Daily Meditations around the Advent Wreath



by *Breathing Space Coventry*

Advent 2021 Calendar



First Week of Advent
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Day 4 – Wednesday, December 1 – p. 9
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Day 6 – Friday, December 3 – p. 12
Rest – Saturday, December 4

Second Week of Advent
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Day 6 – Friday, December 10 – p. 22
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Third Week of Advent
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Fourth Week of Advent
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Daily Meditations around the Advent Wreath



ADVENT WREATH
You are invited to make a simple wreath that includes five candles: a white Christ candle in the center, and four colored candles in the circle of the wreath. Make the advent wreath from twigs and leaves, paper and tinsel, flowers and fabric – whatever is at hand.

MEDITATIONS
The meditations are intended for individual use, but will readily adapt to group gatherings, household prayers, and for sharing with other Christian traditions. Just ask someone to look ahead and prepare. Be sure to give lots of time for reflection and silence – a great chance to be counter-cultural in our, oh so busy, festive season.
There are six meditations for each week. In the fourth week, adjust the other four daily meditations around those specifically for Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC
Choose a carol, a Taizé chant or an aria or chorus from Handel's Messiah to accompany you for each week of this Advent journey. Some suggestions are given on the first day of each week, or choose your own favorites. Sing or play the piece as you light the candle and become still, or during a pause in the meditation, or as a way to bring the time of prayer to a close. (You can find all the music and listen on a Spotify playlist here: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3JBnEz5NIcvR0Kv8b94Z7N?si=31947ff2e03448c7&nd=1)

DEVELOPING PRAYER PRACTICES
Several prayerful practices form part of our Advent Wreath meditations: Lectio Divina is introduced in Week One; gospel contemplation in Week Two; centering prayer is developed in Week Three; the Examen in Week Four; and repetition and going deeper is the invitation at the end of each week.

Each of these helps me to take care, take heart, and take time to be with the Lover of my soul. Nurture these prayer practices, and see which might help sustain you as you go into the year ahead.

First Sunday ~ The Candle of the Prophets and Peoples

Today we enter the First Week in Advent

We light the first candle (one on the circle) to remember the voice and vision of the prophets and peoples who longed for a savior and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.



Music for the First Week in Advent:

Carol: O come, O come Emmanuel to gather in your arms our suffering world.
We dwell in darkness yearning for light.
O come again and bring us love and life.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel has come to us, O people of this Earth.

Or

God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay.
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of comfort and joy.

Taize: Within the darkest night you kindle a fire that never dies away.

Handel's Messiah: *Aria - Bass:* The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light
Tenor Recitative: Comfort ye my people

Today is Day One of the First Week in Advent

We light the first candle (one on the circle) to remember the voice and vision of the prophets and peoples who longed for a savior and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.



As you enter into prayer today, as this season of Advent opens, what is the longing deep in your heart?

Trusting that the Spirit is here to help you, read through this passage several times really slowly. You may find that reading aloud helps you slow down. Let the words move deeply into your being, like refreshing rain into dry soil. Allow a word or phrase to touch you. Listen for the Holy One to speak to you in your deep longing from Isaiah 9:

> The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light: those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exulting when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken, as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

As you continue in prayer now, reflect on the word or phrase that has touched you, exploring what it means to you here and now. Let the word or phrase connect with your personal situation.

Consider the communities and nations you are part of. What darkness in your community or nation needs to be eased and addressed? What might it mean to long for justice and well- being in your neighborhood, in your city?



Respond to God about what you have thought, and noticed through this reading and reflection: write or pray your response, dance or paint or even sing your response: in gratitude, trust, longing, repentance or intercession.

Feel free … for as long as it takes.

As you gaze at the Advent candle, sit quietly with God, at rest in the presence of the One who loves you. Be still, trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work in the depths of your spirit deepening your faith. Allow the Word to move from your head to your heart to dwell there in peace-full silence.

Holy One, hear our prayer and may our cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Two of the First Week in Advent

Lighting the candle again, we remember the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a savior and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.



Today we hear from the prophet Jeremiah (ch.8) We may be surprised at the bleakness and despair, and wonder how this sits with the fun-filled expectancy of Advent. My human condition, my divided heart, my self-absorption, my busy distracted-ness all lead me to suffering, to unjust practices, and to many sparkling images…

> My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.
>
> Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king not in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols? The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved."
>
> For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

Here, Jeremiah has a whole raft of questions to God about his society. I take some moments to articulate my own heart-felt questions about our society.

