

*Holy Darkness.*  
*Holy Light.*

REFLECTIONS FOR THE SEASON OF ADVENT 2023  
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# INTRODUCTION

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*“O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.” –Ecclesiasticus 24.3; Wisdom 8.1*

## PREPARATION. EXPECTATION. ANTICIPATION.

The Season of Advent calls the church to a time of intentional hope and longing as we await the incarnation of Jesus at Christmas. The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus* which means, “coming,” “arrival,” or “visit”. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. For Christians Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year. During Advent, we prepare for and anticipate the coming of Christ. We remember the longing of our Jewish ancestors for a Messiah and our own longing for, and need of, forgiveness, salvation, and a new beginning.

The focus of the season is the spiritual and practical anticipation and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. This season, with its long nights and short days, holds the desires and yearnings for deliverance from the evils of the world, first expressed by Israelite slaves in Egypt as they cried out from their bitter oppression. It is the cry of those who have experienced the tyranny of injustice in a world under the curse of sin, and yet who have hope of deliverance by a God who has heard the cries of oppressed and brought deliverance!

It is a seeking after hope, however faint at times, that accompanies us through the Season of Advent. Our joyful anticipation of the coming of the Christ Child who will bring a reign of truth, justice, and righteousness is the focus of this season.





# ADVENT WEEK ONE

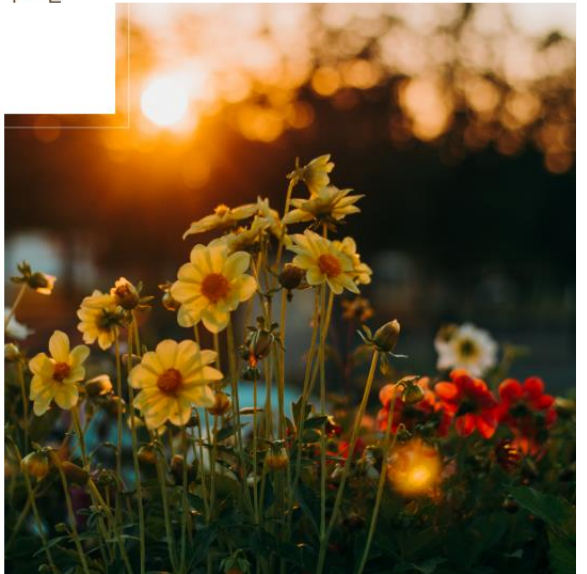
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The candle of this first week of Advent is a candle of **HOPE**. Today the flame of this candle reminds us of the hope that came to this world when Jesus was born. Jesus said, "I came so that everyone would have life, life in all its fullness."

- L.* You called the patriarchs and matriarchs to live by the light of faith and to journey in the hope of your promised fulfillment.
- R.* **May we be obedient to your call and be ready and watchful to receive your Christ, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Amen.**



H O P E



# THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

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“Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.”

-Psalm 80:19

## PRAYER

Holy God, Holy and Mighty,  
give us hearts to perceive the hope  
of your reign breaking into our world once more;  
that we who are weary, and waiting and watchful,  
may welcome once more the Child of Bethlehem,  
Jesus, your son into our hearts and homes. Amen.



## REFLECTION: HOPE

Following the aftermath of the 2015 mass shooting in Paris, France, a man named Angel Le visited the site of the shooting with his young son. The son was worried that his family may have to leave because of the “baddies” who had done this horrendous act. The son saw the flowers and the candles that had been laid by countless people to memorialize those who had been lost.

The little boy with tears in his eyes said,  
“They've got guns. They can shoot us because they're very, very bad, Daddy.”  
“They've got guns but we have flowers,” replied the dad.  
“Flowers don't do anything papa,” cried the son.  
“They fight guns. They're so we don't forget the people who have gone. As long as there are people with flowers we know that people with guns won't win.”

Advent is about hope. It is about flowers and candles against guns and hate. It is about the smallest light surrounded by a storm of gloom. Hope is a paper boat floating on a restless sea. As we go about our daily lives it can be easy to lose sight of hope. There is so much in our world to fear, but there is also abundant hope that goes unnoticed and unseen.

In the small acts of kindness offered to a stranger, in the act of giving and receiving love, in a smile of encouragement freely given, we see the seeds of hope being planted.

Hope is a radical act of defiance in the face of the impossible. Hope is a frail yet fierce force. Hope is a single drop of water seeking to move a mountain, or flowers and candles standing against “baddies” with guns.

