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# ADVENT ★ 2012





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Throughout Scripture God marks time with special feast days such as Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The early Church celebrated significant days in the life of Christ. He was the marker of time. The Church took the centrality of Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega literally. Epiphany and the Nativity came into being in the early centuries along with Passover (Easter) and Pentecost. By the fifth century the season of Advent began to emerge, settling on the four Sundays prior to Christmas Day by the early sixth century. Jesus Christ was the focal point of each of these seasons. As we move from season to season, each day leads us through the life and ministry of Jesus, but it is not simply a rehearsal of the earthly life and works of Christ. We are invited to live into the life of the living Christ as we move through God's story. We are observing time "Christianly" in our days on earth as the Holy Spirit shapes and matures our spiritual life. Most of the time, our lives are shaped by the civil or academic calendars. We then try to overlay this time with our "spiritual lives." Without an awareness of "Christianly time", we are simply fending day to day trying our best to make sense of the events around us. By observing the Christian Year as we walk day by day, we are given lives shaped by the perspective of the Holy Spirit.

The days of Advent were originally a time of fasting and preparation for baptism on January 6th Epiphany. Advent's connection with the nativity of Christ came later. It varied in length from three to six weeks depending on the locality. In some cases it was a forty day "little Lent," as it was called and was a time of repentance and mourning in preparation for baptism. Purple was the color of royalty and mourning, hence the purple candles.

**Christmastide**, which followed the Nativity of Christ on the 25th, was celebrated not as a single day, but as twelve days with carols, festivities, and gifts being given each of the days. There are any number of theories as to the origin of Christmas Day. Some

of them had to do with the winter solstice. Others were based on the annunciation of Gabriel to Mary on March 25th. (December 25 was nine months later.) Not until the fourth century did December 25 become a broadly accepted date of the Nativity in the Western Church.

**Epiphany**, like the Nativity, is celebrated on a set day, January 6<sup>th</sup>, regardless of what day of the week it comes. It is actually older than Christmas Day and marks the revealing of Jesus Christ as Savior to all nations, not just to the Jewish people. Epiphany means "to reveal, to bring to light."

Toward the Middle Ages, the **Advent wreath** appeared in Germany and Scandinavia emerging out of the folk culture rather than from any biblical teaching or custom. In some places the wreath was mounted on a suspended wooden wagon wheel hung in a prominent place to give light. Religious significance was attached to each part of the wreath. Four candles were always used and placed in a ring of evergreen interspersed with red holly berries. The circle of evergreen symbolized God's unending love for his children. The evergreen itself symbolized eternal life, as green was the color of life. The red berries symbolized drops of blood shed for the sins of the world.

The advent wreath may have four blue or four purple candles. Sometimes there are three purple and one pink candle. The candles are purple or dark blue as those colors represent royalty and Jesus as the King. Secondly, purple is also the color of mourning or penitence (as people prepared for their baptisms on Epiphany).

**Materials needed:** evergreen, three purple candles, one rose candle, and one white candle. The candles are placed at 12, 3, 6, and 9 o'clock positions in the circle and the white one, the Christ candle, is placed in the middle. You can also use four purple or four blue candles and one white one as well.

**Activity:** The kitchen table is a perfect place to place the wreath since the candle(s) are often lit around meal time. Since your family may have different schedules and not eat together, you may want to work out another time for the family to be together to light the candles and read scripture. You may even decide that one night a week you'll all eat together! This is a great opportunity for children to lead in Scripture reading or in some of the short responses. Be sure to pass the reading responsibilities around to various family members.

It has been said, "Traditionalism is the dead faith of living people, but tradition is the living faith of dead people!" The observance of the Christian Year provides a great opportunity for all of us to grow in faith and gain a deeper understanding of the Incarnation, the Second Coming, and the significance of Christ's coming to earth in human form through a *living* tradition which is nearly 2,000 years old.

As you use this booklet, there is an opportunity to light your Advent candles, read a scripture passage each day highlighting some aspect of the season, read a brief commentary, follow some suggestions of music to listen to or read or sing a carol, and conclude with a brief prayer. This devotional time is designed with families in mind, but individuals can make good use of the material as well. May the devotionals of the following days serve to deepen the souls within each of us as we await the Savior's return and the fulfillment of God's story in creation.

We encourage you to go to [ljcommunitychurch.org](http://ljcommunitychurch.org) each Sunday to observe the worship service during these special days.

- Dr. Daniel Sharp

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*December 2*



## FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

**In lighting the first advent candle, the Candle Lighter says:** "*Maranatha!*"

**Response:** "*Come soon, Lord Jesus.*"



**Scripture:** Luke 21:25-36

<sup>25</sup> "And there will be strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. <sup>26</sup> People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!"

<sup>29</sup> Then he gave them this illustration: "Notice the fig tree, or any other tree. <sup>30</sup> When the leaves come out, you know without being told that summer is near.

<sup>31</sup> In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that the Kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things have taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

<sup>34</sup> “Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. <sup>36</sup> Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.”

**Reader:** “*These are the words of Jesus.*”

**Response:** “*Concerning the end of the age.*”

### Some thoughts:

Advent is a season of preparation, of looking forward to the future. For children it is very simple, they are counting the days until Christmas! The passage you just read is also a conversation Jesus had with his disciples about anticipation. To give us a little context, Jesus had been talking with crowds of people at the Temple. The religious leaders were challenging his authority and identity. In this context, the disciples began to talk about what an impressive building the Temple was. Jesus told them plainly that even the magnificent Temple would be destroyed. Naturally, they wanted to know when this would happen. Jesus’ response was today’s reading. The first paragraph is terrifying. Miraculous events will occur, frightening sights that have never before been seen will occur. He then gives them a clue as to what signs to look for. He urges them to be steady and alert. Jesus’ word is certain. It is important to remember that the birth of Jesus is not simply the end of Advent, but an important part of a much bigger picture in God’s plan to restore all of his creation.



**Additional Scripture:** Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; I Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:1-24

**Carol:** O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee. O Israel!

*-Veni Emmanuel, 12th century*

### Prayer:

Gracious Father, as the sun rises tomorrow morning, as the beauty of the full moon appears again this month, as we look to the beginning of a new year, as we move through this decade and this century, having begun a new millennium, forbid it Lord that we should forget these words of our Savior. May we be ever watchful in anticipation of your return. May we be steady in faith, repentant in heart, tender in soul, humble in spirit, and diligent in study. Though this world will pass away, your word abides eternally. Help us always to watch for the signs of your coming Kingdom and not get lost in the hype of this world. This we pray through Jesus Christ, our coming King. Amen.

*-DS*

*December 3,*

**MONDAY**

(Light the same candle all week.)

**Candle Lighter says:** “*Maranatha! Which means...*”

**Response:** “*Come, Lord Jesus.*”

**Scripture:** 2 Peter 3:1-18

<sup>3</sup>This is my second letter to you, dear friends, and in both of them I have tried to stimulate your whole-

some thinking and refresh your memory. <sup>2</sup> I want you to remember what the holy prophets said long ago and what our Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles.

<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.”

<sup>5</sup> They deliberately forget that God made the heavens by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. <sup>6</sup> Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. <sup>7</sup> And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed.

<sup>8</sup> But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

<sup>11</sup> Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, <sup>12</sup> looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. <sup>13</sup> But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.

<sup>14</sup> And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for

these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight.

<sup>15</sup> And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him— <sup>16</sup> speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture. And this will result in their destruction.

<sup>17</sup> I am warning you ahead of time, dear friends. Be on guard so that you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing. <sup>18</sup> Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

All glory to him, both now and forever! Amen.

**Reader:** *This is God's perspective for today.*

**Response:** *Thank you, Lord, for your patience.*

Some thoughts: This is a portion of a letter written by the Apostle Peter to Christians who were living in a society and culture that laughed at Christian faith, criticized their morality as being “judgmental,” and mocked any talk of “Christ's return.” They openly mocked the Christian life-style and values. Does this perspective sound unusually relevant? (Whoever said we have to make the Bible relevant? It seems to be relevant all by itself without our help.)

The season of Advent begins with the theme of the Lord's Return, the Second Coming. For many people, Christians included, this idea seems very remote, almost like a fairy tale. Most people think very little about the end of the world. If they believe in God at all, the general thought is that the world just goes on and on like always. Peter reminds his readers and us that God made the world and he will

bring it to a conclusion. Sometimes I have to admit, I wish Jesus would return and end this whole thing. But here we are given some insight into God's own loving heart. God measures time completely differently than we do. What we do see is God's patience, giving all people time to repent. While some people regard Christ's return as a "fantasy of epic proportions," Peter reminds us several times that God is giving people time to come to him seeking forgiveness, to make things right with him. During these early days of Advent, ask one of your friends how they think the world will end. Then be ready when they ask you! Peter ends this letter with "All glory to him, both now and forever! Amen!" We need always to keep God's biggest story in mind. Live today with the end in mind.

**Additional Scripture:** Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11

**Hymn:** The King Shall Come

The King shall come when morning dawns  
And light triumphant breaks  
When beauty gilds the eastern hills  
And life to joy awakes.

Not as of old, a little child  
To bear, and fight, and die,  
But crowned with glory like the sun  
That lights the morning sky.

Then let the endless bliss begin  
By weary saints foretold,  
When right shall triumph over wrong  
And truth shall be extolled.

*-Ancient Greek Hymn*

**Prayer:**

Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. Our Father, our Creator, your hand is the source of everything that is from the beginning and your hand will bring everything to completion at the end. We thank and

praise you for your uncommon patience in giving each person time to repent and appropriate the saving grace of Jesus Christ. May there be many people in this season who turn their hearts towards you. This we pray through our Savior and Coming King, Jesus Christ. Amen.

-DS

*December 4,*

TUESDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: "*Maranatha!*"

**Response:** "*Come soon, Lord Jesus.*"

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 7:25-26

<sup>25</sup> "And now, O LORD God, I am your servant; do as you have promised concerning me and my family. Confirm it as a promise that will last forever. <sup>26</sup> And may your name be honored forever so that everyone will say, 'The LORD of Heaven's Armies is God over Israel!' And may the house of your servant David continue before you forever.

Revelation 22:12-16

<sup>12</sup> "Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

<sup>14</sup> Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will be permitted to enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life. <sup>15</sup> Outside the city are the dogs—the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idol worshippers, and all who love to live a lie.

<sup>16</sup> "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne. I am the bright morning star."

**Reader:** *This is God's word from his kings.*

**Response:** *Thank you, Father, for the earthly King David and the eternal King Jesus.*

**Some thoughts:**

At first glance these two passages may seem an odd pairing. You may wish to read the whole passage in 2 Samuel as noted below. David is part of a long line of prophecy foretelling that the Messiah would come through the tribe of Judah, David's tribe. In the passage from 2 Samuel, David learns that his house would continue forever! For that to happen, one of his heirs would have to live forever, never dying. When David prayed, "We have never heard of another God like you," he was not overstating. John, writing roughly a thousand years later, quotes Jesus' own words. Jesus is the beginning and the end, the King from the tribe of Judah, whose reign is eternal. This King defeated death. He brings the fulfillment of the promise to David, the promise of the restoration of God's kingdom on earth eternally. "The bright and morning star" is another name for the Messiah. Sometimes we read a phrase in the Bible without much thought about its significance only to discover that a thousand or two thousand years later, God fulfilled exactly what he promised in Jesus Christ. When you read Scripture, go slowly, noticing every little phrase. God was very careful about what he said.

**Reader:** *These are amazing words from the prophet Samuel and the Apostle John.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God for your detailed word.*

**Additional Scriptures:** Psalm 90;  
2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16

**Hymn:** Once in Royal David's City

Once in royal David's city  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her baby

In a manger for his bed.  
Mary was that mother mild  
Jesus Christ her little child.

And our eyes at last shall see him,  
Through his own redeeming love,  
For that child, so dear and gentle,  
Is the Lord in heaven above,  
And he leads his children on  
To the place where he has gone.

*-Cecil Alexander, 1848*

**Prayer:**

Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? What more can I say to you? You know what your servant is really like. How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you. We have never even heard of another God like you! And now, O Lord God, I am your servant; do as you have promised concerning me and my family. And may your name be honored forever so that everyone will say, "The Lord of Heaven's Armies is God." This I pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, throughout all ages, Amen.