Am I able to stay with the hurt, the mourning, the dismay? Or do I want a quick solution and to move on? Israel waited many centuries, many harvests, many summers …



But it's not just "those people out there" who are provocative, who oppress, who serve themselves....

While in this prayer space, I recall the times I too have turned aside. I reflect on this past week, on how I have spent my time, on how I have spent my money, on how I have spoken ... and I know why my joy has gone and my heart is sick.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord grant us your peace.

Reading the passage again, I give thanks for people like Jeremiah who have the courage to lament and voice their concerns before God

Holy One, hear my prayer, and may my cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Three of the First Week in Advent

As we light the candle again, we remember the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a savior and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.



Hope rises in today's reading from Habakkuk 3:

> Though the fig tree does not blossom and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord;

I will exult in the God of my salvation, God the Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.



This lament from the world of agriculture reminds us of our environment, of global warming, of our poor stewardship of creation. And there is also the world of commerce, of the internet, of cities and neighborhoods, of the marginalized, of the powerful. How would Habakkuk express himself in our context?

Read the passage again. You may find rising within you a parallel litany of all that is going wrong in your neighborhood, your family, or the world. You may even wish, after this meditation, to write a 'dynamic equivalent' for our day, following Habakkuk's pattern.

How will your version end? "God makes my feet...."?

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went,
Oh morning, at the brown brink eastward springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.

- G.M. Hopkins

Holy One, hear my prayer, and may my cries come to you. AMEN



Today is Day Four of the First Week in Advent

With candle lit, we remember again the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a savior and leader who would ease their suffering, bring justice, and well-being to their nation and communities.



Psalm 10 is a profound expression of the injustice, suffering and distress people are still experiencing today.

> (1 -4)Why, o Lord, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor – let them be caught in the schemes they have devised. For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart, those greedy for gain curse and renounce the Lord. In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, "God will not seek it out" and all their thoughts are "There is no God".
>
> (7-14) Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under their tongues are mischief and iniquity. They sit in ambush in the villages; in hiding places they murder the innocent. Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; they lurk in secret like a lion in its den; they lurk that they may seize the poor; they seize the poor and drag them off in their net. They stoop, they crouch, and the helpless fall by their might. They think in their heart, "God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it."
>
> (15-16) Rise up, o Lord; o God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed. Why do the wicked renounce God and say in their hearts, "You will not call us to account"? But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan.
>
> (17-18) O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

Have you ever asked the questions at the start of this psalm? What is your own experience of God being distant, or seeming to hide? Recall a period when this has been your reality. How did it or does it feel?

When was I last called to account, for a poor decision, a mistaken judgment, or insensitive action? Have I noticed how mixed my motives are even in everyday matters?



Read the passage a second time.

Today, instead of railing against those who exploit and deceive, perhaps I could take on the contemplative discipline of asking at every small or major decision point in my day: what are my motives here - really?

Holy One, hear my prayer and may my cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Five of the First Week in Advent

As the candle is lit, we remember again the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a savior and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.



Zechariah is another of the prophets who kept hope on the horizon for an anxious and miserable people. In Zechariah 9, he especially encourages men and women to rejoice...

> Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion! Shout aloud o daughter of Jerusalem! See your leader comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the warhorse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from

> the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, o prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.
>
> On that day the Lord their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. For what goodness and beauty are his! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

Notice how the young men are blessed by the coming leader. How does goodness and beauty affect them? What might flourishing look like for them?

I love to hear that it's the young women who get to enjoy the new wine! In fact this reading sets out talking to women, to the daughters of the land and the city. In what ways does the good news of Jesus' coming have special significance for women? How might they be relieved that the coming leader is humble?



Consider contemporary parallels to setting free women and girls, men and boys, setting free prisoners from a waterless pit, the prisoners of hope.... Imagine how this might be.

There is much imagery in these words of Zechariah the prophet: a protected flock of people / the shining jewels of a crown / prisoners of hope. As you read the passage again, notice what resonates with your context, with the journey you are on. What prophets and suffering people might your lighted candle be shining for?

As our meditation comes to an end, take some minutes to stay with the pictures God has brought to mind. You may wish to revisit any words and images during sacred pauses in your day and night.

Holy One, hear our prayer and may our cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Six of the First Week in Advent

As the first candle is lit, we remember again the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a savior and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.



Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know
Be still
Be

silence

Where were the places of greatest resonance in your meditations this week?

Return to that reading and reflection again.

Ask God to take you deeper in what God's Spirit revealed to you. Wait on God.

As this first week of Advent draws to a close, give thanks for the many prophets and people of vision, love and courage who have held the faith and comforted God's people and brought hope to the poor and neglected.

You may wish to write down the names of particular prophets and peoples; place them beside the Advent wreath candle.

Holy One, hear our prayer and may our cries come to you. AMEN

Second Sunday ~ The Candle of the Mary and Joseph

Today we begin the Second Week in Advent

We light this second candle to honor Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.



Music for the Second Week in Advent:

Carol: Joy to the world the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king.
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing...

Taize: Nothing can trouble nothing can frighten. Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble nothing can frighten. God alone fills us.
Nada te turbe nada te espante, quien a Dios tiene nada le falta.
Nada te turbe, nada te espante: Solo Dios basta.

Handel's Messiah: Chorus: And the glory, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed

Today is Day One of the Second Week in Advent

We light this second candle to honor Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.



Usually we approach Scripture with the expectation of reading its words and thinking about their meaning. Yet when we read anything that tells a story or relates to life issues, we always use more than our intellects. Using our imaginations opens us to encounter God more directly than our intellects allow. Today you are invited to bring your whole selves to God in meditation and prayer. Ask the Holy One to guide you to be open and attentive.

Read this passage through to remind yourself of Joseph's story as Matthew tells it - and use your imagination to set the scene as vividly as you can: what would you see? what would you hear? What is in the background? What is the emotional atmosphere like? Take time to let the scene unfold.

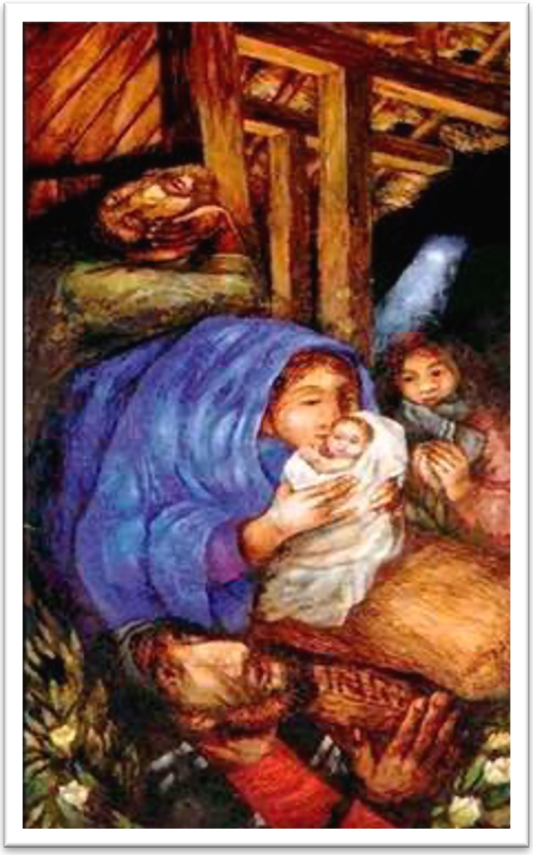
> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Now let yourself become part of this scene. Without forcing anything, what are you drawn to in the story? Perhaps you identify particularly with one of the characters, and take that role. Or maybe you are a bystander, a child, a serving boy, watching what is happening.

When you have found your place, allow the story to unfold: re-play the video in your imagination.

Now that you are part of the scene, notice how you find yourself responding – your thoughts, actions, feelings. It may be that the narrative unfolds a little differently to the biblical account. Notice what happens and trust God to take you there. Do you find yourself interacting with one of the characters? Is there anything you want to say or ask? Is there anything another wants to say to you? How do you respond?

When your imaginary journey through the story has come to an end, take some minutes to reflect. Consider how what happened might blend with your real life situation. How is the God of surprises nudging you? Allow this to lead to prayer, and journal your reflections. Linger as long as need be.



Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning , is now and will be forever. AMEN.

Today is Day Two of the Second Week in Advent

We light this second candle to honor Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.



