



# 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

A long-exposure photograph of a starry night sky, showing numerous curved light trails from stars. The trails are most prominent in the upper half of the image, where they form a dense, swirling pattern of blue and white lines. The lower half of the image shows a lighter, less dense trail pattern, with the dark silhouette of a tree visible at the bottom center.

HOPE

PEACE

JOY

**LOVE**

# LOVE

Love, at its essence, is the heart of faith, yet it is the hardest and most demanding call in following Christ and seeking God. To love is to look beyond ourselves, embrace the divine light in others, and live in harmony with God's will for all creation. This season of longing expectation reminds us that love is not just a feeling but an active choice—an offering of kindness, patience, and selflessness in a world yearning for hope. It means that we cannot see love as a mere sentiment but as the ultimate source and culmination of all creation.

As we live more fully into a love that looks beyond ourselves and focus more intently on the ultimate gift of God's love—Jesus, Emmanuel—let us carry this truth in our hearts: we are deeply loved, we are called to love in return, and we receive abiding love. How then do we live more fully into love? How do we share this love that we know deeply but understand incompletely? We look for love bursting forth in small and great ways around and through us. To see love we must be love.

Whether through a gentle word, a generous act, or quiet prayer, may we embody the spirit of Advent by living out the love that transforms lives and draws us closer to the divine. As this season of Advent draws to an end, let love be the light that guides us, and let love be the anchor that steadies us as we prepare to welcome Christ anew.



O God, who lovingly created and more lovingly restored the cosmos, and whose very self is infinite love; reground us in yourself, that seeking to love and serve you in all persons we may grow in compassion and grace; for the sake of Emmanuel your ultimate gift of Love. Amen.

**How will you embody love today?**



# ADVENT WEEK FOUR

## MONDAY: FORGIVE

### SCRIPTURE Ephesians 4:32

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

### REFLECTION

In my family growing up, Christmas was a huge deal. For weeks before Christmas there were chores to be done; the furniture needed to be dusted, drinks had to be bought, the silverware had to be polished, food had to be cooked, all in preparation for family and friends to stop by on Christmas. Rarely did we do presents growing up because Christmas was about being ready to welcome friends and strangers who stopped by in the guise of Christ. In the Caribbean, Christmas is about community gathering, so preparing is an act of hospitality.

I imagine Mary and Joseph, like millennia of parents, tried to be prepared for Jesus's coming. I imagined that they found a cot, knitted clothes, and made toys in preparation for the baby. I wonder how the census threw all their well-thought-out plans out the window? Or did Jesus simply come earlier than they planned? Regardless of the best-laid plans God has a way of showing up. In this season dedicated to preparation, be prepared to be surprised by God.

### PRAYER

O God of astonishing surprise, you prepare a place for us and prepare us for a place in your embracing love. Grant to us who await the birth cries of Jesus Emmanuel to be watchful and waiting, that we may welcome you into the manger of our hearts; for the sake of your Love. Amen.

### QUESTION

How are you preparing to welcome Christ into your midst today?



# ADVENT WEEK FOUR

## TUESDAY: PREPARE

### SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 29:11

*"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

### REFLECTION

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Familiar words that we say and pray whenever the community gathers, but how often do we pay close attention to what they mean? Forgiveness dwells at the heart of Christianity as a radical act of love. But we often give into the fallacy that forgiveness is about the other person. Forgiveness starts with me, not with the other person. Forgiveness by its very nature is a self-focused act. To forgive is to let go. We find it hard to let go of the slights, hurts, insults, and harm caused by others while often neglecting our failings and faults. But to forgive is to let go of the hope that we can change the past.

In Jesus, we see God's willingness to find us and forgive us. God has been in the forgiveness business since Eve and Adam disobeyed the first commandment, and God continues in the same vein now. Advent invites us to let go of what has been so that we may be open to what will be in the forgiveness offered by God in the Child of Bethlehem.

### PRAYER

O Holy One, in love you call and in love you free us from the fetters of our sins and chains of our transgressions; help us in our struggles and our striving to release into your hands our failed hopes and our dashed dreams; that we might forgive as we are forgiven. For the sake of Christ, we pray. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will you seek to be forgiven or to forgive today?



**MERRY CHRISTMAS**



# INCARNATE

"And the word became flesh." No angels, no shepherds, no sheep, none of the familiar Christmas trappings that are the stuff of pageants and plays the world over. The innkeepers are keeping their inns and the magi are blissfully stargazing. No journeys to a distant land, no fleeing from the jealous king, and no dreams of what is to come.