*-adapted from King David*

*December 5,*

WEDNESDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: *"Maranatha!"*

**Response:** *"Help is on the way!"*

**Scripture:** Luke 11:29-32

<sup>29</sup> As the crowd pressed in on Jesus, he said, "This evil generation keeps asking me to show them a miraculous sign. But the only sign I will give them is the sign of Jonah. <sup>30</sup> What happened to him was a sign to the people of Nineveh that God had sent him. What happens to the Son of Man will be a sign to these people that he was sent by God.



generation on judgment day and condemn it, for she came from a distant land to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Now someone greater than Solomon is here—but you refuse to listen.<sup>32</sup> The people of Nineveh will also stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent.

**Reader:** *This is the powerful word of Jesus.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

This passage reminds me of something that happened later in Jesus' life. Do you remember the time when Herod Antipas asked Jesus to do a miracle for him? Herod wanted to see some magic, some tricks! False religions often have magic potions or words or secret knowledge as a core belief. Not so with Christianity. Jesus was not a magician. His miracles always had a specific point, namely that he was God in human flesh. Jesus harkens back to the points of two Old Testament stories. In Solomon's case, the Queen of Sheba listened to his wisdom. In Jonah's case, the people of Nineveh listened and repented of their ways. Now the ultimate Prophet and King are present and the people refuse to repent of their ways. Their hearts were hardened and they did not recognize who was in their midst. Resist the urge to ask for miracles and live this day patiently with a tender, repentant heart, seeking to recognize this same Lord, living and present in your life.

**Additional Scriptures:** Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31

**Materials:** *crèche set*



*(Crèche at St. Patrick's Cathedral, NYC)*

**Activity:** One of the best loved symbols of Advent is the crèche. The Advent season is about looking forward to the Lord's return. Waiting and delayed gratification is difficult in our culture. (After all, you can buy a complete bedroom set and not begin paying for it for three years! You don't even have to wait until you have the money.) Talk with your family about things they have to wait for. Then take your crèche set and add one piece at a time throughout this season. Decide with the family the order of pieces you want to add. There is only one rule: the baby in the manger is last! Let different people decide which piece they want to add. As they put their piece in place over the weeks, have them tell what it would have been like to have been that person or animal at the manger.

**Music:** Your choice of Christmas music.

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ, our Prophet, Priest, and King eternal, grant that we may listen to you with our heart, recognize you with our ears and eyes, and repent with our tongues. May we not look to the spectacular, the miracle, to cause us to put our trust in you. Speak your prophetic words to us; grant us wisdom to understand, and give to us patience to trust in the quiet unspectacular moments of this day. This we pray in our Savior's Name. Amen.

-DS

## December 6,

THURSDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: *"Hear the words of old man Zechariah."*

**Response:** *"The prophecy of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled."*

**Scripture:** Luke 1:68-79

<sup>68</sup> "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people.

<sup>69</sup> He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David,

<sup>70</sup> just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago.

<sup>71</sup> Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us.

<sup>72</sup> He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—

<sup>73</sup> the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham.

<sup>74</sup> We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear,

<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.

<sup>76</sup> "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord.

<sup>77</sup> You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.

<sup>78</sup> Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,

<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."

**Reader:** *These are words of great blessing.*

**Response:** *And we rejoice in what God has done.*

### Some thoughts:

This is one of the most significant chapters in all of Scripture. You may want to read the entire portion. In this writing of Luke, we learn of the promise to Elizabeth and Zechariah, that in their old age they will become the parents for the forerunner of the Messiah. Mary learns that she will become the mother of the Son of God; she sings one of the four canticles in the book of Luke; John the Baptist is born; and we conclude this first chapter with a second canticle, the song of Zechariah...today's pericope! Old Zach's tongue has been loosened after nine months...my guess is Elizabeth enjoyed the quiet! But here he breaks out into song, a song of praise to God. Though it has been long in coming, God has completely and faithfully fulfilled his promise to his people. In three short months the Savior of the world would be born and Zach and Elizabeth's son, John, would be the one calling people to repentance and proclaiming the One who is "the Light of the world." Join the praise of God with Zechariah's words and **serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness throughout this day!**

**Additional Scriptures:** Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a

**Materials:** *add a piece of your choice to the crèche sharing what it would have been like to have been that piece.*

**Music:** listen to Advent music together (see CD list)

### Prayer:

Blessed Lord, like John, may we be bold to tell people how to find salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. May we prepare the way for the Holy Spirit's working in the lives of those around us. May you shine your light through us to a darkened world, a world living in the advancing shadow of a peaceless death. Because of your mercy, may the morning light of heaven break upon us, that Christ may be glorified. For it is his glorious name we pray. Amen.

- DS

## December 7,

FRIDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: *“Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.”*

**Response:** *“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”*

**Scripture:** Malachi 3:13-18

<sup>13</sup>“You have said terrible things about me,” says the LORD.

“But you say, ‘What do you mean? What have we said against you?’

<sup>14</sup>“You have said, ‘What’s the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the LORD of Heaven’s Armies that we are sorry for our sins?’ <sup>15</sup>From now on we will call the arrogant blessed. For those who do evil get rich, and those who dare God to punish them, suffer no harm.”

<sup>16</sup>Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name.

<sup>17</sup>“They will be my people,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “On the day when I act in judgment, they will be my own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient child. <sup>18</sup>Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”

**Reader:** *This is the inspired word of the Lord.*

**Response:** *We thank you, Lord, for the Scriptures.*

**Some Thoughts:**

One of the central themes of Advent is that of final

judgment. Have you ever felt, and I know you have, that some people “get away with murder?” Sometimes literally. It just seems like some people who cut corners, do bad or wrong things, don’t have to pay for it. Cheating seems to work! Plus...there are others cheering them on and everyone gets off “scot-free.” Sometimes I’ve felt, “What’s the use of trying to do right? It doesn’t seem to make any difference.” We live in an upside down world. Right is wrong and wrong is right. But...there is this glorious v.16 “*Then...*” is a most powerful word. It’s a “time” word. It’s a word of reckoning, God’s reckoning. God says, “Time’s up!” God remembers who are his and how they served him. How can you serve the Lord today? He’ll remember!

**Additional Scriptures:** Luke 1:26-56; Philippians 1:18b-26

**Materials:** *add another piece to the crèche sharing what it would have been like to have been that piece.*

**Carol:** I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head:  
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,  
“For hate is strong and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
“God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good will to men.”

– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

**Prayer:**

Eternal God, you have been the hope and joy of many generations down through the ages. You have looked upon your creation in love and mercy as you have given the children made in your image freedom

to love or reject you. Far too many people, including me, have gone our own way. In your mercy you have not brought instant judgment, but have given time for repentance, wanting all people to come to the knowledge of the truth. When the wrong go unpunished, let me pray for their repentance; when the evil ones escape, let me pray for their repentance; when the lying goes uncorrected, let me pray for the liar's repentance; when the crooked are praised, let me pray for their soul's repentance; when my pride goes unchecked, Lord have mercy and forgive me through Jesus Christ, my Redeemer. Amen.

-DS

## *December 8,* SATURDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: *"The Light is coming,"*

**Response:** *"The Light of the world."*

**Scripture:** Malachi 4:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The LORD of Heaven's Armies says, "The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw. They will be consumed—roots, branches, and all.

<sup>2</sup>"But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture. <sup>3</sup>On the day when I act, you will tread upon the wicked as if they were dust under your feet," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

<sup>4</sup>"Remember to obey the Law of Moses, my servant—all the decrees and regulations that I gave him on Mount Sinai for all Israel.

<sup>5</sup>"Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives. <sup>6</sup>His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.

Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse."

**Reader:** *These are the final words of the Old Testament from Malachi.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God for these words of warning and truth.*

### **Some thoughts:**

These are the last words of the Old Testament. It's interesting to me that the last word is "curse." That word actually summarizes the first thirty-nine books of the Bible very well. Adam and Eve rebelled against God, were expelled from Paradise, and entered a world of death. The rest of the Old Testament tells the story of men's and women's unsuccessful, continuous struggle to overcome sin in this fallen, cursed world where evil reigns under Satan, "the ruler of this world." (Jn. 12:31) The First Testament ends on a glorious note. The battle against evil is winning with the words, "the Lord of Heaven's Armies."

Judgment is surely coming lead by the Son of Righteousness! This Savior will bring freedom and healing from the plague of sin.



Having grown up on a farm, the image of having "joy like calves let out to pasture" is something non-farmers most likely miss completely. When our calves were little, they were put in little, individual pens. When the days got warmer in the spring, we

would open the barn and let them out to run freely. They would leave the only pen they had ever known and gingerly go out the barn door for ten to fifteen feet literally shivering with excitement. At that point they realized they were free and leapt for joy like little lambs and ran everywhere until they got tired. This is the joy described in gaining freedom from sin. It no longer has a hold. Malachi closes his book and the Testament with the admonition to look for Elijah, the prophet who will foretell the coming of the Messiah and preach repentance. Live this day in joy and freedom for sin has been forever defeated. Try to jump and click your heels together, but don't hurt yourself! We have a great Savior.

**Additional Scripture:** Luke 1:57-66, 1-25; Luke 9:1-6

**Activity:** *add an animal to the crèche and demonstrate a leaping calf!*

**Carol:** What Child Is This?

What child is this, who, laid to rest,  
On Mary's lap is sleeping  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping,  
This, this is Christ the King,  
whom shepherds guard and angels sing  
Haste, haste to bring him laud,  
The babe, the son of Mary.

Why lies he in such mean estate  
Where ox and ass are feeding  
Good Christians, fear; for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.  
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,  
The cross be borne for me, for you;  
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,  
The babe, the son of Mary.

*-William Dix, 1865*

**Prayer:**

Our God and heavenly Father, death came to this

world through a man. We have willingly followed that man. But there was another man who went through death and gained the victory. Through Christ's victory, we have all gained victory, for through the work of the Holy Spirit, we belong to him. Even as he was raised from the dead, so will we be raised victorious over the power of evil, sin, and death. Thanks be to you, God our Father, who gives us the victory through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*-adapted from the Apostle Paul*

*December 9,*



## SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Light two Advent candles (two purple candles, light these two all week)

**Candle Lighter:** *"The Light of the world is coming."*

**Response:** *"Jesus is that Light."*

**Scripture:** Malachi 3:1-4

3 Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

<sup>2</sup>"But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. <sup>3</sup>He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD. <sup>4</sup>Then once more the LORD will accept the offerings brought to him

by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.

**Reader:** *"This is the message of the prophet Malachi."*

**Response:** *"As given to him by the Holy Spirit."*

**Some thoughts:**

Over the years I've become more and more interested in gaining a greater understanding of the Jewish aspects of Scripture. For example, the name of the prophet, Malachi, is a play on the Hebrew word, *malakī*, meaning "my messenger." The messenger may be either an angel or a human functioning as the divine courier. While the people were eagerly awaiting the coming of the Lord, they were warned to prepare for his coming. The desire of God is to make a holy people. Purity (holiness) comes from a blazing hot refining fire which burns off the slag, leaving pure gold. A second example is given in which exceedingly strong soap bleaches a garment to pure brightness. In Malachi's day, people were offering tainted sacrifices to the Lord. They had been treating their worship in a slovenly manner, thinking it really did not make any difference how they approached the worship of God or what they offered. Malachi challenged them to clean up their act before the Lord suddenly appears. This is an apt warning to all of us to approach worship with care.

**Additional Scripture:** Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

**Music:** Listen to a setting of this scriptural passage in *Messiah* and note the "fire" in the music! No.5,6,&7



**Prayer:**

Lord God, forgive me for the times I crash into your presence, oblivious as to where I am or with whom I am dealing. May I prepare my heart, mind, and soul to commune with you. May I honor you in every part of my worship and may my offerings be acceptable in your sight through Jesus Christ my Lord, for indeed, it is only his offering that is acceptable to you. Amen.

-DS

*December 10,*

MONDAY

Light two purple Advent candles (light these two all week)

**Candle Lighter:** *"The Light of the world is coming."*

**Response:** *"Jesus is that Light."*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:1-11

40 "Comfort, comfort my people,"  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup>"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.  
Tell her that her sad days are gone  
and her sins are pardoned.

Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over  
for all her sins."