Two Bible passages today, from Ruth and Matthew, bring a perspective on Joseph and Mary:

> When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was content, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then [Ruth] came stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! He said: "Who are you?" and she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant: spread your cloak over your servant for you are next-of-kin." He said, "May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men whether poor or rich. And now my daughter, I will do for you all that you ask ... Remain this night ... as the Lord lives, I will be the one with the right to redeem you." So she lay at his feet till morning, but got up before one person could recognize another... So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son.
>
> Salmon [was] the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David ... and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

The genealogy of Jesus is startling evidence of God's gentle persistence in overwhelming, with good, the chaotic actions of humankind: Judah visited prostitutes, Rahab deceived by covering up her night visitors; David had an affair and murdered; Solomon flirted with other spirits; all to arrive at Joseph, the right man as a husband, to provide a safe tender place for Mary to be able to welcome and surrender her body to God. Boaz gently offers a similar hospitality of heart and hearth to Ruth.

Stay with these two tender interludes of truly gentle men, carefully respecting the dignity of vulnerable women, and be oh, so grateful.

How do you care, or have you cared, for another vulnerable person? Perhaps, like most of us, you can also recall when you have trampled on another's fragile self. Talk to the God who is Love about all the feelings that surface.

As you read the passages again, consider how God's tender care of you is reflected in this story.



Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning , is now and will be forever. AMEN.

Today is Day Three of the Second Week in Advent

We light this candle to honor Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.



Mary told her story to Luke, like this:

> In the sixth month [of Zechariah and Elizabeth's pregnancy] the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much

perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born of you will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month of her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Consider - in the light of your two Advent wreath candles:

"It is no longer we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us," Paul explains.

"How can this be?" we wonder.

"Can Christ be formed in us?"

For nothing will be impossible with God.

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me as you say ..."



Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning , is now and will be forever. AMEN.

Today is Day Four of the Second Week in Advent

We light this candle to honor Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.



When we are facing turmoil and significant shifts in our lives, isn't it so good to have a friend to hold us? And so often one's heart leaps in empathy and community on the shared faith journey.

> In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord"... And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.(Luke 1:39-45,56)

How have I been this safe place of refuge for a friend?

Who have been the generous hearts, mentors, open-hearth-people for me?

I treasure these times and people .... and give thanks.

As I read about the interaction of these two women again, I consider whom I might go to spend time with. I ask God for the openness and transparency required for mutual blessing in the face of life- changing events.

> *Oh the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person,*
> *having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words,*
> *but to pour them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together,*
> *knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them,*
> *keep what is worth keeping and then,*
> *with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away.*
>
> *- Dinah Maria Mulock Craik*



Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning , is now and will be forever. AMEN.

Today is Day Five of the Second Week in Advent

We light this candle to honor Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.



Luke tells us that Mary wrote and sang this song in her first trimester of pregnancy. Many of us aren't able to be creative in these particular ways, but maybe her simple joy and humility still brings a message for us two thousand years later.

Trusting that the Spirit is here to help you, read through this passage several times really slowly. You may find that reading aloud helps you slow down.

Let the words move deeply into your being, like refreshing rain into dry soil. Allow a word or phrase to touch you. Listen for the Holy One to speak.

And Mary said,
My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God my savior
For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations shall call me blessed,

For the Mighty One has done great things for me
And holy is his name.
His mercy is on those who fear him
From generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm
He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
And lifted up the lowly;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
And sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel
In remembrance of his mercy,
According to the promise he made to our ancestors
To Abraham and his descendants forever."

As you continue in prayer now, reflect on the word or phrase that has touched you, exploring what it means to you here and now. Let the word or phrase connect with your, or a friend's, situation.

Respond to God about what you have thought, and noticed through this reading and reflection. Maybe creativity isn't too far away after all: write or pray your response, dance or paint or even sing your response: in gratitude, trust, longing, repentance or intercession.

Feel free … for as long as it takes.

Sit quietly now with God, at rest in the presence of the One who loves you. Be still, trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work in the depths of your spirit deepening your faith. Allow the Word to move from you head to your heart to dwell there in peace-full silence. Take a leaf from Mary's book.



Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning , is now and will be forever. AMEN.

Today is Day Six of the Second Week in Advent

We light this candle to honor Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.



Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know
Be still
Be

silence

Where were the places of greatest resonance in your meditations this week?

Return to that reading and reflection again.

Ask God to take you deeper in what God's Spirit revealed to you. Wait on God.

As this second week of Advent draws to a close, give thanks for the many good women and men who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.

Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning , is now and will be forever. AMEN.