God breaks into our world, not with strength or might or power, but with hope. Of all the things in the cosmos that God could have used, of all the magnificent power that God could have employed to get our attention, why would God choose something as fragile as hope? Why not overwhelm humanity with displays of power and awe? History tells us that strength and power are fleeting vanities. History is littered with the ruins of authority defeated by the radical notion of hope because hope pitted against power always endures. The journey of hope may be long and winding but it endures to the end.

Hope comes to us in a manger and not in a mansion. God comes to us in the frailty and helplessness of a child, because when hope spreads, when hope is shared, hope grows, and hope has the power to radically overwhelm the world.

As we begin this Advent journey, may we be peddlers of a holy hope, and may we look to the day of hope.

*There's a day of hope, may I live to see,  
When our hearts are happy, and our souls are free.  
Let the new day dawn, oh, Lord, I pray.  
We'll never get to heaven, till we reach that day. –The Musical Ragtime.*

#### ACTION

**Be a hope detective.** Seek out the places and people who convey hope in your world. Write down those encounters with divine hope and allow them to carry you when things feel hopeless.



## MONDAY THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

“Peace be within your walls and security within your towers. For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.” –Psalm 122:7-8

### PRAYER

Unexpected God,  
Your presence in our world  
surprises and shocks us.  
You come to us in the cries of a child  
and the emptiness of a tomb.  
Wake us from the slumber of comfort  
and move us to the urgency of peace;  
through Christ the long awaited one. Amen.

### REFLECTION: QUIET

I love the quiet of the morning. There is something mystical and magical about listening to the world stir to life. The symphony of birds singing, the gentle rustling of leaves, the creak of a floorboard, they all are portends of the dawning day.

As the day begins, that quiet almost feels like a deep breath before a plunge into depthless water ripe with possibilities. I imagine God dwells in the quiet of that deep breath and in the depth of fathomless water. Advent calls us to spend some time in the quiet space before everything begins anew. Perhaps the intention of Advent is rest in the quiet and listen for God.

### ACTION

**Dwell in Quiet.** Spend some intentional time in meditation and quiet as you begin a new day. Capture the moment in poetry, photography, drawing, journaling or something that stirs your imagination.

## TUESDAY THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

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“May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.”  
–Psalm 72:3

### PRAYER

Awaken us now to your coming, O God,  
that we may shake off the sleep that neglects love  
and wake from the drowsiness that abandons justice.  
Bend our wills to the audacity of hopefulness;  
that we may with joy and wonder  
welcome the Christ Child into our midst. Amen.

### REFLECTION: LOOK AGAIN.

One of the habits I have taken on this year is to go walking at least three times a week. I have to be intentional about taking a walk because the demands of life always try to get in the way along with my many excuses why today is not a good day to walk. But I have found that I need to walk. I need to place one foot in front of the other and to move. Purposeful walking is good for me. It allows me moments of mindlessness, but above all, it allows me to see.

Discarded sweaters, lost shoes, forgotten water bottles, stuffed animals, and much more have all been companions on my walks. Each item tells a story I imagine. Each story held by God, each person carried by the Holy One.

Advent invites us to look again around us for signs of God’s in-breaking. God is always trying to get our attention. Perhaps this Advent season we may try to look again at the familiar places and see God’s unfolding story all around us.

### ACTION

Look again and again. Take some time to really look at the familiar things around you. Offer a prayer for people and stories that those things conjure.



## WEDNESDAY THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

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“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” –Psalm 23:4

### PRAYER

Raise our heads and hearts  
in expectation, that we may yearn for the day  
of the coming of Christ O Holy One of Truth.  
Rain down hope in the midst of our despair  
and guide into the ways of your justice and peace. Amen.

### REFLECTION: LISTEN

I usually end most of my days sitting outside on the deck enjoying the darkness. In the summer the crickets come out and the fireflies dance on the air. In the winter I often hear the song of our resident barn owl out on the prowl. The darkness sharpens my ears to hear the transition of the world around me. As one thing takes its rest, another begins its work.

Advent is a time of listening in the dark and in the light because God dwells at the heart of both. In our often busy lives we seldom have the time to truly listen to the sounds of God’s voice speaking softly about us. In the concerto of the crickets and the opus of the owl, in the symphony of silence and the hymn of hope, God calls to us. Perhaps we may want to find the time to stop and listen. Perhaps we may need to sharpen our ears and tune our hearts to the voice of the still-speaking God whose child we await.