- <sup>3</sup> Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting,  
 "Clear the way through the wilderness  
 for the LORD!  
 Make a straight highway through the wasteland  
 for our God!"
- <sup>4</sup> Fill in the valleys,  
 and level the mountains and hills.  
 Straighten the curves,  
 and smooth out the rough places.
- <sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,  
 and all people will see it together.  
 The LORD has spoken!"
- <sup>6</sup> A voice said, "Shout!"  
 I asked, "What should I shout?"
- "Shout that people are like the grass.  
 Their beauty fades as quickly  
 as the flowers in a field.
- <sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fade  
 beneath the breath of the LORD.  
 And so it is with people.
- <sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fade,  
 but the word of our God stands forever."
- <sup>9</sup> O Zion, messenger of good news,  
 shout from the mountaintops!  
 Shout it louder, O Jerusalem.  
 Shout, and do not be afraid.  
 Tell the towns of Judah,  
 "Your God is coming!"
- <sup>10</sup> Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in power.  
 He will rule with a powerful arm.  
 See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.
- <sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd.  
 He will carry the lambs in his arms,  
 holding them close to his heart.  
 He will gently lead the mother  
 sheep with their young.

**Reader:** *This is God's prophetic word from the Old Covenant.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God for giving Isaiah these words.*

**Some thoughts:**

This is another remarkable passage of Scripture. These words of Isaiah describe the message of the prophet, John the Baptist, in proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. They have been set to music many, many times through the centuries. Perhaps the most time-honored and well-known setting is that in Handel's *Messiah*. John preaches good news of repentance and healing. God's glory will come into our midst and everyone will see and recognize the Savior! Verses 6-8 are remarkably similar to the second movement of the Brahms *Requiem*, a passage which reminds us of the temporary nature of our life on earth while the word of the Lord stands eternally. (It is always good to get perspective on life's biggest picture, isn't it?) Handel again picks up Isaiah's joyful news that "God is coming again in power!" In the concluding portion of our pericope today, Handel reminds us of the tenderness of our great God and his care for his sheep. As a farm boy, the relationship between a lamb and its mother is very, very close. One bleat from the mother in the midst of a whole flock and her lambs will come running. One bleat from them and she is there in an instant. When the mother sheep knows the shepherd, she will trust him with her lambs. This passage is a beautiful picture of our God both when he comes again and how he cares for us in the meantime. You can trust the Shepherd today to care for his lambs, including you.

**Additional Scripture:** Psalm 126; Romans 8:22-25

**Activity:** Find a picture of you or your family or extended and add it to your crèche. Include pictures of anyone in your extended family who has left life on this earth. (They are still living! Just not here.)

**Music:** This week listen to *Messiah*, #2,3,4,9,20 and *Brahms Requiem* #2.

**Prayer:**

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor

and glory and praise! To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever. Amen!

*-from the Revelation*

## *December 11,*

### TUESDAY

**Candle Lighter:** *“O come, O come Emmanuel.”*

**Response:** *“And lead us into everlasting life.”*

**Scripture:** 2 Peter 1:2-15

<sup>2</sup> May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. <sup>4</sup> And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires.

<sup>5</sup> In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

<sup>8</sup> The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they

have been cleansed from their old sins.

<sup>10</sup> So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. <sup>11</sup> Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I will always remind you about these things—even though you already know them and are standing firm in the truth you have been taught. <sup>13</sup> And it is only right that I should keep on reminding you as long as I live. <sup>14</sup> For our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me that I must soon leave this earthly life, <sup>15</sup> so I will work hard to make sure you always remember these things after I am gone.

**Reader:** *This is the word of the Lord as recorded by the Apostle Peter.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God for this encouragement.*

**Materials:** *add another piece to the crèche sharing what it would have been like to have been that piece or character.*

#### **Some thoughts:**

We know that the season of Advent is concerned with the final Judgment and the Second Coming of Christ, culminating with the Nativity of Christ, his coming in human form. This passage from Peter’s second letter, focuses on what we do in the meantime between those two advents of Christ. There is actually another optional one in between. It is the one where Jesus comes into the lives of individuals who then become followers of Christ. Peter is not far from death as he writes this letter to those he loves. He wants them to continue to grow in faith after he’s left this earth. Verses 3-11 are well worth memorizing during this season. They are an articulate description of our position in Christ, God’s promises to us, the plan for continued growth, the progress that results, and the eternal



entrance into heaven. Put yourself in Peter's place, what would you say to your loved ones knowing your end was near. You'd want them to remain faithful to the Lord, to keep growing in their faith. You'd want them to remember the truths they had learned. You'd want them to finish their life strongly and enter into the Kingdom of the Lord with great joy. Think of one way you can encourage your family in faith today, then do it.

**Additional Scripture:** Psalm 126; Isaiah 19:18-25

**Carol:** As with Gladness Men of Old

Holy Jesus, every day  
Keep us in the narrow way  
And when earthly things are past,  
Bring our ransomed souls at last  
Where they need no star to guide,  
Where no clouds thy glory hide.

-William Dix, 1858

**Prayer:**

Bring us, O Lord God, at the last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but an equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity, in the habitations of thy majesty and thy glory, world without end. Amen.

-John Donne (1571-1631)

*December 12,*

**WEDNESDAY**

**Candle Lighter:** "The Sun of Righteousness will rise."

**Response:** "With healing in his wings."



*Guido Reni*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 35:5-6

And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind  
and unplug the ears of the deaf.  
<sup>6</sup>The lame will leap like a deer,  
and those who cannot speak will sing for joy!  
Springs will gush forth in the wilderness,  
and streams will water the wasteland.

Luke 7:18-30

<sup>18</sup> The disciples of John the Baptist told John about everything Jesus was doing. So John called for two of his disciples, <sup>19</sup> and he sent them to the Lord to ask him, "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?"

<sup>20</sup> John's two disciples found Jesus and said to him, "John the Baptist sent us to ask, 'Are you the Messi-

ah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?"

<sup>21</sup> At that very time, Jesus cured many people of their diseases, illnesses, and evil spirits, and he restored sight to many who were blind. <sup>22</sup> Then he told John's disciples, "Go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor. <sup>23</sup> And tell him, 'God blesses those who do not turn away because of me.'"

<sup>24</sup> After John's disciples left, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. "What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? <sup>25</sup> Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people who wear beautiful clothes and live in luxury are found in palaces. <sup>26</sup> Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. <sup>27</sup> John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say,

'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.'

<sup>28</sup> I tell you, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of God is greater than he is!"

<sup>29</sup> When they heard this, all the people—even the tax collectors—agreed that God's way was right, for they had been baptized by John. <sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and experts in religious law rejected God's plan for them, for they had refused John's baptism.

**Reader:** *This is the word of the Lord as recorded by Isaiah and Luke.*

**Response:** *Thank you, Lord, for these complementary words.*

**Some thoughts:**

Sometimes people wonder how the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament. After all, are not

people just finding "convenient connections" long after the fact? In these two passages we have a perfect example of how Jesus interprets the Scriptures he had in his day, the First Testament. His cousin, John the Baptist, wanted to know if Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus answered that question by quoting the prophet Isaiah. In his answer to John, Jesus is defining God's biggest picture of restoring creation with his examples of giving sight to the blind, the lame now walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life. The Good News is being preached to the poor. It is only through the Messiah that God is restoring his creation was Jesus' answer to John. Jesus then turns to the crowd to affirm and verify that John is indeed the one to announce the coming of the Messiah, again quoting Isaiah. The people, knowing the Scriptures much better than most people do in our day, embraced what Jesus said. Sad to say, many of the Pharisees and experts in religious law rejected God's plan of recreation, because they refused to believe John and consequently Jesus' own words. Though writing over 700 years before the time of Jesus, Isaiah describes in detail the work of the Messiah. These two passages provide a classic example of how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophecies. In every case, the heart of the issue is that Jesus is God come in the flesh to bring restoration to the whole created order.

**Additional Scripture:** Psalm 126; Isaiah 35:3-7

**Hymn:** Of the Father's Love Begotten

Of the Father's love begotten  
Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the source, the ending he,  
Of the things that are, that have been  
And that future years shall see,  
Evermore and evermore!

Christ, to thee with God the Father,  
And, O Holy Ghost, to thee,  
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving

And unwearied praises be  
Honor, glory, and dominion,  
And eternal victory,  
Evermore and evermore!  
-Prudentius, 4th century

**Prayer:**

Father, as the day of your re-appearing draws closer, create in me a deeper longing for the restoration of all of creation. Thank you for the completeness of your word. I wonder again and again at the detail and unity of the whole of Scripture. Thank you for the care and manner in which Jesus revealed himself and mission to the people. I love studying and following the thought process of Jesus' discussions in a passage like this. Thank you for your Holy Spirit who guides and teaches, making your word vibrant this day. Glory to you Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen. -DS

*December 13,*

THURSDAY

**Materials:** *add another piece to the crèche sharing what it would have been like to have been that piece or character.*

**Candle lighter** says: "*Maranatha!*"

**Response:** "*Come, Lord Jesus.*"

**Scripture:** Isaiah 12:2-6

See, God has come to save me.

I will trust in him and not be afraid.  
The LORD GOD is my strength and my song;  
he has given me victory."

<sup>3</sup> With joy you will drink deeply  
from the fountain of salvation!

<sup>4</sup> In that wonderful day you will sing:  
"Thank the LORD! Praise his name!  
Tell the nations what he has done.

Let them know how mighty he is!  
<sup>5</sup> Sing to the LORD, for he has done wonderful things.

Make known his praise around the world.

<sup>6</sup> Let all the people of Jerusalem  
shout his praise with joy!

**Reader:** *This is the joyous word of the prophet Isaiah.*

**Response:** *Thank you, God, for these words of hope and certainty.*

**Some thoughts:**

Some of you may be thinking right about now, "Isn't it time to get a little more focused on Christmas? I thought advent was about getting ready for Christmas." Actually it is a bit larger than that; Advent takes us all the way to the end of time. (We will get to the Nativity! Patience!) While Isaiah is writing to the children of Israel in his day, he is also writing about a future day, a day that is *yet* to arrive. Quite frequently the writers of Scripture are dealing with several levels of understanding at the same time, particularly in the First Testament; there is the actual time frame of their day, there is the time frame of the Newer Testament, and, in some cases, our days and to the end of the world when God restores and makes all things new. One verse can refer to all of those times. Such is the case here. This chapter is a future song of testimony from those who have been redeemed by the salvation of God. The "those" is you and me! Take a few minutes (or longer) and think what it will be like to express your full joy to the Lord, knowing that this life is past. People from every tongue and nation will be together praising the Lord all around the world. The last half of the last verse is more than I can imagine. "The Holy One of Israel, [God], lives among you." The veil will be lifted. Emmanuel, God with us, will be present in full splendor. All creation will be made new. All of this is *sung*. Heaven is filled with the sound of the *voices* of the redeemed. Have you ever wondered about the significance of human voices singing in worship? You should. You should also

practice this Sunday for when you get to heaven!

**Additional Scripture:** Amos 6:1-8;  
2 Corinthians 8:1-15

**Carol:** O Come, All Ye Faithful

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation  
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above,  
“Glory to God, all glory in the highest.”

O come, let us adore him,

O come, let us adore him,

O come, let us adore him,

Christ the Lord.

*-Latin hymn, John Wade, 1751*

*(You can also practice singing in the shower today!)*

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, help us to not get so lost in the concerns and activities of the immediate world that the eternal world we cannot see seems unreal. Teach us, O Lord, to use this transitory life as pilgrims returning to their beloved home; that we may take what our journey requires, and not think of settling in a foreign country, the country wherein we now abide. Amen.

*-adapted from John Wesley (1703-1791)*

*December 14,*

FRIDAY

**Candle Lighter:** *“The Lord is sufficient.”*

**Response:** *“A very present help in times of trouble.”*

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 9:1-13

<sup>9</sup> I really don't need to write to you [Corinthians] about this ministry of giving for the believers in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> For I know how eager you are to help, and I have been boasting to the churches in Macedonia that you in Greece were ready to send an offering a year ago. In fact, it was your enthusiasm that stirred up many

of the Macedonian believers to begin giving.