Third Sunday ~ The Candle of the Angels and Shepherds

Today we begin the Third Week in Advent

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.



Music for the Third Week in Advent:

Carol: Hark the herald angels sing! Glory to the newborn king!

Taize: The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit
Come Lord and open in us the gates of your kingdom

Handel's Messiah: *Chorus*: Glory to God
Duet: He shall feed His flock like a shepherd



Today is Day One of the Third Week in Advent

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.



Our wreath has three candles alight now – the prophets', the parents', and now ordinary people are drawn in …

Our meditations in the first week had a social justice theme, in the second week we were more personal and intimate. This week we consider how those two might resonate together in worship and contemplation. The glory of the Holy comes directly to the humblest, and the response is presence, witness, and adoration.

> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace and goodwill among all people!"
>
> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

Imagine the scenes – first these ordinary people living outdoors night after night with their animals when suddenly a messenger turns up with the strangest of news and joined by a starry choir … and then these ordinary people finding a couple from out of town, camping with a newborn in a barn … Let yourself be one of these ordinary people, a youngster, a granddad, a simple lass, …

When the angel appears, how would you express the fear, astonishment, total amazement in your body? Stand now, move around and take up this posture.

Or if you would rather, imagine yourself arriving at the fodder box, and seeing the small face of a snuggly-wrapped baby … what would your body's response be?

Allow yourself to enter into the worship, the wonder, the silence as you hold this stance or posture with your body for several minutes. Be present to the events; let your spirit experience the privilege and the mystery. Stay in the sacred space.

After the time of stillness has come to its end, you may like to write a simple psalm, or a message in a birthday card, or sketch the scene in charcoal or pastels, to give witness to your own adoration, and wonder. You could leave this response beside the Advent wreath.



Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN

Today is Day Two of the Third Week in Advent

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.



Our reading is the same passage as yesterday, and today we learn from Mary's response to the events.

> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace and goodwill among all people!"
>
> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

"Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart". Is this something I too might do? Prayer that is treasuring and pondering, prayer in my heart … contemplative prayer.

Choose a word of 1 or 2 syllables from this reading that you are drawn to – perhaps something the angels said … great joy, savior, good news, glory, a child, peace… and sitting erect but comfortably, with eyes closed, breathe normally, saying the sacred word as you breathe in and out.

Relax into this, and trust the Spirit to guide you into God's presence.
After 5-10 minutes, open your eyes, and stay still for a while longer. Take a few deep breaths. Stretch! Be thankful.

Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN

Today is Day Three of the Third Week in Advent

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.



Shepherds, and flocks of sheep – and goats, and lost sheep, and pastures and still waters, a rod and staff, and lost sheep and oil … there are many pastoral metaphors threaded through our understandings of the relationship between the Holy One and us human beings.

Feel free to choose one of these passages to read and reflect on today:

Ezekiel 34 | John 10 | Psalm 23 | Luke 15 | Matthew 25:31f



What aspect of the sheep – shepherd relationship is closest to your experience of how you and God are together?

When you are done, enter a time of contemplative centering prayer:

> *Centering prayer is not a way of turning on the presence of God. Rather it is a way of saying, "Here I am." The next step is up to God. It is a way of putting yourself at God's disposal, it is God who determines the consequences.*
>
> - Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart, p.33

- o Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within (e.g. Immanuel, Abba, amen, peace). Ask God to give a word for you ....
- o Sitting comfortably with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word.
- o When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word, thereby reaffirming your choice to be united with God. Let go again and again the distractions, the sounds, the feelings, the thoughts. Put yourself at God's disposal.
- o Remain in stillness and silence, for 10, 15, or 20 minutes.
- o At the end of the prayer period, open your eyes and stay still and in silence for a couple of minutes.
- o Be grateful. . . and don't evaluate!

Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN

Today is Day Four of the Third Week in Advent

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.



More about shepherds, from Micah 5 & John 10

> But you, o Bethlehem of Ephrathah who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. And this one shall stand and feed her flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord God. And they shall live secure, for now their leader shall be great to the ends of the earth; and shall be the one of peace.
>
> I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as my Father knows me and I know my Father. And I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

If our nation looked for these qualities in our leaders, how would our nation be affected?

Think about areas of leading in your own life – at work, with children, in your community..... What do Micah's and John's perspectives remind you about?

"One flock, one shepherd" - could this be a significant part of the joy of the angels and surprise of the shepherds?

