



# 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

# PEACE

On Good Friday, April 18, 1930, BBC Radio, the most listened-to newscast around the world reported, "There is no news!" They then went on to play piano music for the rest of the radio broadcast. It was unusual at best and bizarre at worst.

A day with no news? Can you even imagine such a day in our modern era? Can you imagine the evening news broadcast coming on air and simply saying, "There is nothing going on in the world that needs to be reported. We will now commence forty-seven minutes of feel-good animal videos and serene natural vistas to fill the remaining time. Good night!"

I would love it! People would probably freak out. But isn't that what we long for and look for in this season of Advent? We look for the coming of the Prince of Peace into our world to bring an end to conflicts, wars, division, and devastation. We long for a day when the stuff of human brokenness is healed and reconciled under the banner of peace.

I suspect that with the coming of that blessed day, there will be a day of no news. Let us look for, long for, strive for, and work for a day when, in Jesus, we have no news but Good News to share.



O Prince of Peace, whose coming we await and whose reign of love we long for; Give us the peace that the world cannot give, that in tranquility and grace, we may be called repairers of the breach and makers of peace. For the sake of Christ, our longed-for Savior. Amen.

**How will you work towards peace today?**



# ADVENT WEEK TWO

## MONDAY: DREAM

### SCRIPTURE Psalm 19:1-4

*“The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament[a] proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice[b] goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.”*

### REFLECTION

“The heavens are telling the glory of God.” As children, we play among the clouds. We leap tall mountains and skip along limitless shores through the eyes of our imagination. With deep imagining, we can transport ourselves from the demands and distractions of everyday life into the realm of dreaming. Dreaming lightens our souls, inspires our creativity, and allows us to play playfully. At some point, we leave imagining behind. We relegate daydreaming to the curiosity of childhood and put on the whole armor of rationality.

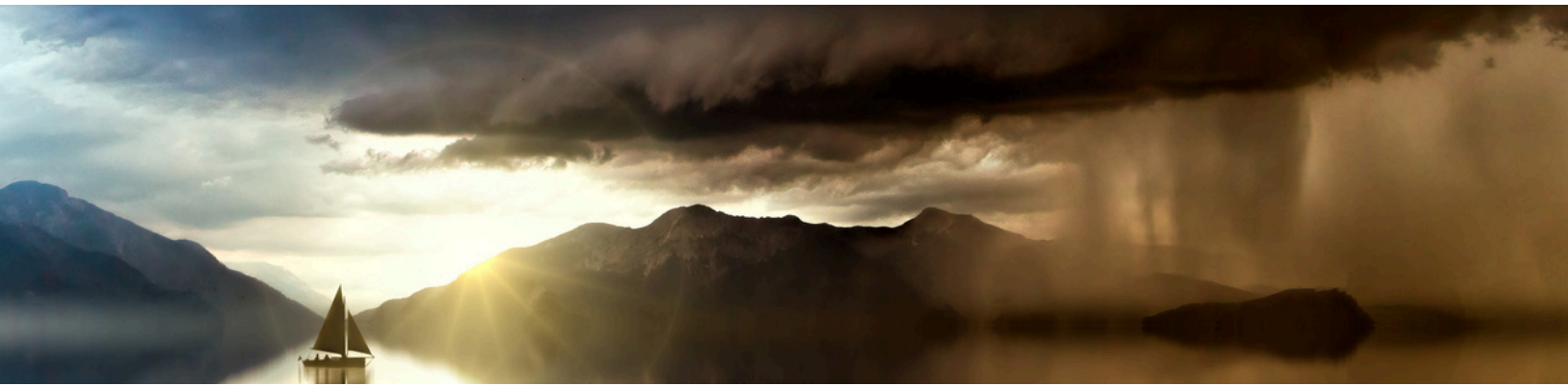
Where does our imagining go when we shed the trappings of childhood? Yet God enters our well-ordered lives with the divine imagining of Jesus being made flesh in our midst. Perhaps the long-awaited incarnation is God’s playful imagination colliding with our stayed rationality inviting us into the dance of Divine dreaming.

### PRAYER

O God of infinite dreaming, you called forth the rich diversity of all created things, you call humanity to join you as co-creators of a world filled with wonder and dreaming. Expand our vision beyond our sight so that we may see you at work among us, expanding our knowledge and wisdom as we await the coming of the Christ Child. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will you seek and be sought by imagination today?