<sup>3</sup> But I am sending these brothers to be sure you really are ready, as I have been telling them, and that your money is all collected. I don't want to be wrong in my boasting about you. <sup>4</sup> We would be embarrassed—not to mention your own embarrassment—if some Macedonian believers came with me and found that you weren't ready after all I had told them! <sup>5</sup> So I thought I should send these brothers ahead of me to make sure the gift you promised is ready. But I want it to be a willing gift, not one given grudgingly.

<sup>6</sup> Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. <sup>7</sup> You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” <sup>8</sup> And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. <sup>9</sup> As the Scriptures say,

“They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever.”

<sup>10</sup> For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.



*Jonathan Sharp*

<sup>11</sup> Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God.

<sup>12</sup> So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.

<sup>13</sup> As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ.

**Reader:** *This is God's word as recorded by the Apostle Paul.*

**Response:** *And we are thankful to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

There are several very powerful things going on here in this seemingly innocent passage. Paul is encouraging his friends in Corinth to come through and follow the example of the Macedonians, who, though very poor in material possessions, came through with their giving for those in need in the church at Jerusalem. There are deeper things to notice here. Paul is writing about the heart. Jesus said “You cannot serve both God and money.” (Mt. 6:24). We are continually asked in the Scriptures to unite the material and the spiritual. Humans, Christians included (!), have this great tendency to want repeatedly to separate the two. In a few of these next observations, I’m indebted to Kenneth Bailey in his book, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*. William Temple, the archbishop of Canterbury, wrote, “The spiritually minded person does not differ from the materially minded person chiefly in thinking about different things, but in thinking about the same things differently. It is possible to think materially about God, and spiritually about food.”<sup>1</sup> The Greek world of the Corinthians was divided into matter (bad) and spirit (good). Jesus stressed that either

can be bad or good and that God made them both “good” in the first place. “God looked on all he had made and said it was *very good*.” –after he finished creation on the sixth day. (Gen.1:31) To understand the context of our material goods, we must go back to the source. All of them come from God. When we give a gift, we are either giving an offering or passing the gift we’ve been given along to another. The giving is the measure of how much our heart truly “gets it.” The Incarnation is God’s supreme demonstration of the significance and united worth of the material and spiritual. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (Jn.1:14) Giving with the cheerful, generous heart expresses glory to God...which is why the angels sang “glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” (Lk.2:14)

**Additional Scripture:** Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12

**Carol:** Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

King of kings, yet born of Mary,  
As of old on earth he stood.  
Lord of lords, in human vesture,  
In the body and the blood,  
He will give to all the faithful  
His own self for heavenly food.

–St. James, 4<sup>th</sup> century

**Prayer:**

Lord, isn’t your creation wasteful? Fruits never equal the seedlings’ abundance. Springs scatter water. The sun gives out enormous light. May your bounty teach me greatness of heart. May your magnificence stop me being mean. Seeing you a prodigal and open-handed giver let me give unstintingly like a king’s son, like God’s own.

–Archbishop Helder Camara. b.1909

<sup>1</sup> William Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 468.

*December 15,*

SATURDAY

**Candle Lighter:** *“My soul glorifies the Lord.”*

**Response:** *“And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*



*Birth of John the Baptist*

**Scripture:** Luke 1:57-66

<sup>57</sup> When it was time for Elizabeth’s baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. <sup>58</sup> And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

<sup>59</sup> When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. <sup>60</sup> But Elizabeth said, “No! His name is John!”

<sup>61</sup> “What?” they exclaimed. “There is no one in all your family by that name.” <sup>62</sup> So they used gestures to ask the baby’s father what he wanted to name him. <sup>63</sup> He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s surprise he wrote, “His name is John.” <sup>64</sup> Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

<sup>65</sup> Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. <sup>66</sup> Everyone who heard about it reflect-

ed on these events and asked, “What will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.

**Reader:** *This is the word of the Lord as recorded by Luke the physician.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

This account is a wonderful story. An old couple, the priest Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were well past the age of being able to have children. You recall the earlier part of this chapter when Zechariah and Elizabeth were told that they would in fact conceive in their old age and that they would have a son, the forerunner of the Messiah. Their niece, Mary who was three months pregnant with Jesus, was also staying with them when Elizabeth’s baby was born. You can imagine how thrilled the neighbors were in anticipating this “miraculous” birth! The communal rejoicing reminds one of the Naomi’s joy at the birth of a grandson, Obed, or Hannah’s rejoicing at the birth of Samuel, or Samson’s parents rejoicing at his birth. (Interestingly, every promised child in Scripture was a boy.) The baby, John, was named and circumcised—on the eighth day after the birth, (when the blood clotting in the male child is at its highest level ever). When Elizabeth wanted to name him after his father, Zechariah’s dumbness left and he said the baby’s name should be “John,” the name the angel had given him. We see God’s working in the lives of the old couple even in the meaning of their names. Zechariah means “the Lord remembers”; Elizabeth means “God’s promise”; and John means “the Lord is gracious.” The Lord promised them. He remembered his promise and he was gracious! There is much meaning in the names of people in the Bible. Can you imagine the machinations that went on as the neighbors tried to figure out what to call this new baby boy? It seems like a cross between Pictionary and charades! The greatest joy of all was that the people recognized the hand of God moving in their midst. You can be sure the whole community

kept an eye on John as he grew up. Look for God moving in your midst today. Keep your eyes open!

**Additional Scripture:** Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 9:8-15

**Prayer:**

Awake, my soul, and with the sun  
thy daily stage of duty run;  
shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise  
to pay thy morning sacrifice.

Direct, control, suggest this day  
All I design or do or say,  
That all my powers, with all their might,  
In thy sole glory may unite.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow  
Praise him all creatures here below  
Praise him above ye heavenly host  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

-Thomas Ken, 1670

## December 16,



### THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Light two purple and one pink candle all this week  
(or three purple candles if you do not have a pink one)

**Candle Lighter:** *"My soul glorifies the Lord."*

**Response:** *"And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."*

**Scripture:** Luke 3:7-18

<sup>7</sup> When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God's coming wrath?" <sup>8</sup> Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe,

for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. <sup>9</sup> Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

<sup>10</sup> The crowds asked, "What should we do?"

<sup>11</sup> John replied, "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry."

<sup>12</sup> Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, "Teacher, what should we do?"

<sup>13</sup> He replied, "Collect no more taxes than the government requires."

<sup>14</sup> "What should we do?" asked some soldiers.

John replied, "Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay."

<sup>15</sup> Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. <sup>16</sup> John answered their questions by saying, "I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>17</sup> He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire."

<sup>18</sup> John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.

**Reader:** *These are the challenging words of John the Baptist.*

**Response:** *We will take them to heart.*

### Some Thoughts:

There is no doubt that John the Baptist was an interesting character! We know him as a fiery evangelist calling people to repent. The people were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Because of his fire and zeal, some of them wondered if he might not be the long awaited Redeemer. John replied that his baptism was outward in nature (with water) but that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Fire is often spoken of in connection with God throughout Scripture. It has to do with purifying and bringing holiness. It burns everything leaving only what is pure remaining. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to purify believers. John then goes to the agrarian image again with the wheat and the winnowing fork. This implement of harvest is used to toss bundles of wheat into the air as the chaff, which is lighter than the wheat kernels, blows away as the wheat falls straight to the floor. (I remember often in my growing up years of taking a head of wheat and rolling it back and forth in my hand and then blowing across my hand as the chaff and hulls of the kernels blew away leaving only the pure wheat in my hand.) Chaff can be very explosive and burns very easily. The image here is that of God's coming judgment. John wanted the people to know that the Messiah was at hand. He was challenging the people to purity and holy living in preparation for God's coming judgment. He demanded that actions accompany faith. Help the poor in material ways. Be honest, don't just talk the faith, do it! Like the Jews in John's day, we await the return of the Messiah. Let us live with repentant hearts looking for ways to help the poor and the hungry today.

**Additional Scripture:** Zephaniah 3:14-20;  
Philippians 4:4-7

**Carol:** On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
Announces that the Lord is nigh  
Awake and listen for he brings  
Glad tiding of the King of kings.

Let every heart be cleansed from sin  
Make straight the way for God within  
And so prepare to be the home  
Where such a mighty guest may come.

To you, O Christ, all praises be  
Whose advent sets your people free  
Whom with the Father we adore  
And Holy Spirit evermore!

-Charles Coffin, 1736

### Prayer:

We pray to Thee to be compassionate toward our weakness, O Lord, to guard us in peril, to direct us in doubt, and to save us from falling into sin. From the evil that is around and within us, graciously deliver us. Make the path of duty plain before us, and keep us in it even unto the end. Amen.

-King's Chapel Liturgy 1831

*December 17,*

MONDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: *"Jesus Christ is,"*

**Response:** *"the light of the world."*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 13:7-17

<sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith.

<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. <sup>9</sup> So do not be attracted by strange, new ideas. Your strength comes from God's grace, not from rules about food, which don't help those who follow them.

<sup>10</sup> We have an altar from which the priests in the Tabernacle have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> Under the old system, the high priest brought the blood of animals into the Holy Place as a sacrifice for sin, and the



bodies of the animals were burned outside the camp.  
<sup>12</sup> So also Jesus suffered and died outside the city gates to make his people holy by means of his own blood. <sup>13</sup> So let us go out to him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore. <sup>14</sup> For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come.

<sup>15</sup> Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name. <sup>16</sup> And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.

<sup>17</sup> Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

**Reader:** *This is God's word giving us a bigger picture of Christmas.*

**Response:** *Thank you, Lord, for this your holy word.*

### **Some thoughts:**

Before narrowing in on the specifics of the nativity of Jesus, it is important to see the biggest picture. The theme of these first two weeks of advent has been about the Second Coming of Christ, final judgment, and the establishing of a new creation. John the Baptist has played a primary role in announcing the coming of the Savior. Before proceeding into some of the specifics of the Nativity itself in the coming days, this pericope in Hebrews gives us one last final overview. Context is worth everything. Why did God take on human flesh? To bring restoration to the *whole* created order. The writer of Hebrews states that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." As far as yesterday goes, Jesus was the Father's agent in the creation of all that exists. Concerning the "today," he sits at the Father's right hand interceding on our behalf. As regards the "forever," he will come

again to restore all of creation and then rule for all eternity. The author of this epistle reminds us that "this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come." That pilgrimage idea is primary in Advent! Therefore, offer praises to God with your lips...that means singing! And also, remember to share what you have with the poor (always a social awareness and responsibility). This section closes in a typical rabbinic technique, *inclusio*, where verses seven and seventeen discuss the same idea and frame the central thought of this passage. As you reflect on the specifics of the birth of Jesus in a few days, keep in mind the biggest picture.

**Additional Scripture:** Isaiah 11:1-9;  
Numbers 16:1-19

**Activity:** Add the remaining pieces of your crèche throughout this week, but leave the manger empty.

### **Prayer:**

Lord God, Father of our Messiah, the one who has perfect knowledge, perfect understanding, heavenly timing, merciful patience, and compassionate judgment, forgive us Lord for our narrow, short-sighted understanding of the Nativity. This Christmas may we grasp the biggest picture of your restoration plan. In gratitude for your mercy, we pray this through Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

-DS

*December 18,*

TUESDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel."*

**Response:** *"For he has visited and redeemed his people."*



*Hubble Telescope*

**Scripture:** John 1:1-14

- <sup>1</sup> In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- <sup>2</sup> He existed in the beginning with God.
- <sup>3</sup> God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.
- <sup>4</sup> The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.
- <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.
- <sup>6</sup> God sent a man, John the Baptist, <sup>7</sup> to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. <sup>8</sup> John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. <sup>9</sup> The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
- <sup>10</sup> He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came

to his own people, and even they rejected him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. <sup>13</sup> They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

<sup>14</sup> So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

**Reader:** *This is God's word bringing light to our dark world.*

**Response:** *Thank you Lord Jesus, the Light of the world.*

**Some thoughts:**

Yesterday we asked you to reflect on the “yesterday, today, and forever” aspect of Jesus’ life. Today I want to look more intently at the “yesterday” part as relates to the nativity. In this prologue to the book, (many of whom believe that the first five verses were actually a hymn text of the early church), we see clearly that Jesus, the diving Logos, was the agent of creation. Everything in existence, seen and unseen, was created by and through him. He has never not existed. In this passage in John, the material, physical life and the spiritual life are tied together. Whereas people have often tried to separate these two, the Scripture unites them in God’s purpose for creation. Jesus breathes life into every creature. The physical life he gives also brings spiritual light, an inborn realization of the existence of God. (Rom 1:19-21) However, something happened to God’s perfect creation, a creation God called “very good.” With the entrance of sin, due to human rebellion against God, the Son of God stepped out of eternity and entered human history in the country of modern day Israel. That is astonishing! The Father determined he would redeem this vast universe of creation through the gift of his Son. (Gen.3:15) So the eternal, creator Logos of “yesterday,” the same

one, was born the human, earthly Jesus of “today” in the manger of Bethlehem. We are still in the “today” Jesus, who intercedes in heaven on our behalf. When we begin to flesh out Jesus as “the same yesterday, today, and forever” in the context of the nativity, our minds begin to stretch in wonder at God’s great love and humility. We begin to get a glimpse of “the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.” Reread today’s passage reflecting on some of these thoughts.