Take time again today to say "Here I am" to God, as did Mary, as did the shepherds.

- o Using your sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within, sit comfortably with eyes closed, and silently breathe your word several times.
- o Become still and wordless.
- o When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word, thereby reaffirming your choice to be united with God.
- o Let go again and again the distractions, the sounds, the feelings, the thoughts. Put yourself at God's disposal.
- o Remain in stillness and silence, for 10, 15, or 20 minutes.
- o At the end of the prayer period, open your eyes and stay still and in silence for a couple of minutes.
- o Be grateful. . . and don't evaluate!



Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN

Today is Day Five of the Third Week in Advent

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.



More on angels in today's reading: entertaining them unawares, like the shepherds did.

> The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them he ran from the tent entrance, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My Lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought … let me bring a little bread …" And Abraham hastened into the

> tent to Sarah and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour … and make cakes” Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good … and hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the prepared calf and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.
> They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” … Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife shall have a son.” Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? … Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” … But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh.”: for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes you did.”

A lovely personal story here, (for more see Genesis 18:1 – 19). Messengers from the Most High can come at high noon as well as in the depths of night. What strikes you about Abraham’s response to angels? And what about Sarah’s response?

Have you ever been blessed by strangers? How did you react - more like Abraham or more like Sarah? Their message mayn’t have been about your fertility (!), but nevertheless, you were suddenly “entertaining angels unawares”.

Is there an invitation for you to become an angel? Does the Lord need your hands and feet and voice to bless someone you have never met before and will never see again?



Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN

Today is Day Six of the Third Week in Advent

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.



Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know
Be still
Be

silence

- o Using your sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within, sit comfortably with eyes closed, and silently breathe your word several times.
- o Become still and wordless.
- o When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word, thereby reaffirming your choice to be united with God.
- o Let go again and again the distractions, the sounds, the feelings, the thoughts. Put yourself at God's disposal.
- o Remain in stillness and silence, for 10, 15, or 20 minutes.
- o At the end of the prayer period, open your eyes and stay still and in silence for a couple of minutes.
- o Be grateful. . .

Where were the places of greatest resonance in your meditations this week? Return to that reading and reflection again.

Ask God to take you deeper in what God's Spirit revealed to you. Wait for God.

As this third week of Advent draws to a close, be ready to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds as you notice God's nudges to share your experience of the Holy One, or to find still places of worship, or to entertain angels, or to lead differently, or become an unexpected guide or messenger.

Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN

Fourth Sunday ~ The Candle of the Wise Ones

Today we begin the Fourth Week in Advent

Along with the first three, we light the fourth candle encouraged to know that the wealthy and knowledgeable, the foreign and different ones, the elderly and widowed, these Wise Ones, recognized the promise of the babe, and the star in the sky, and responded generously and joyfully.



Music for the Fourth Week in Advent:

Carol: As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold …

Taize: Bless the Lord my soul and bless God's holy name
Bless the Lord my soul, who leads me into life.

Handel's Messiah: *Chorus*: For unto us a child is born
Chorus: Hallelujah



Today is Day One of the Fourth Week in Advent

Along with the first three, we light the fourth candle encouraged to know that the wealthy and knowledgeable, the foreign and different ones, the elderly and widowed, these Wise Ones, recognized the promise of the babe, and the star in the sky, and responded generously and joyfully.

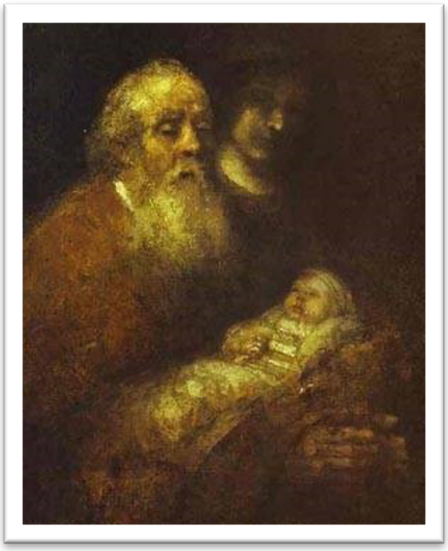


We don't usually include Anna or Simeon in our nativity narratives, but these two are Wise Ones indeed. They brought gifts of praise and blessing, instead of gold and incense. Luke relates their encounters with baby Jesus:

> Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. … There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a

> great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Somehow both Anna and Simeon were able to recognize the significance of the occasion, of the parents and child. They were tuned in to the movements of God's Spirit in their hearts; they were present and attentive to God. Is this something you are alert to in your life? When did you last notice a nudge from the Holy One?



