



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



HOPE

PEACE

JOY

LOVE

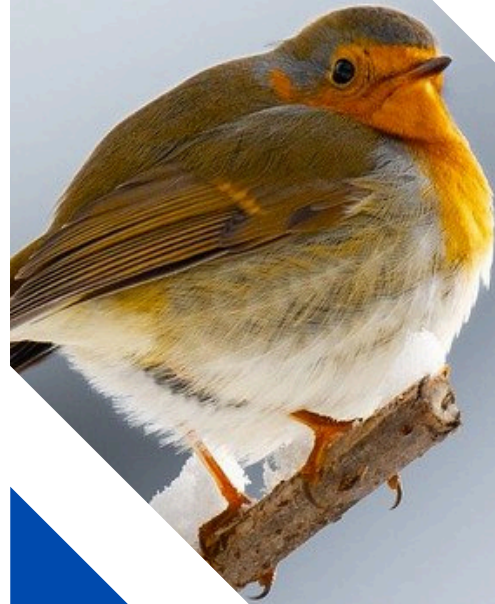
HOPE

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Romans 15:13

We don't often think of hope as being courageous. Hope is often depicted as being frail, fragile, or feeble. And at times hope can seem fleeting, a mere pipe dream. But hope is the most radical and courageous act we can have in the face of oppression and injustice.

Hope when everything says that you should not hope is a defiant act of courage. God choosing to be among us in the form of the most innocent, fragile, and precious baby is a defiant act of courageous hope. Hope has transformed our world. Hope has toppled rulers destroyed empires and changed the course of human history. Hope has torn down walls, healed divisions, and made friends of enemies.

Now more than ever we need the courage of hope to lead us on.



O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love, calling humanity to radical hope. Come to teach us the path of knowledge and show us the wellspring of truth; In Jesus whose coming we await. Amen.

How will I live the courage of hope today?



ADVENT WEEK ONE

MONDAY: STORY

SCRIPTURE Matthew 13:34-35

“Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.’”

REFLECTION

Stories are all around us. They swirl and swell, they ebb and flow. They are the waters in which we live. The stories of the rivers and the creek, the forest and the trees. The stories of our people buried in the Earth and the cry of the forgotten echoing from the soil. Stories surround us, emanate from us, shape us, refine us, define us, undo us, remake us, heal us, wound us. Stories are the most powerful thing we have as people.

The stories that we tell ourselves about where we come from, about who we are, and about where we are going all matter because the story shapes our perspective and our vision. We are in the middle of the story as we are telling it. The stories we tell ourselves matter! We are a part of God’s unfolding story as we walk this journey of Advent. What’s your God story?

PRAYER

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: who is revealed in sacred story. Come and shine on our story, so that we may be always rooted in your goodness and love; all the days of our lives. Through Jesus, the Word made flesh. Amen.

QUESTION

How will I shape my story today?



ADVENT WEEK ONE

TUESDAY: GIFT

SCRIPTURE James 1:17

“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

REFLECTION

A gift given freely from an unrelenting and unyielding love! The gift of our lives is a love story. Not because we create the narrative but because out of love God gifted us. We are God’s beloved. The gift of belovedness is perhaps the hardest gift for us to accept because we often find ourselves unacceptable, and unloveable. That is the nature of God’s grace and love. God is God and God is love. God’s love affair with humanity is unrelenting.

As we journey through the unfolding story of God, breaking into our world, the gift that is given is God’s very self. God takes on the very thing, the very substance of who we are to remind us in the depths of our being that we are worthy of this gift of unimaginable, unconditional, and unsolicited love. Perhaps in the season, the lesson we learn is to simply accept the gift of God’s love freely given.

PRAYER

O Gift Divine, who orders all things in love and who has given each of us the breath of life. Give us the grace to use our gifts for the building up of others and for the sharing of Love. All this we ask in the name of Jesus the truest gift of all. Amen.

QUESTION

How will you nurture the grace-given gift of love?