**Additional Scripture:** Numbers 16:20-35; Acts 28:23-31

**Music:** “Behold the Lamb of God” from *Messiah*. No.22

**Prayer:**

Holy and compassionate Father, out of your great love you brought forth the earth and world, indeed the entire vastness of the universe, all that is seen and unseen, all powers and forces and sounds and color and ideas. You invented thinking and reason and love. In our rebellion we turned away from you and severed a perfect communion. Our Savior, Jesus, your holy Son, stepped onto this planet and into this life to provide all of creation’s way back to you. Lord Jesus, how we thank and praise you for what is unimaginable for us to comprehend. When you returned to sit at the Father’s right hand, you sent the Holy Spirit to abide with us until you return. Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you now and forever into the next world and throughout eternity. Amen.

-DS

*December 19,*

WEDNESDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: “*The Father has rescued us from the Kingdom of darkness...*”

**Response:** “*And transferred us to the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.*”

**Scripture:** Colossians 1:15-20

<sup>15</sup> Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

<sup>16</sup> for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see

and the things we can’t see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

<sup>17</sup> He existed before anything else,

and he holds all creation together.

<sup>18</sup> Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body.

He is the beginning,

supreme over all who rise from the dead.

So he is first in everything.

<sup>19</sup> For God in all his fullness

was pleased to live in Christ,

<sup>20</sup> and through him God reconciled everything to himself.

He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth

by means of Christ’s blood on the cross.

**Reader:** *These are the words of the way, the truth, and eternal life.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

This is one of my favorite periscopes in all of Scripture. In my opinion it is the most compact, complete articulation of the person and work of Christ anywhere in the Bible. It describes why and how Christ is the same “yesterday, today, and forever.” It is a passage upon which to base theology. It is another text which many scholars believe was one of the hymn texts of the early church. It is an expanding commentary on yesterday’s passage in John. Here Paul brings to completion the “yesterday” part of Christ in that he describes the work of Christ which

bring us to the “today” where the blood of Jesus made peace with everything in heaven and on earth. We are reminded that the baby born in Bethlehem was (is) the *visible* image of the *invisible* God! God came to us in a way we can understand. A couple of years ago I got a chance to speak to a 9<sup>th</sup> grade class in a secular school regarding the essence of Christianity. I asked the students what would be the best way to communicate with a colony of ants to help them solve a problem inherent in the ant colony. They concluded that it would be to become an ant. Good answer. I then asked, “How do you think the ant colony would respond?” I was surprised by one girl’s answer. She said, “We would kill it.” When I asked her why, her response was, “Because the ant wasn’t one of us.” And my response was, “That is exactly what the people did to Jesus.” The historicity of the invisible God becoming a visible human is unlike any other account in any religion in all of history. That remarkable birth is still in effect today as you read these thoughts. Why not decide to memorize this passage in Colossians?

**Additional Scripture:** Isaiah 11:1-9; Luke 7:31-35

**Carol:** O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful,  
Joyful and triumphant  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!  
Come and behold him,  
Born the King of angels,  
O come, let us adore him.

True God of true God,  
Light from Light eternal,  
Lo, he abhors not the virgin’s womb,  
Son of the Father, begotten, not created,  
O come, let us adore him.

-John Wade, 1751

**Prayer:**

As the Lord of yesterday and today, you made peace with everything in heaven and on earth. Your work is accomplished. We ask that you

support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is accomplished. Lord, how we long for your return. In your mercy come again to this world and receive us unto yourself, grant us a safe lodging in our heavenly home, the home you are preparing for us. And grant us a holy rest, restored communion with you, and peace at last through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

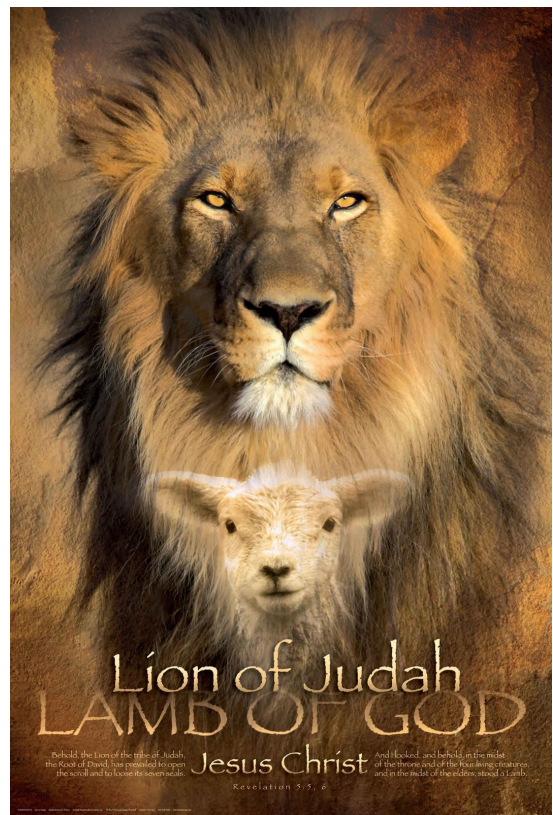
-John Henry Newman 1801-1890 adapted -DS

*December 20,*

THURSDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: *“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,”*

**Response:** *“For you will go before the Lord to give knowledge of salvation to his people.”*



**Scripture:** Revelation 7:9-17

<sup>9</sup> After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.

<sup>10</sup> And they were shouting with a great roar,

“Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!”

<sup>11</sup> And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God. <sup>12</sup> They sang,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, “Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?”

<sup>14</sup> And I said to him, “Sir, you are the one who knows.”

Then he said to me, “These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.

<sup>15</sup> “That is why they stand in front of God’s throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter.

<sup>16</sup> They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun.

<sup>17</sup> For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd.

He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

**Reader:** *This is God’s word describing the “forever” Jesus.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God for we look forward to this great day.*

**Some thoughts:**

“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.” The last two days we’ve looked at the “yesterday” and “today.” Now we look at the “forever.” This event has yet to happen. This portion opens with the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that his offspring would be as numberless as the stars in the sky. The white robes and waving palm branches were ancient symbols of victory and success. Remember Palm Sunday. The celebration here is the *final* victory over evil and a world hostile to its Creator. The power of evil is judged and forever destroyed and banished. “Salvation” or “Hosanna” were often chanted heralding the victors and conquerors. The angelic beings fell down in prostrated worship of God. They sang the song of the redeemed. Framed by “Amens,” seven words of worship were sung: blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and strength. All of these belong to our God! In Jewish thought, the number seven was the perfect number so it is not surprising that it should appear here. There were seven days of creation. Six days to create the material universe and a seventh day for spiritual rest and acknowledgment. Once again we see God melding the material and the spiritual together. There are seven weeks of seven days between Passover and Shavuot (Pentecost) and the giving of the Torah who’s first verse has seven words and twenty-eight letters! You may again be saying to yourself, “What does this all have to do with the birth of Jesus?” As Christians, it is so important that we grasp the whole significance of the birth of our Savior and not simply think of it as the birth of a baby a couple of thousand years ago. This is an ongoing story that you are a part of today as you read this. The passage you have just read, lies in our future! Because of the Birth in

old Bethlehem, the birth of the New Jerusalem is coming. Come Lord Jesus!

**Additional Scripture:** Hebrews 10:10-18; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 80:1-7

**Music:** “Worthy is the Lamb” from *Messiah* (This portion of *Messiah* is built on the seven words of worship you just read in Revelation. It is the concluding piece of the whole work.)

**Prayer:**

O Lord, our self-revealing God, we thank you for giving us the full picture of your love as the whole of Scripture unfolds. In it we see from the beginning to the end how you took care of each detail and how truly dependent we are upon you for everything. Thank you for your willingness to inhabit this planet, this speck in the universe, to make possible the restoration of our communion with you. Your condescension and humiliation in coming to earth is beyond anything we can begin to comprehend. But we thank you for humbling yourself, even unto the point of death, death on a cross. Wherefore God has highly exalted you. That at your name every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow. For your name is above every name in heaven and on earth. We join in with all those who bring you glory. We pray this in your name, our glorious Redeemer. Amen.

-DS

*December 21,*

FRIDAY

**Candle Lighter** says: “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. For he as visited and redeemed his people...*”

**Response:** “*to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*”



**Scripture:** Matthew 1:16-25

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup> All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

<sup>18</sup> This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

<sup>20</sup> As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

<sup>23</sup> “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

**Reader:** *This is the glorious word of the Lord to Joseph.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

I’ve included the tail end of Matthew’s genealogy to remind us that Joseph was in the lineage of Abraham and King David. Of all the characters in the story of Jesus’ birth, Joseph is sometimes overlooked. Joseph was a man of great integrity and lineage. He also strikes me as a humble man. Scripture says that he was a “good man.” What made him “good”? In Judaism, to be engaged was to be in a permanent relationship. It could only be broken by a legal divorce. In the viewpoint of their society, Mary and Joseph were considered husband and wife, even though they had not consummated their relationship with a formal wedding at this point. Scripture makes this clear. According to the Law, Joseph could have exposed Mary to a public trial and, if convicted, she would have been stoned to death since she was definitely pregnant and a suspected adulteress. Joseph had another option. He could pay a fine and break the engagement.

That course of action would have been a quieter approach and have helped Mary save face. As he was proceeding with this latter plan, the angel, Gabriel, came to him in a dream and explained what God was doing through Mary. When Joseph awoke, he took Mary as his wife and refrained from sexual relations with her until the birth of Jesus. They had six other children following the birth of Jesus. Joseph was an observant Jew. On the eighth day Jesus was named and circumcised. On the fortieth day he was redeemed as the firstborn. They made pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem as evidenced when Jesus was twelve years old. Joseph apparently died at some point prior to the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. I can image some of the “under the breath” comments and gossip that circulated during the pregnancy and through the first years of marriage. Joseph is definitely one of the people I’d like to talk with in heaven! He is a model of being faithful to the Lord’s leading in the midst of cultural pressure.

**Additional Scripture:** Isaiah 42:1-9; Luke 3:23-38

**Carol:** Joseph, Dearest Joseph Mine

“Joseph dearest, Joseph mine,  
Help me cradle the child divine;  
God reward thee and all that’s thine  
In paradise,”  
So prays the mother Mary.

He came among us at Christmastide,  
At Christmastide, in Bethlehem;  
Men shall bring Him from far and wide  
Love’s diadem: Jesus, Jesus,  
Lo, He comes, and loves, and saves,  
and frees us!

“Gladly, dear one, lady mine,  
Help I cradle this child of thine;  
God’s own light on us both shall shine  
In paradise,  
As prays the mother Mary.”  
—Anonymous, 14th century

**Prayer:**

Use me then, Lord, for whatever purpose, and in whatever way you may require. Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel. Fill it with your grace; take it for your abode. I seek to serve you this day, this week, this life to bring you honor and to bring glory to your name. May I have courage and do nothing that would detract from you or cause others to stumble. Like Joseph, may I be a “good and honorable” person to the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*-adapted from D.L. Moody, DS*

*December 22,*

**SATURDAY**

**Candle Lighter says:** *The angel Gabriel said, “Greetings, favored woman!”*

**Response:** *“The Lord is with you!”*

**Scripture:** Luke 1:46b-55

<sup>46</sup> Mary responded,

“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

<sup>47</sup> How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

<sup>48</sup> For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,  
and from now on all generations will call me  
blessed.