What did you do in response?

There is a prayerful practice many centuries old that can lead us to being mindful and present to the significance of our days and weeks and years...the examen:

> o Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus or God or the Holy Spirit to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful.
>
> o Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful.
>
> o Let your feelings come to the surface. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just the way you are.
>
> o Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. You may like to journal your learnings or share them with a family member or friend.

Eternal God, grant to me this day and every day, such readiness and delight in following Christ, That whether my life is short or long I shall have lived abundantly.
AMEN

- New Zealand Prayer Book (2005), p.106

Today is Day Two of the Fourth Week in Advent

Along with the first three, we light the fourth candle encouraged to know that the wealthy and knowledgeable, the foreign and different ones, the elderly and widowed, these Wise Ones, recognized the promise of the babe, and the star in the sky, and responded generously and joyfully.



Read this passage through to remind yourself of the wise ones' story as Matthew tells it - and use your imagination to set the scene as vividly as you can: what would you see? what would you hear? What is in the background? What is the emotional atmosphere like? Take time to let the scene unfold.

> In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise ones from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Judea with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he enquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet [Micah] ... Then Herod secretly called for the wise ones and learned from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage". When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Now let yourself become part of this scene. Without forcing anything, what are you drawn to in the story? Perhaps you identify particularly with one of the characters, and take that role. Or maybe you are a bystander, a child, a serving boy, watching what is happening.

When you have found your place, allow the story to unfold: re-play the video in your imagination.

Now that you are part of the scene, notice how you find yourself responding – your thoughts, actions, feelings. Maybe the narrative unfolds a little differently to the biblical account. Notice what happens and trust God to take you there. Do you find yourself interacting with one of the characters? Is there anything you want to say or ask? Is there anything another wants to say to you? How do you respond?

When your imaginary journey through the story has come to an end, take some minutes to reflect. Consider how what happened might blend with your real life situation. How is the God of surprises nudging you? Allow this to lead to prayer, and journal your reflections. Linger as long as need be.

Eternal God, grant to me this day and every day, such readiness and delight in following Christ, That whether my life is short or long I shall have lived abundantly.
AMEN

- New Zealand Prayer Book (2005), p.106

Today is Day Three of the Fourth Week in Advent

Along with the first three, we light the fourth candle encouraged to know that the wealthy and knowledgeable, the foreign and different ones, the elderly and widowed, these Wise Ones, recognized the promise of the babe, and the star in the sky, and responded generously and joyfully.



The sequel to the visit of the wise ones is tragic.

> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, [the wise ones] left for their own country by another route. Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother,

> and flee to Egypt and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child and destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. ... When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise ones, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, according to the time he had learned from the astrologers. . . When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said. "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up... and went ...

If the astrologers had not followed the star, then this outrageous killing of infants would not have happened. Were they on the wrong track? No, the terror originated from a desperately insecure, sadly abusive leader, who had to control his world by any means. How do I react to being tricked, to events being out of my control? What do I do with my frustrations, when anger lurks?



How do we hold the ambiguity of a God who seems to protect and guide one family but leaves all the others exposed to infanticide? Was Joseph the only one alert to God's nudges?

Can I honestly express to the Holy One my thoughts and feelings in the face of injustice? This prayerful examen practice can lead us to becoming aware of the significance of what is going on around us, the ambiguities of our motives, the messengers who are trying to get our attention:

> o Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus or God or the Holy Spirit to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful.
>
> o Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful.
>
> o Let your feelings come to the surface. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just the way you are.

o Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. You may like to journal your learnings or share them with a family member or friend.

Eternal God, grant to me this day and every day, such readiness and delight in following Christ, That whether my life is short or long I shall have lived abundantly.
AMEN

- New Zealand Prayer Book (2005), p.106

Today is Day Four of the Fourth Week in Advent

Along with the first three, we light the fourth candle encouraged to know that the wealthy and knowledgeable, the foreign and different ones, the elderly and widowed, these Wise Ones, recognized the promise of the babe, and the star in the sky, and responded generously and joyfully.



During Advent, our anticipation is building, the nativity scenes are being assembled and our images of Jesus and his family alone and abandoned in a dirty stable are forming. But is that the way it really was?

