“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”*

### REFLECTION

This season calls for imagination. This is the season of angels bearing Good News of great joy; of wandering stargazers and visitors from far-off lands. This is the season for cherishing these things in our hearts and looking towards the coming of hope.

The Advent journey to the manger is a pilgrimage of imagining and reimagining God's presence among us. But often our imagination fails us. We would rather seek certainty rather than stargaze. If we are honest we want our angels safely nestled on trees or in heaven where they make no great demands of us and where we can ignore their divine message.

But to enter this season of Advent is to embark on an adventure into the imaginative work of joining God in creatively rethinking who we are and how we are as people of faith. Perhaps the call of this season is to look beyond the concrete and to dive deeply into the waters of wild imagining.

### PRAYER

O God of infinite imagining, spur our hearts and our minds beyond the now so that we may catch sight of your Divine vision unfolding in the world about us. That with Jesus our Salvation we may dream new dreams, and foster new visions; now and always. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will you imagine with God a different future?

# JOY

“Joy is the holy fire  
that keeps our  
purpose warm and  
our intelligence  
aglow.”

-Helen Keller