# ADVENT WEEK TWO

## TUESDAY: STILL

### SCRIPTURE Psalm 46:10-11

*"Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."*

### REFLECTION

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Be aware of your breath. Be aware of your body. Be aware of your surroundings. Ground your feet beneath you. Listening to the gentle beating of your heart. Feel the rhythm of your breathing. Sense the air about you on your skin. Breathe. Allow yourself to be still. Breathe. In the stillness wait for God. Listen for the voice of the Holy One speaking in the stillness. God comes to us,

God enters our world, and God breaks through the noise of our creating, with the stillness of being. In those moments of stillness, we experience the spaciousness of clarity. The world will often tell us what we must be doing to be productive, yet God invites us into the stillness of simply being. God enters our world in the stillness of the night and pierces our well-ordered lives with the cries of a child. Be still and know.

### PRAYER

O God enshrouded in stillness, we seek you in the earthquake, wind, and fire, yet you are not there. We look for you in our busyness, yet you are not there. Help us to dwell in the stillness of your presence, that the coming of Christ we may be still and know that you are God.

### QUESTION

How will we embrace stillness in our doing today?



# ADVENT WEEK TWO

## WEDNESDAY: DEEP

### SCRIPTURE Luke 5:4-5

*“When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”*

### REFLECTION

I learned to swim in the ocean. We started in the shallows of the shore and the constant motion of the waves. Hands in the sand and feet out towards the horizon kicking to get our sea legs. We moved a little deeper with the mastery of each motion. Further from the comfort and safety of the shore. Arms and legs moving in rhythm, pushing against the dance of the waves and the flow of the current. Out into the deep we went as a final test.

The deep ocean, where the anchor of the sand and the embrace of the shore seem a distant memory. Out in the deep all the things we learned were put to the test. We needed to go deep. Without venturing into the deep, we cling tightly to the shore. The depth of God is discovered in the deep. Deep calls to deep calls to deep. This season of expectation is rich with its depth. Come into the deep.

### PRAYER

O God who calls us into the depth of your love, when we are fearful grant us courage, when we are despairing, grant us hope, when we are lost grant us grounding, and when we are wandering grant us your homing. Direct us in seeking the deep truth that is Jesus our Savior. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will you enter the deep today?





# ADVENT WEEK TWO

## THURSDAY: JOURNEY

### SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 29:11-13

*"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. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart."*

### REFLECTION

There is an exhilaration in starting something new. Looking out onto the unknown path unfolding brings excitement and trepidation. The first step at the beginning of something new energizes and excites more often than not, but the journey ahead is shaped by the journey behind it. We lay tracks for our coming journey in the choices we make today and the seeds we sow in our lives. In seeking to come among us, God invites us into a journey of discovery that helps us enter into an old story made new.

The story of God's love affair with humanity, with you, has been unfolding for millennia, and with each turn, bump, and smooth path we move a step closer to the heart of completeness. Pay attention to the journeys that have shaped you; they are a gift of love from the God of all journeys.

### PRAYER

O God of faithful journeys, you companion your people along every path, every byway, every road. Be our companion and guide us as we seek to follow in the Way of Jesus the Christ, that relying wholly on your goodness and grace, we may accomplish your purpose, now and at our journey's end. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will your journey be reshaped today?



# ADVENT WEEK TWO

## FRIDAY: DISRUPTION

### SCRIPTURE Luke 21:34

*“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you unexpectedly.”*

### REFLECTION

Have you ever noticed that whenever you sit down to do something important, something that you just have to get done, there is always an interruption? The cat wants attention. The dog needs walking. The kid wants to play. A neighbor needs to talk. The computer needs to be updated. Life has a way of disrupting the well-ordered, the well-meaning, and the well-planned. Somewhere between frustration and acceptance, we respond to the disruptions of our planned doing. Emmanuel, God with us, is God’s supreme disruption of our world.

When we think we have it all together, when think we have figured it out, when we know exactly how things will go, God enters the world and shatters our illusion of control. The disruption of God turns us upside down and the right side up because the distraction is often the place of leaning into the unknown. Perhaps we might wait patiently for the many distractions of God’s presence in our world.

### PRAYER

O God of holy disruption, you break into our world like a thief in the night, and you upend our well-made plans continually. Help us to see in the many interruptions and distractions of our lives the holy constant that is your presence as we look for Christ to be born among us once more. Amen.

### QUESTION

How will you greet the disruptions of today?



# ADVENT WEEK TWO

## **SATURDAY: INTENTION**

### **SCRIPTURE** James 5:12

*“Above all, brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “Yes” be yes and your “No” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.”*

### **REFLECTION**

I have taken up walking as a physical and spiritual practice. Most mornings I have to convince myself that this is a good idea. Leaving the warmth of my bed on those cold winter mornings is good for me. Or so I tell myself. I have to be intentional and, most days, motivated to foster this habit. But once I'm up and out, I remember why this is good for me. This motivated intentionality forces me to take notice.