Five simple words from the Gospel of John transmit the most profound mystery of the incarnation -God becoming flesh to dwell among us. In these uncomplicated words, the entirety of the infinite Creator enters into the finite world, taking on human form, vulnerability, and suffering. No mere act in history, a momentary reveling in humanity, but a demonstration and declaration of God's deep desire for intimacy with creation. God's love affair with humanity takes flesh in the very humanity of Jesus.

On this day, Christmas Day, we are reminded that God is not distant or detached from the everyday struggles and stumblings of our lives but is intimately integrated into the life of the world. The incarnation of God with us in the person of Jesus is a reminder and a challenge to look for the divine in the ordinary. It is the assurance that there is night so dark that the light of hope is not there, no struggle so challenging that God has not redeemed, and no despair so thick that God is not able to dispel.

God comes among us, reminding us that greatness is found not in power but in love and self-giving. This Christmas, let it be our hope, our prayer, and our desire that the Word may be made flesh in us.



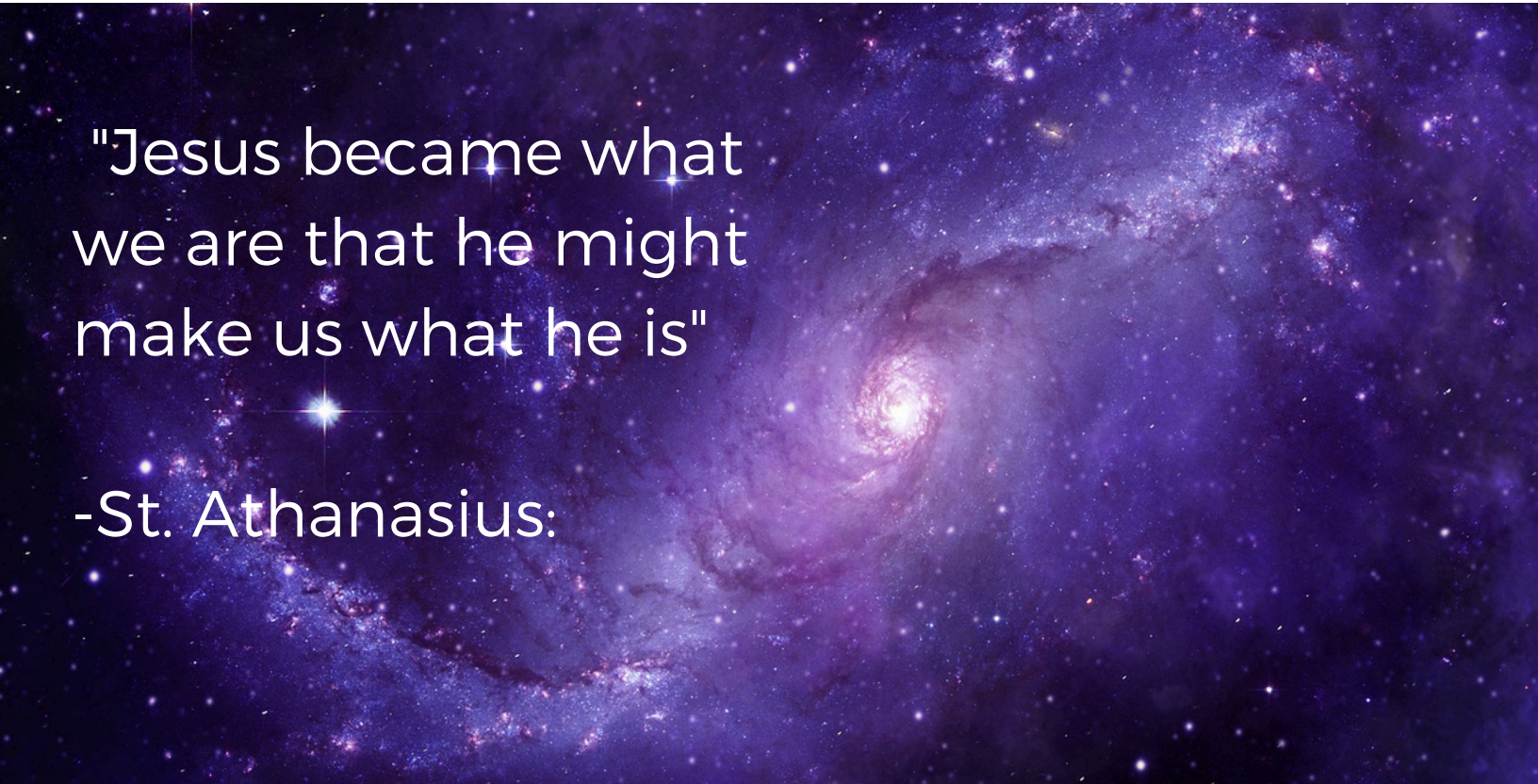
O God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share the life of his divinity; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