<sup>49</sup> For the Mighty One is holy,  
and he has done great things for me.

<sup>50</sup> He shows mercy from generation to generation  
to all who fear him.

<sup>51</sup> His mighty arm has done tremendous things!  
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down princes from their thrones  
and exalted the humble.

<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away with empty hands.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel  
and remembered to be merciful.

<sup>55</sup> For he made this promise to our ancestors,

to Abraham and his children forever.”

**Reader:** *“This is the song of Mary.”*

**Response:** *“Thank you Lord for fulfilling your promise.”*

**Some thoughts:**

Have you ever wondered what Mary’s life was like? She was born into a humble Jewish family, but a famous family at that. She was in the lineage of Israel’s greatest king, King David. She had royal blood as did her fiancé. As a young woman (girl) an angel appeared to her out of the blue. She was frightened and unsure of what was happening. (Angel visitations were rare in biblical times.) Mary learned she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She responded to Gabriel with faith and trust in God. But who would believe her story when common knowledge was that she was the engaged virgin wife of Joseph? It is interesting to me that a few days after the angel left, Mary left town to go visit her aunt Elizabeth who was already six months pregnant with John the Baptist. I have wondered why the visit right then? Maybe Mary needed time to be away from home and gather her thoughts. Elizabeth’s response to Mary when she heard her voice was certainly an affirmation of what God was doing in her body. Mary returned home after three months. It appears that she was separated from Joseph during that time so the community assumption may have been that Joseph was not the father. I’ve always been intrigued by the visit to Elizabeth. What we do know is that Mary sang one of the four great canticles recorded in Luke. Known as the *Magnificat*, named for the first word in the Latin text, Mary sings her heart out for joy to the God who has called her to bear the Savior of the world. Mary was a primary source to Luke in writing his gospel. She was present at the beginning and all the way through the Ascension and Pentecost. It is safe to say, Mary is the most remarkable, unique woman who ever lived.

**Additional Scripture:** Luke 1:26-45;  
I Samuel 2:1-11



**Music:** *YouTube. Magnificat JS Bach*  
Nikolaus Harnoncourt. It is sung in Latin. You cannot miss the joy of the music! You may want to listen to several different versions on YouTube. The conductors are interesting to watch!

**Prayer:**

God, our Father in heaven, I thank you for Mary and the trust she showed as a young girl. She seems to have always been locked in on you and what you were doing even though she didn't always understand everything that was happening. She never wavered from Jesus' side. She traveled to Egypt with him as a baby; to the Temple for his bar mitzvah. She was there when he did his first public miracle. She was present at his crucifixion and his ascension. She was part of the early church. She trusted you completely. Lord, may my life exhibit the same kind of tenacity towards you all through this day. In Jesus' name, Amen. -DS

*December 23,*



**FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT**

Light four candles each day this week.

**Candle Lighter** says: *"I am the Good Shepherd."*

**Response:** *"The Good Shepherd sacrifices his life for his sheep."*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 49:8-13

<sup>8</sup>This is what the LORD says:

"At just the right time, I will respond to you.  
On the day of salvation I will help you.  
I will protect you and give you to the people

as my covenant with them.  
Through you I will reestablish the land of Israel  
and assign it to its own people again.  
<sup>9</sup> I will say to the prisoners, 'Come out in freedom,'  
and to those in darkness, 'Come into the light.'  
They will be my sheep, grazing in green pastures  
and on hills that were previously bare.  
<sup>10</sup> They will neither hunger nor thirst.  
The searing sun will not reach them anymore.  
For the LORD in his mercy will lead them;  
he will lead them beside cool waters.  
<sup>11</sup> And I will make my mountains into level paths  
for them.  
The highways will be raised above the valleys.  
<sup>12</sup> See, my people will return from far away,  
from lands to the north and west,  
and from as far south as Egypt."  
  
<sup>13</sup> Sing for joy, O heavens!  
Rejoice, O earth!  
Burst into song, O mountains!  
For the LORD has comforted his people  
and will have compassion on  
them in their suffering.

**Reader:** *These are the words of the Good Shepherd.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

Have you ever noticed how prominent a role sheep play in the Scriptures? The size of a flock is a measure of wealth. Sheep are prominent in the psalms. A wolf in sheepskin is a bad thing. A good shepherd will go after a lost sheep. The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. Sheep are a primary animal in sacrificial worship. We've all heard of the "sacrificial lamb." Jesus is the Good Shepherd. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. The passage of Scripture for today describes the final day of salvation in terms of a flock grazing in green pastures (cf. Psalm 23). His sheep know his voice. Sheep are separated from goats. The greatest king of Israel, David, was a shepherd boy. Is it any surprise then that the very first people to

hear the news of the birth of the infant Messiah were lowly *shepherds*? God sent a host of angels to sing to the shepherds. They received the royal treatment from heaven! They ran to the manger and then told the story of what they had seen and heard. God revealed himself to the humble of heart then and now. Let us celebrate the birth of Jesus with humble hearts.

**Additional Scripture:** Luke 15:1-7

**Carol:** Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Infant holy, infant lowly,  
for his bed a cattle stall  
oxen lowing, little knowing  
Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
Swift are singing angels singing  
Noels ringing, tidings bringing,  
Christ the babe is Lord of all

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping  
Vigil till the morning new  
Saw the glory heard the story,  
Tidings of a gospel true.  
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,  
Praises voicing, greet the morrow;  
Christ the babe was born for you.

*-Polish carol*

**Prayer:**

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp. Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O lambs of God's fold, put your hope in the Lord—now and always.

*-adapted from Psalm 131, DS*

*December 24,*

**CHRISTMAS EVE**

Light four candles plus the white Christ candle.

**Candle Lighter** says: *"The Word became flesh,"*

**Response:** *"And dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."*



**Scripture:** Luke 2:1-5

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. <sup>4</sup> And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. <sup>5</sup> He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.

**Reader:** *This is the word of the Lord.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

Time is a funny thing. In our world it is a linear measure, giving us a beginning, middle, and ending. The irony is that often we wait for "time to pass" while we wait for something else to "begin." Several different kinds of things are happening within the same time framework. (And you are thinking, "Dan, stay away from the eggnog!") There *is* a point here. For many thousands of years God's people had looked for a Redeemer of some sort, a Messiah. There had been many hints through the years, but

no action and then..."At that *time* the Roman Emperor..." God, who dwells in timelessness, entered measured time. Augustus and the Roman Empire made sure we knew this entrance was not myth but history, measured time which had a beginning, middle, and end. We have names, dates, places, events all occurring in time. Who would ever think that the simple words "*At that time...*" would make it possible for linear time to find the Way into eternity and make it possible for us to leave time as we know it to dwell forever with God in unending eternity? What we celebrate tomorrow is so much more than the birth of a baby. The time of waiting is nearly up. The day draweth nigh!

**Music:** *Your choice*

**Prayer:**

Our gracious and kind heavenly Father, for the entrance of your Son into this world we give you thanks; for the visitation of Gabriel we give you thanks; for the courage of Mary's response, we give you thanks; for your being willing to leave the eternal glory of heaven and suffering as a servant on this earth for a few short years, we give you thanks. Keep us from a "yawning" faith. Guard us, Lord Jesus, from becoming dull and indifferent to the mystery and wonder of your birth and Incarnation. This we pray in the name of the unity of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

-DS

*December 25,*

CHRISTMAS DAY

Light four candles, the Christ candle, and add baby Jesus to the manger. (Still no kings or camels. They come in a couple days!)



*Giorgione*

**Candle Lighter** says: "*My soul magnifies the Lord,*"

**Response:** "*And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*"

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1-20

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. <sup>4</sup> And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. <sup>5</sup> He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.

<sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. <sup>7</sup> She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

<sup>8</sup> That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, <sup>10</sup>but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. <sup>11</sup> The Savior—

yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! <sup>12</sup> And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

<sup>16</sup> They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. <sup>18</sup> All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, <sup>19</sup> but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

**Reader:** *“This is the greatest news ever announced.”*

**Response:** *“In the history of the whole world!”*

**Some thoughts:**

Find some time today to be by yourself and thank the Lord for what he did and does. If you have never put your complete trust in Christ, this would be a great day to do that!

**Music:** *Messiah* Part I and any other Christmas Music you choose. Play music all day!

**Prayer:**

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen!

*December 26,*  
WEDNESDAY

Light the Christ candle everyday through Christmastide.

**Candle Lighter** says: *“His mercy is for those who fear him.”*

**Response:** *“...from generation to generation.”*

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:16-18

<sup>16</sup> Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. <sup>17</sup> Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup> “A cry was heard in Ramah—  
weeping and great mourning.  
Rachel weeps for her children,  
refusing to be comforted,  
for they are dead.”

**Reader:** *This is the sad word of the Lord as recorded by Matthew.*

**Response:** *But evil did not ultimately win.*



**Some thoughts:**

Christmas is undoubtedly one of the most joyous times of the year. Without trying to be a party crasher the day after Christmas, it is worth looking at the whole picture of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. Consider the fact that Israel was being occupied by a foreign power. The faux king of the Jews, having been put into power by the Romans, was insane and dangerous. This paranoid man ordered every little boy under the age of two in Bethlehem to be killed in order to thwart any claim to his throne since he had learned from the wise men that a king of the Jews had been born. In the midst of joy, sometimes there are really bad people and horrible things happen. Even then, God's biggest plan is not thwarted. Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. Her husband, Jacob, fathered the twelve sons whose descendents became the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew quotes Jeremiah in verse eighteen in writing of the exile of Israel to Babylon. Rachel was barren most of her life before the Lord blessed her with two sons. She died giving birth to Benjamin. The town of Ramah was located in the land portion assigned to the tribe of Benjamin. In this passage we have the great sadness of the moment. But Jeremiah goes on to write of the ultimate restoration of Israel and the fulfillment of God's plan for his people. Though there is horror, despair, and great sadness in the moment, God's ultimate plan will not be thwarted then or now. (In some traditions this horrific event is commemorated as the *Feast of the Holy Innocents*.)

**Additional Scripture:** Jeremiah 31:1-34

**Prayer:**

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.  
—*Psalm 23:4*

*December 27,*

THURSDAY

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *“A ruler will come from you, Bethlehem...”*

**Response:** *“who will shepherd my people, Israel.”*

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:1-12

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, <sup>2</sup>“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

<sup>3</sup>King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

<sup>5</sup>“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

<sup>6</sup>‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”



<sup>9</sup> After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! <sup>11</sup> They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

<sup>12</sup> When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

**Reader:** *These are the words of Matthew.*

**Response:** *As recorded in his gospel.*

#### **Some thoughts:**

Yesterday we read about the horror created by a crazy king. Herod “the Great” as he was known, was a tyrant and a builder of great buildings, notably a rebuilding of the Jewish Temple. Herod’s genealogy can be traced to the Edomites. The Edomite people grew out of the family of Esau, the rebellious, short-sighted brother of Jacob who sold his birthright for food. The family quarrel carried on for centuries! Herod was hated by the Jews as a conniving half-breed traitor. He murdered two of his wives and three of his sons when he suspected they were plotting against him. Jesus was born in the time of this man’s rule. Have you ever wondered why this period was God’s perfect time to enter our world? It seems like it was a pretty stressful time to be born. What this story tells me is that God’s plan will not be derailed by a thoroughly evil man. God can weather whatever comes our way. Rejoice! The ultimate victory is his ... always!

**Additional Scripture:** Ephesians 6:10-18

**Carol:** Lully, Lullay

Lullay, Thou little tiny Child,  
*Henry Siddons Mowbray*

By, by, lully, lullay.  
Lullay, Thou little tiny Child.  
By, by, lully, lullay.  
O sisters, too, how may we do,  
For to preserve this day;  
This poor Youngling for whom we sing,  
By, by, lully, lullay.  
Herod the King, in his raging,  
Charged he hath this day;  
His men of might, in his own sight,  
All children young, to slay.  
Then woe is me, poor Child, for Thee,  
And ever mourn and say;  
For Thy parting, nor say nor sing,  
By, by, lully, lullay.  
*-Traditional English Carol*

#### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, may we never lose sight in the most difficult of times of your ultimate victory over sin, death, and the power of evil. This we pray through Jesus Christ, whose resurrection from the dead claimed the victory forever.