### ACTION

Stop and listen. This week find the time to sit in a quiet place, either at night or during the day, and listen for a symphony of sound around you.

## THURSDAY THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

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“Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.”  
–Psalm 80:19

### PRAYER

O Holy Wisdom,  
stir our hearts to recognize your presence unfolding about us.  
Help us who seek after the vanities of this world to fix our hearts securely on you,  
that in wisdom and strength we may await the day of your coming reign in Jesus Christ,  
the long expected. Amen.

### REFLECTION: WAITING

How many of us really like to wait? We live in a culture of instant gratification. Waiting is passé. We spend hours on hold trying to talk to a real living, breathing human being when we call a utility company. We get frustrated when there is traffic on our commute. We get annoyed when our food is late. We don't like to wait. And yet as we travel through this season of Advent, this season of slowing down, of waiting, of hoping, God invites us to that place of waiting.

Jesus' incarnation into our world is hope and encouragement as we long and look for the presence of God. Keep awake, stay alert, get busy because ready or not, here God comes once again to disrupt our well-ordered lives and dwell once more with us.

Advent is the radical reorienting of our lives and our world towards a God who took flesh, bone, and blood and chose to be with us in the world. A God who chose the way of loss, grief, and pain to remind us that there is no part of the human condition that is not sacred and precious to God.

And it all begins with waiting.

### ACTION

**Practice Gratitude.** In the times that you have to wait for something this week, stop and make a list of all the things you're grateful for in your life.

## FRIDAY THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

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"The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." –Psalm 118:22-23

### PRAYER

God of the rejected, God of the neglected,  
You center those who have been named "less than" and elevate those called outcasts.  
Empower us to draw the circle of love wide enough that all may come within your  
tender embrace; through Jesus the rejected we pray. Amen.

### REFLECTION: AWE

This past summer I made a visit to the Grand Canyon. It was one of the many things on my bucket list. As a child growing up in the Caribbean, I had heard about the Grand Canyon and had even seen pictures, but I could never really fathom the grandeur and the scope of the canyon. There is a wild beauty in the desert as you approach the canyon. In the sand and the dust is the beauty of awe.

Like so many others before, I stood at the rim of the Grand Canyon and felt dwarfed by the sheer size of the canyon. It is awe inspiring to think that for thousands of years, drop by slow drop, water carved and sculpted the magnificent living artwork that is the Grand Canyon.

Author and poet Marianne Williamson said that prayer comes in three forms; help, thanks, and awe. The Grand Canyon, holding a new born baby, seeing a spectacular sunset, a candlelit church, and so much more convey the awe of God's grace and beauty.

What we long for, what we seek this Season of Advent is the awe of God displayed not only in the grand and majestic, but also in the simple and sublime. May our prayer this season be always help when we need it, thank you when we offer it, and awe when we encounter it.

### ACTION

Everyday awe. Take some time today to see the details. No matter what it may be, take some time to look closely at the intricacy and discover the awe of God in the ordinary.

## SATURDAY THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

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“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” –Psalm 27:1

### PRAYER

O God, our light and our salvation,  
teach us to resist the temptation of fear  
and lure of complacency, that in keeping awake and alert  
we may watch for the coming of Christ. Amen.

### REFLECTION: TOGETHER

There is an old Kenyan proverb that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” There is sage wisdom in those words. They are a good reminder that we need each other, that we are made for companionship and togetherness. We sometimes forget that we are made to go far together. We can easily succumb to the myth that we are self-made and self-reliant. Our society seems to value and even glorify the “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” attitude. We honor those who made it on their own, blazed their own trail, and found their own path. But we know, in truth, they were supported and encouraged by others along the way.

As people of faith we are called in to community. We who follow Jesus find deep connectivity in the messiness of walking together. Yet even with the messiness of being in community, and the sometimes difficulty of walking together in faith, we know that God goes with us through every trial and triumph.

Advent is a good reminder that God is with us, here and now, revealed in the fellowship of broken people we call church, made manifest in the ordinary elements of bread and wine, and available to us in the seemingly small gestures of mercy we offer and are offered each and every day. It may not be where we expect God to show up, but it is just where we need God to be. Together in the presence of God and each other we will go far.

### ACTION

Gifts of gratitude. Take the time this week to thank someone who helped you along the way to where you are today.