To take notice of the path before me, to take notice of the people around me, to take notice of God's presence encroaching at times around me. In a real sense, advent is about the intentionality of seeking to notice God breaking into our world. God walks with us for a time, and we must be able to tune our feet to notice God, in the walking.

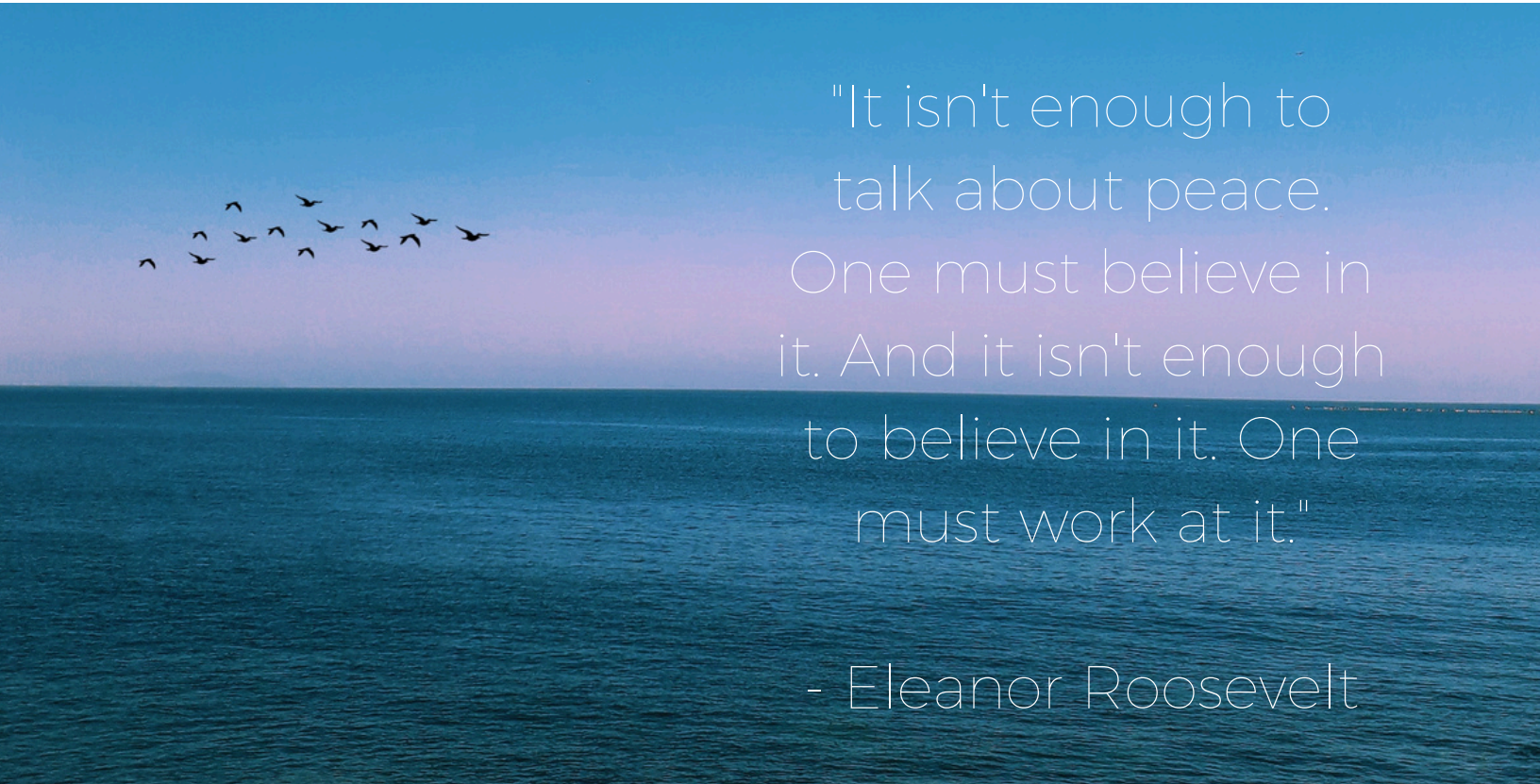
### **PRAYER**

O God, who out of chaos created order and who out of nothing called the cosmos. Renew us in your intentional love so that we might be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ Jesus. Then use us we pray to fulfil the task of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Amen.

### **QUESTION**

How will you intentionally notice God today?

# PEACE

A flock of birds is flying in a loose formation across a clear, light blue sky. Below them, the surface of a deep blue ocean is visible, with gentle ripples. The horizon line is straight and divides the sky from the water.

"It isn't enough to  
talk about peace.  
One must believe in  
it. And it isn't enough  
to believe in it. One  
must work at it."

- Eleanor Roosevelt