*-DS*

## *December 28,* **FRIDAY**

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *“A Savior is born!”*

**Response:** *“Who is Christ the Lord.”*

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:1-2; 7-12

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, <sup>2</sup> “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when

the star first appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

<sup>9</sup> After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! <sup>11</sup> They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

<sup>12</sup> When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

**Reader:** *This is the word of the Lord.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

### **Some thoughts:**

We spoke a few days ago of the humility of the shepherds in the nativity story. We are also well aware that the Christ child was worshiped by kings from foreign lands. What is striking is that the worship of a baby was received with joy. Humans were not to be worshiped. The word used here is the most common one used for the worship of God and Christ. It is the same word used at the end of Matthew’s gospel immediately prior to Jesus’ ascension. These kings had followed a star in order to find the King of all kings. Their gifts further increase the significance of their visit. Gold is the symbol of kingship, a gift to kings. Frankincense is symbolic of deity and was used in worship in the offering of prayers. The myrrh was used in embalming in preparing bodies for burial. This passage was very influential in the early Church’s practice of kneeling, bowing, and prostration in worship. Many churches today continue in these practices as part of their expression of worship. The humble and the mighty

alike bow before baby Jesus. I’m reminded of the passage in Philippians “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” Join the wise men this day.

**Additional Scripture:** Psalm 72:10-17; Isaiah 60:1-22

### **Carol:** Brightest and Best of the Stars

Brightest and best of the stars of the morning  
Dawn on our darkness and come to our aid;  
Star of the east, the horizon adorning,  
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid

What shall we give him, in costly devotion?  
Shall we bring incense and offerings divine,  
Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean,  
Myrrh from the forest or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each lavish oblation,  
Vainly with gifts would his favor secure  
Richer by far is the heart’s adoration,  
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor  
-Reginald Heber, 1811, *alt.*

*(You can also hear this sung on Youtube.com)*

### **Prayer:**

O ye heights of heaven, adore him,  
angel hosts, his praises sing,  
powers, dominions, bow before him,  
and extol our God and King:  
let no tongue on earth be silent,  
every voice in concert ring,  
evermore and evermore!  
Christ, to thee with God the Father,  
and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,  
hymn and chant and high thanksgiving  
and unwearied praises be:  
honor, glory, and dominion,  
and eternal victory,  
evermore and evermore!

*-Of the Father’s Love Begotten, 4<sup>th</sup> century*

*December 29,*  
SATURDAY

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *“Jesus, the Light of the world, is coming again!”*

**Response:** *“Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!”*



*Eugene Girardet*

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:13-23

<sup>13</sup> After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

<sup>14</sup> That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, <sup>15</sup> and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”

<sup>16</sup> Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appear-

ance. <sup>17</sup> Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup> “A cry was heard in Ramah—weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.”

<sup>19</sup> When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. <sup>20</sup> “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

<sup>21</sup> So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. <sup>22</sup> But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

**Reader:** *This is God’s word as recorded by Matthew.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

The serene picture in our minds of the manger with peaceful animals, the noble kings, and humble shepherds surrounding Mary, Joseph, and the sleeping baby didn’t last long. It seems that God entered the world amidst strife, hostility, and terror. Imagine the jolt to Joseph as he was sleeping and an angel appeared again in another dream telling him of Herod’s evil plan to kill all Jewish boys. The angel’s instructions were to leave immediately for Egypt. So in the middle of the night, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus, the Redeemer of Israel, vanished from Bethlehem only to arrive days later in Egypt. There is an interesting parallel. Some 1400 years earlier, a similar thing happened, only in reverse. Moses, the redeemer of Israel, was born when



a narcissistic pharaoh ordered all Jewish baby boys to be killed. Moses' mother hid him and his life was spared as he was raised by the pharaoh's daughter. Moses, a type of Old Testament Christ figure, led God's people from bondage to freedom in the Promised Land. Though Moses was not able to complete the journey, it was Joshua ('Jesus' in Greek) who actually led them into Canaan. After a period of time, the angel appeared again in a dream and told Joseph Herod had died and that they could go back to Israel. Another dream had them travel to northern Israel to the town of Nazareth, where Jesus was to spend his boyhood years. This move fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea 11:1 in which the prophet says that God will call his Son out of Egypt. It would appear from the beginning Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, as he grew up, were aware of the devil's attempts to destroy God's plan of redemption and recreation. Again, Jesus is well acquainted with the pressures and stresses of life in this world from his early years on throughout his life on this earth.

**Additional Scripture:** Exodus 1:8-2:11

**Music:** *O Magnum Mysterium* Morton Lauridsen youtube.com The Nordic Choir rendition. Exquisite. There are many choices on YouTube. This is the one you want. It paints a musical picture of the mystery and wonder of the manger scene.

**Prayer:**

Father in heaven, may I be trusting and faithful in listening to your voice. May I act in obedience and have courage to do what you have asked. Thank you for the example of Joseph and Mary's integrity and obedience in raising your Son here on earth. In the name of Jesus, Amen. -DS

*December 30,*  
SUNDAY

Light the Christ Candle and add the kings and camels.

Your crèche is now complete!

**Candle Lighter** says: *"Jesus has been given all authority..."*

**Response:** *"...in heaven and on earth."*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:16-20

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

<sup>18</sup> Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

**Reader:** *"These are the comforting words of Jesus..."*

**Response:** *"...just before he left this earth."*

**Some thoughts:**

Have you ever wondered what the significance of the king's visit to the infant Jesus was? We know they brought gifts of significance and represented nobility and so forth. But was there something more? Throughout the First Testament, it is very clear that Israel was God's chosen people, a nation set apart for him. There were also clear instructions that all the nations of the world would be blessed through them. Over time the Jews came to believe God was exclusively theirs and neglected the "blessing they were to be to other nations." The visit of the magi underscored in a powerful way right from the beginning of Jesus' arrival on earth, that the Messiah had come for *all* peoples and tribes. In his earthly ministry, Jesus again and again underscored this fact in his many dealings with non-Jews, drunkards, prostitutes, lepers, and Romans; all unclean people

as far as the religious Jews were concerned. Among Jesus' last words was a final reminder that the gospel was to be proclaimed to all the nations of the earth. Do you have associations with people of other nationalities with whom you might share the great news of the gospel? You may even be the "camel" that carries them to the Savior! Humbling, isn't it?



**Additional Scripture:** Acts 2:1-21

**Hymn:** Jesus Shall Reign

Jesus shall reign where're the sun  
Does its successive journey run  
His kingdom spread from shore to shore  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

People and realms of every tongue  
Dwell on his love with sweetest song  
And infant voices shall proclaim  
Their early blessings on his name.

*-Isaac Watts, 1719*

**Prayer:**

*(Jesus praying for us shortly before his crucifixion.)*  
My Father in heaven, these people do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth, teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so

they can be made holy by your truth. I am praying not only for these disciples, but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

*-adapted from John 17- DS*

*December 31,*

MONDAY

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: "The Word became flesh..."

**Response:** "...and dwelt among us."

**Scripture:** Philippians 2:6-8

Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.  
<sup>7</sup> Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.  
When he appeared in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

**Reader:** *This is the powerful word of the Lord.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God for this news regarding his Son.*

**Some thoughts:**

Have you ever come across a story or recounting of an event that was so utterly fantastic that you said this cannot possibly be true? This recounting is truly beyond reason. No one could have imagined this actually happening! The birth of Jesus Christ was just such an event, the only one of its kind since the existence of time. He "appeared in human form." You have undoubtedly heard or read this verse so

many times. There is not another faith, no religious system, no group of prophets or enlightened individuals who claims a God in human flesh. Jesus' claim is 100% God and 100% human being. He is not half and half. He does not morph back and forth between the two natures. He was not a prophet with magical powers nor simply a great moral teacher. He is the only God who has gained the victory over sin, death, and the powers of darkness. No other religious belief system deals with the problem of the reality of sin in any significant way. Jesus did. Not only did he become human, he lived among us. The word John uses in his gospel is "tabernacle," just like the Tabernacle in the Old Testament dwelt in the literal midst of God's people. Not only did he live with his people, he gave himself for them and for his creation. God's becoming Incarnate was the confirmation that we could not have communed with God through any human effort. The birth of Jesus was the flesh and blood action of a God who greatly loves his people and his creation and chooses to bring them back to himself that they again might enjoy him forever. No one but God could ever have thought up this fantastic story. History truly is his fantastic and glorious story.

**Additional Scripture:** Col.1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3; John 1:1-14

**Carol:** O Come, All Ye Faithful

True God of true God,  
Light from Light eternal,  
Lo, he shuns not the virgin's womb  
Son of the Father, begotten, not created,  
O come, Let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

*-Latin hymn*

**Prayers:**

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
And the love of God,  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
Be with you all.

*-II Corinthians 13:14*

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise more than we can utter be unto thee, O most adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, by all angels all men, all creatures for ever and ever Amen and Amen.

*-Thomas Ken 1637-1711*

*January 1,*  
**TUESDAY**

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *"I have seen your salvation..."*

**Response:** *"...which you have prepared for all people."*

**Scripture:** Luke 2:21

"Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived."

**Reader:** *"This is God's word."*

**Response:** *"Thanks be to God."*

**Some thoughts:**

This may seem as a particularly odd verse and strange way to start the New Year! No, I was not up too late or celebrated too much. There is a reason for this choice. I have been impressed anew this year as I read at the quick obedience of both Mary and Joseph in regards to the visits and dreams of the angel Gabriel. Both of them acted with humility and sought to do the honorable thing, Mary in her humble submission to the Lord upon hearing that she would be the *theotokos* (God-bearer) and Joseph in wanting to avoid public humiliation for Mary by divorcing her quietly and paying the fine. So their action in having Jesus circumcised on the eighth day in accordance with the Jewish Law is no surprise at all. When Jesus later said in his adult ministry that he had come to fulfill the Law rather than abolish it, that truth started with his parents at his

birth. Circumcision is a symbol of separation from the world as God's people, a symbol of purity and loyalty to the covenant with God first established with Abraham. Jesus' circumcision thus identified him with God's covenant with Abraham. The name Jesus, Joshua in Hebrew, means "the Lord saves." So, on this eighth day from the Nativity, Mary and Joseph fulfilled the Jewish Law. (It is also an interesting fact that in a male baby, the primary clotting elements in the blood, vitamin K and Prothrombim, reach their highest level in life and are actually about 110 % of the normal level on the eighth day after birth. The levels build from birth to the eighth day and then return to normal levels. It seems that God thought of everything!)

**Additional Scripture:** Gen. 17:9-14

**Prayer:**

Father in heaven, who hast brought us to this day, let the peace of Thy love descend upon us. May every stormy passion be subdued, every unquiet thought cast out, every earthly care and anxiety forgotten, that in the calm of thy loving Presence we may find a remedy for our souls' unrest, and in Thy loving-kindness an answer to our every need; in whatever lies ahead this coming year, for the sake of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

-Unknown

*January 2,*

WEDNESDAY

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *"The king of the Jews..."*

**Response:** *"has been born for all."*

**Scripture:** Luke 2:22-24

<sup>22</sup>Then it was time for their purification offering, as

required by the Law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD." <sup>24</sup>So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

**Reader:** *"These are the detailed words of Luke."*

**Response:** *"Thank you, Lord, for careful details."*

**Some thoughts:**

Here again we read of the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph and of Luke's attention to detail in his gospel. His is the only gospel that records this information. Two different things are happening here. On the fortieth day after the birth of their first-born son, Mary came for her purification offering. Second, the child was presented at the Temple for his redemption as the first-born son. You'll recall in the Old Testament that the Lord claimed all the first-born of Israel as his own. Remember all the first-born in Egypt were killed as the last plague prior to the Exodus. The Israelites' first-born were redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb. So Mary and Joseph brought nearly six week old baby Jesus as their first-born to redeem him and present him to the Lord God. Normally Joseph would have paid five silver coins as the redemption price. Luke left out that detail, but it does say clearly that Jesus was presented to the Lord. It is powerful when we realize that God calls his children his first-born and that his own Son paid the price of our redemption, not with five silver coins, not with Judas' thirty pieces of silver, but with his own blood, the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Regarding her purification offering, we know that Mary and Joseph were not wealthy because their redemption sacrifice was a pair of young pigeons or two turtledoves, the acceptable offering of the poor. The sacrifice was to make atonement for the mother, one for a burnt offering and one for a sin offering.