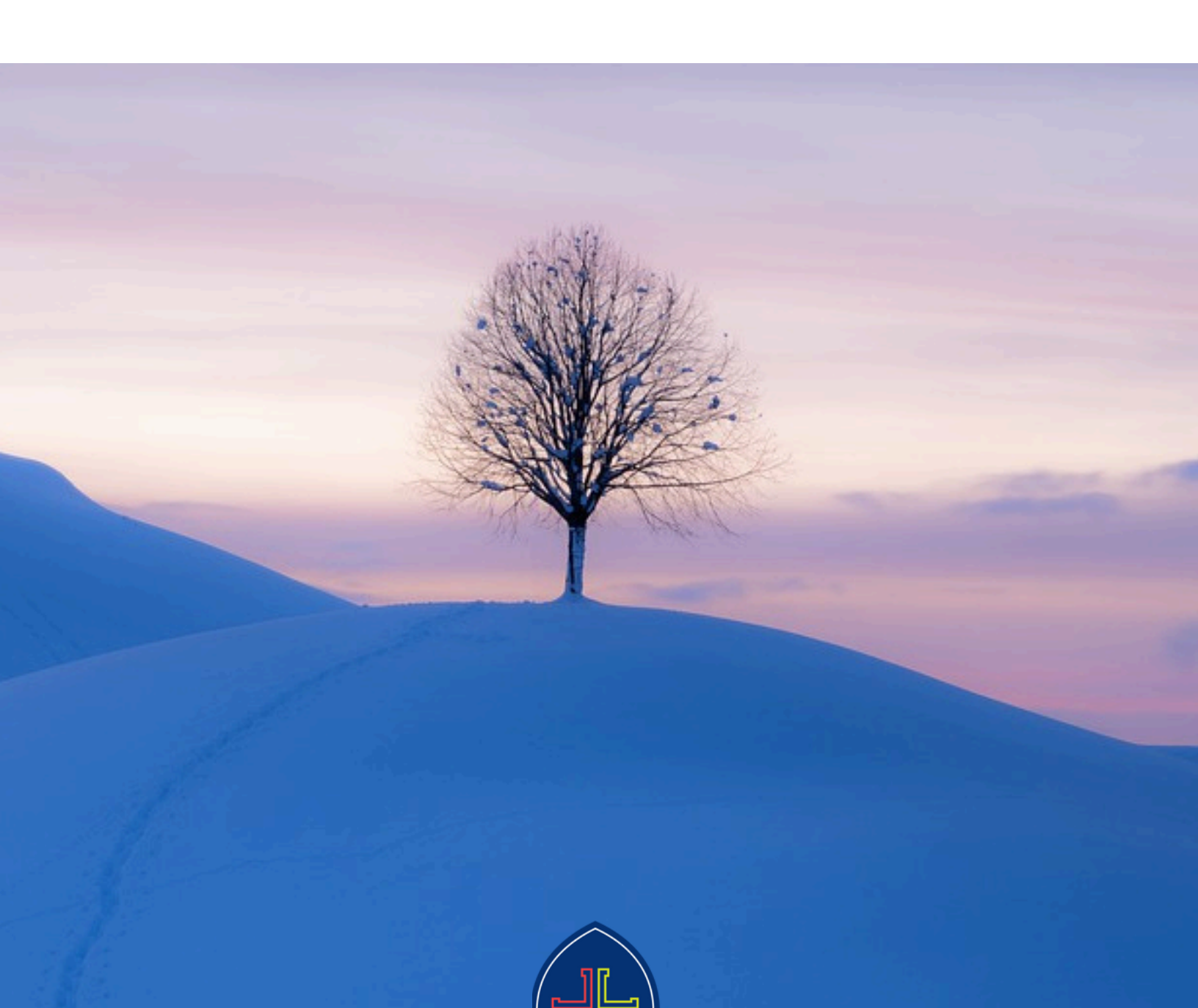
**How will God be incarnate in you today?**

# LOVE

"Jesus became what we are that he might make us what he is"

-St. Athanasius:





THANK YOU FOR JOINING IN  
THE ADVENT JOURNEY!  
MAY GOD BLESS YOU AT CHRISTMAS  
AND THE WHOLE YEAR THROUGH!