ADVENT WEEK ONE

WEDNESDAY: LISTEN

SCRIPTURE Psalm 37:7-9

“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for God. Do not fret yourself over the one who prospers, the one who succeeds in evil schemes. Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; do not fret yourself; it leads only to evil. For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait upon the Lord shall possess the land.”

REFLECTION

Noise always seems to be on the threshold of what we want. Noise is the thing that clutters the air around us as we plan and prepare for God’s breaking into the world. God does not come to us with noise or fury. God comes to us with a cry, a whimper, a gasp, on a darkened night, interrupted by new life. All else is noise.

God pierces the noise that we create in our world and enters not just our reality but each one of us. What noise is God seeking to break through for you? What noise keeps you from hearing, seeing, or finding God in the still small voice and the midst of the noise?

PRAYER

O Still Small Voice of Calm, who dwells in the loudest silence, quiet our hearts, our minds, and our very being, that we may listen for your voice speaking above the roar of our lives. All for the sake of your Love in Jesus the long-awaited One. Amen.

QUESTION

How will I listen for God’s voice against the noise of today?



ADVENT WEEK ONE

THURSDAY: BREATHE

SCRIPTURE Ezekiel 37:9

"Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath:[a] Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,[b] and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

REFLECTION

"And God breathed the breath of life." We don't pay a whole lot of attention to our breath, most times. Our bodies go on autopilot when it comes to breathing. And yet our breath, the closest thing to us often gets caught in our throats and times of panic and fear. Our breath quickens, our hearts race. We feel constricted when confronted by fear.

God's coming among us seeks to dispel fear. God's coming is the deep breath of Advent, allowing us to breathe deeply of God's love, to savor hope, to center expectation. All we have to do is breathe. Where in this season do you need to find a deeper breath?

PRAYER

O Breath of Life, with a Word you called the cosmos into being, and you bless each one of us with the breath of life. Helps us to breathe with you a world transformed by hope, that we may live and know that you are God, doing wonders beyond our imagining Amen.

QUESTION

How will I take time to breathe God's presence today?



ADVENT WEEK ONE

FRIDAY: WANDER

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

Tumbleweed. When I was a kid, I used to love those old-fashioned westerns. I was especially drawn to the scene where the hero and the bad guy stood facing each other in the climactic scene where good would triumph over evil. And inevitably as that scene was framed, you would see a lone tumbleweed roll across the screen. Tumbleweed was a visual reminder that they were somewhere in the middle of a desert, and this roaming bush was simply blowing by doing its thing.

The season of Advent can feel a lot like tumbleweed. Our lives can feel a lot like tumbleweed, rolling along, trying to find a place to put down roots, to go deeper into the heart of God, into our understanding of ourselves. We can feel like we are drifting, rolling along without point or purpose. Then God gets a hold of us and grounds us. Where do you need to be grounded in this season?

PRAYER

O Day Star from on high, who illumines the hearts and minds of your faithful people, and who guides those who wander along right paths, be our sign and guide on the path ahead; that in those times of uncertainty and unknowing, we may ever hold fast to the Light of Christ coming into the world. Amen.

QUESTION

How will I wander along the path of God today?



ADVENT WEEK ONE

SATURDAY: SHINE

SCRIPTURE Matthew 4:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

REFLECTION

As children, we are encouraged to shine. Our childhood milestones are moments to be celebrated; our first steps, our first words, our first tooth. We are encouraged by those who love us to shine as we know we naturally should. But somewhere along the way our lights dim. We move from being called to shine to being able to blend in.

The light of God is infused into our very being. Yet in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, we are told to hide our light, to dim our wicks. God calls us to shine with the brightness of the gift of life given to us. How dare we not shine! Not to outshine others but to encourage others to let their light shine. How dare we not shine as God intended us to shine! Perhaps we might recapture the encouragement of childhood. This little light of mine...


PRAYER

O Radiant Light of all creation, who in love fashioned the world and fused the light of your very self into the brightness of each one of us; Give us courage to find our light and rediscover our shine, that we may give glory in our brightness and honor through our light. Amen.

QUESTION

How will I shine with the brilliance of God today?

HOPE



"Hope is being able
to see that there is
light despite all of
the darkness."

- Desmond Tutu