**Additional Scripture:** Lev. 12:2-8; Ex.13:1-16

**Music:** *Any Christmas Music you choose. Or “And He Shall Purify” from Messiah.*

**Prayer:**

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to you, Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from your glorious, unlimited resources you will empower me with inner strength through your Spirit. Then you, Christ, will make your home in my heart as I trust in you. My roots, Lord, will grow deep down into God’s love and keep me strong. And may I have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep your love is. May I experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then I will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. This I pray through Christ my Redeemer. Amen.

*—adapted from Ephesians 3:14-19*

*January 3,*

THURSDAY

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *“Sovereign Lord, now let your servant depart in peace.”*

**Response:** *“I have seen your salvation.”*



*Rembrandt*

**Scripture:** Luke 2:25-35

<sup>25</sup> At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him <sup>26</sup> and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup> That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, <sup>28</sup> Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup> “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised.

<sup>30</sup> I have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared for all people.

<sup>32</sup> He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

<sup>33</sup> Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them, and he said

to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

**Reader:** *This is the long-awaited word of the Lord.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

### **Some thoughts:**

Some days seem so ordinary. In fact, most days are undistinguished. Today may be one of those for you. We're starting a new year. This pericope is one of the more humanly touching passages to me. We read of an old priest whose day it was to preside in the Temple. He had been shown by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's anointed, the Messiah (which means 'anointed one'). When another young couple appeared with a forty day old baby boy, he *knew* who he had in his arms! This day was not ordinary! This baby was the child God's people had been waiting for since the promise to Abraham some 2,000 years previous. I think there is a better translation than the one you just read. Another reads, "Lord, let your servant *depart* in peace. You can see why Simeon could say, "Now I can leave this earth in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation, God..." Notice he did not say "die in peace." Old Simeon understood that those trusting in Jesus do not die, they are simply "dismissed" from life on this earth to continue life anew in heaven. They "depart" human life. The same concept occurs with Peter, James, and John meeting with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. The word for Jesus' departure from earth is "exodus." The biblical concept of death is different from the world's concept. Simeon was "dismissed" and what a way to go! So much for "another ordinary day at the Temple!"

**Additional Scripture:** Luke 9:28-36

**Music:** *listen to youtube.com Rachmaninoff Vesper's Nunc Dimittis with Robert Shaw Festival Singers. Nunc Dimittis is the "Song of Simeon" Luke 2:29-32 (the soloist is singing this passage of Scripture in Russian; this is a magnificent recording.)*

### **Prayer:**

Lord, if any have to die this day, let it be me, for I am ready.  
—Billy Bray, 1794–1868

*The story is that this tin miner was radically changed from a drunken, blasphemer into an ardent evangelist in Cornwall, England. He is said to have spoken this prayer while waiting with his fellow miners to begin the day's shift.*

*January 4,*  
**FRIDAY**

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *"This, this is Christ the King..."*

**Response:** *"...the babe, the son of Mary."*

**Scripture:** Luke 2:36-38

<sup>36</sup> Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. <sup>37</sup>Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer.<sup>38</sup> She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

**Reader:** *This is the word of the Lord.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

**Some thoughts:**

Talk about ordinary days! Anna was now eighty-four and had been a widow most of her life. Though not from the priestly tribe of Levi, she had stayed in the Temple fasting and praying day after day, year after year. But *this* day was uncommon. It was a *kairos* moment, a moment that had “major significance outside of chronological time.” Sometimes those days happen. As I write this, it happens that forty years ago today, my father was killed in a farming accident. That event changed the rest of my life on earth. The day started ordinary, ended very differently. My guess is you have some extraordinary days as well. Anna recognized the magnitude of this occasion. God’s salvation had come to Jerusalem, God’s own city, in the person of this little baby boy. Along with Simeon, she too had been humbly, patiently waiting. This account is another of the wonderful reminders of the effectiveness of the prayers of the elderly. I’ve heard on several occasions from elderly people, “I can’t do much anymore but pray.” That “much” my friends, is the most. Find an “Anna” today you can encourage. It could become an extraordinary day.

**Music:** *Any Christmas Music you choose!*

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, may we live with the same expectation of Simeon as we wait for your return that we may see the “salvation which you have prepared for all people” for you are “the light to reveal God to the nations, and you are the glory of your people Israel!” And like Anna, may we talk with everyone about our ultimate rescue by Jesus. Amen.

- adapted from Luke 2:29-32 -DS

*January 5,*

SATURDAY

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *“This, this is Christ the King...”*

**Response:** *“...the babe, the son of Mary.”*



**Scripture:** John 1:24-34

<sup>24</sup> Then the Pharisees who had been sent <sup>25</sup> asked him, “If you aren’t the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?”

<sup>26</sup> John told them, “I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize.

<sup>27</sup> Though his ministry follows mine, I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal.”

<sup>28</sup> This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup> He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘A man is coming after me who

is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.<sup>31</sup> I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.”

<sup>32</sup>Then John testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him.

<sup>33</sup> I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, “The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>34</sup> I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.”

**Reader:** *This is the affirming word of the Lord.*

**Response:** *Thanks be to God.*

### **Some thoughts:**

Today completes the twelfth day of Christmas. Tomorrow is Epiphany, a day celebrated differently in several traditions. In the Eastern Church, it commemorates the visit of the *magi* and the revealing of God’s Son to the nations. The Incarnation of Christ and the Nativity are two other themes. His miracle at the wedding feast is still another theme we’ll discuss tomorrow. Having mentioned these various foci, his baptism is the primary event which takes our attention today. All four gospels record the event as you might expect. The baptism of Jesus marks the inauguration of his public ministry. John proclaims “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Since Jesus is sinless, you may wonder why was it necessary for Jesus to be baptized? In his own words, “to fulfill all righteousness.” We have seen all along how his earthly parents observed the Law at every point. There are obviously many things we could say, but I’ll mention only two. When a priest was consecrated for ministry, two things had to happen. First, there was the ritual washing with water and second, they were anointed with oil. Being a priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus’ baptism fulfilled the ceremonial washing. Second, priests were anointed with oil, a symbol of the Holy

Spirit throughout Scripture. John records that the “Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form.” Interestingly, priests also needed to be at least thirty years old to begin their ministry. Luke is the only gospel writer to tell us that Jesus was thirty years old when he began his ministry. We see throughout this portion of Scripture that God paid attention to every little detail. When Jesus said he came to fulfill the Law, he did so far more than we realize. Pay attention to details today, it’s part of the walk of faith, remembering that Jesus, our High Priest, is interceding on our behalf.

**Additional Scripture:** Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:21-22

**Music:** *Your Choice*

### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, though you are God, you did not think of equality with God as something you chose to cling to. Instead, you gave up your divine privileges and took the humble position of a slave and were born as a human being. When you appeared in human form, you humbled yourself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross for people that hated you. I greatly rejoice that God elevated you to the place of highest honor and gave you the name above all other names, that at your name, the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that you are Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen and amen!

*-adapted from Philippians 2:6-11 -DS*

## *January 6,* **EPIPHANY SUNDAY**

Light the Christ Candle

**Candle Lighter** says: *“Jesus Christ is...”*

**Response:** *“the Light of the world.”*





**Scripture:** John 2:1-12

The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,<sup>2</sup> and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration.<sup>3</sup> The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine."

<sup>4</sup> "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

<sup>5</sup> But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

<sup>6</sup> Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons.<sup>7</sup> Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." When the jars had been filled,<sup>8</sup> he said, "Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies." So the servants followed his instructions.

<sup>9</sup> When the master of ceremonies tasted the water

that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over.<sup>10</sup> "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!"

<sup>11</sup> This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

<sup>12</sup> After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

**Reader:** *"This is the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry."*

**Response:** *"Thanks be to God."*

**Some thoughts:**

We began advent with the theme of the Second Coming and Jesus' Return to institute a New Creation making all things new. Epiphany is the shedding of new light or revealing of something previously unseen or unknown. Jesus' first public miracle, the first of seven miracles in John's gospel, inaugurates his public ministry and begins to reveal the identity of the Son of God. There are all kinds of specific things we could say about this passage, but one phrase stands out, a phrase that Jesus often repeats in this gospel. The phrase? *"My time has not yet come."* Jesus was always tuned to the timing of his Father in heaven. Not even his mother could coerce him. The result of this miracle? His recently called disciples believed him, but apparently not his brothers at this point. Nothing deterred Jesus. He *never* got pushed off the course of his mission. What other people perceived as urgent matters, did not cause Jesus to change his priorities. (E.g. Lazarus) Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus showed us how to live. This year, we wish you all "Godspeed!" That was Jesus' speed.

**Hymn:** “Songs of Thankfulness and Praise”

Songs of thankfulness and praise,  
Jesus, Lord, to Thee we raise,  
    Manifested by the star  
    To the sages from afar,  
Branch of royal David’s stem,  
In Thy birth at Bethlehem.  
Anthems be to Thee addressed  
God in man made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan’s stream,  
Prophet, Priest, and King supreme,  
And at Cana, Wedding-guest,  
    In Thy Godhead manifest;  
    Manifest in power divine,  
    Changing water into wine.  
Anthems be to Thee addressed  
God in man made manifest.

Sun and moon shall darkened be,  
Stars shall fall, the heavens shall flee;  
Christ will then like lightning shine,  
    All will see His glorious sign;  
    All will then the trumpet hear,  
    All will see the Judge appear;  
    Thou by all wilt be confessed,  
    God in man made manifest.

Grant us grace to see Thee, Lord,  
    Mirrored in Thy holy Word;  
    May we imitate Thee now  
And be pure as pure art Thou  
    That we like to Thee may be  
    At Thy great Epiphany  
And may praise Thee, ever blest,  
    God in man made manifest.

*by Christopher Wordsworth, 1807-1885*

**Prayer:**

Go forth into the world in peace;  
    Be of good courage,  
    hold fast that which is good,

Render to no one evil for evil.  
Strengthen the fainthearted,  
    Support the weak,  
    Help the afflicted,  
    Honor all persons.  
Love and serve the Lord,  
Rejoicing in the power of the Spirit,  
And the blessing of God the Father, Son, and the  
    Holy Spirit  
Be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer, 1928*

***Postscript***

**Philippians 2:5-11**

<sup>5</sup> You must have the same attitude  
that Christ Jesus had.

<sup>6</sup> Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.

<sup>7</sup> Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore, God elevated him to the place of  
    highest honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
    to the glory of God the Father.

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## SUGGESTED ★ MUSIC

<b>Album</b>	<b>Artist</b>	<b>ID Number</b>
Absolute Heaven	Robert Shaw Festival Singers	Telarc
A Cappella Christmas	Studio Singers	62 7243 8 20072 27
A Carnegie Hall Christ.	Kathleen Battle et al	SK 48235
A Fresh Aire Christmas	Mannheim Steamroller	AGCD 1988
A Gospel Family Christmas	Various	1360
An American Christmas	Tudor Choir	LRCD 1060
Black Nativity	Total Exp. Gospel Choir	INTBNO1
Breathe of Heaven	Grover Washington	CK 68527
Celine These Are Special Times	Celine Dion	BK 69523
Christmas Carols from King's College	King's College Choir	CDC 7 47500 2
Christmas with Cambridge Singers	Cambridge Singers	COLCD 111
Christmas with Robert Shaw	Atlanta Symph & Chorus	ACD 8409
Come, Let Us Adore Him	Haven Quartet	Haven Ministries
Crescent City Christmas Card	Wynton Marsalis	CK 45287
December	George Winston	WD 1025
He Is Christmas	Take 6	WBD-4116
Holiday Pops	Boston Pops	09026 63252-2
Many Mood of Christmas	Robert Shaw	CD 8007 Telarc
Messiah	Atlanta Symph & Chorus	CD 80093 Telarc
Miracles	Kenny G	07822-18767-2
O Magnum Mysterium	Robert Shaw Festival Singers	CD 80531
Sharing the Season	Lorie Line	TLP-03 CD
Sharing the Season II	Lorie Line	TLP-06 CD
This Is Christmas	Morman Tabernacle Choir	CDS 3494
Love's Pure Light	Sylvia McNair & WC Choir	Wheaton College



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