According to New Testament theologian Kenneth Bailey in his wonderful book *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes,* no. Middle Eastern cultures are known for their hospitality and Joseph was coming home with a new wife and an expected first child. The whole family was gathering, aunts and uncles, cousins and brothers and sisters. All of them coming home. Yes there was a census that brought them together but in a fun loving culture like this it would not have diminished the welcome or the excitement of a homecoming gathering. The expectation of a baby to be born in their midst would only have increased the excitement.

As Kenneth Bailey explains, the Greek word (*katalyma* or *kataluma*) translated as *inn* in Luke 2:7 does not mean a commercial building with rooms for travelers. It's a guest space, typically the upper room of a common village home.

It was to this simple village home that the shepherds and wise men alike came. Shepherds despised and regarded as unclean by their society, are visited by angels and invited to join the great home coming celebration that marks the coming of the child

who will become the Messiah. That they were welcomed and not turned away from this home is remarkable. This is good news indeed for the outcast and the despised.

Then the wise men come, rich men on camels, probably from Arabia, Gentiles. And they come not to the city of Jerusalem where the Jews thought God's glory would shine, but to the child born in a manager around whom there is already a great light. The wise men come to find a new home, a new place of belonging that has beckoned to them across the world. This too is remarkable and good news for people of all nations who long for a place to call home.

In the birth of Jesus we are called towards a new family and a new home. There are family and friends and animals. And special invitations by angels for the despised and rejected, and a star to guide the strangers and those who seem far off. The new family and the home envisioned in the birth of Jesus is inclusive of all who accept God's invitation.

Let's be willing to invite all those who come with him. They too are part of our family. We cannot welcome Jesus without also extending our hand of welcome to those who gather round the manger – the disreputable and despised, the foreigners and aliens. Who do we exclude from our families because we are afraid they will contaminate us and the babies in our midst?



I love the French custom of santons, in which clay models of villagers are positioned around the manger bringing their gifts to the Christ child. Imagine all our neighbours, those we enjoy and those we don't want to have anything to do with, clustered around the manger, invited into that place of intimate hospitality with God. I encourage all of us

to consider creating our own "santons" this Advent and Christmas season, santons of words, photos, and actions, not figures of clay.

How can you help others to see the embracing love of God for all of humankind in the birth of the child Jesus? What do you long for and which home are you awaiting this Advent season? Who are the friends and strangers you will welcome to the manger?

- from *Come to the Manger - Who Will You Invite* by Christine Sine

Eternal God, grant to me this day and every day, such readiness and delight in following Christ, That whether my life is short or long I shall have lived abundantly.
AMEN

- New Zealand Prayer Book (2005), p.106

Today is Christmas Eve ~ the day before Christmas

Once again we light all four candles.



We light the first candle to remember the voice and vision of the prophets and peoples who longed for a savior and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.

We light the second candle to honor Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.
We light the third candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.

And we light the fourth candle encouraged to know that the wealthy and knowledgeable, the foreign and different ones, the elderly and widowed, these Wise Ones, recognized the promise of the babe, and the star in the sky, and responded generously and joyfully.

On this day we pause to be still.
The long wait is nearly over.
A holy peace descends.
Over the past four weeks
we have journeyed with
the prophets,
the shepherds and angels,
the wise ones,
and with Mary and Joseph.
Now we arrive at Bethlehem.
The world is still in silent expectation.
Be still.
Ponder the mystery of God's incarnation.
Be still.



Today is Christmas Day ~ the Candle of Jesus Emmanuel ~ the Christ Candle



We light the center candle for Jesus who comes to us even now as a baby,
human and wholesome,
fragile and dependent,
breast-fed and bundled,
wearing neither logo or life insurance
waiting to be formed within us.



> In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. . . . And Mary pondered these things in her heart.



This prayerful examen practice can help us, like Mary, ponder the many things in our heart:

> o Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus or God or the Holy Spirit to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful.
>
> o Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful.
>
> o Let your feelings come to the surface. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just the way you are.
>
> o Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. You may like to journal your learnings or share them with a family member or friend.

A blessing for you and those you are with today ~

May you be filled with Light
May the indwelling presence of Christ heal you
May your fear be changed to love
May you be a gift ready to be given.
AMEN

Today is the Day After Christmas

Again, we light all five candles; again we rejoice that Light has entered our world; again we welcome the Christ child; again, we honor the prophets, the parents, the ordinary people, the wise ones. . . and we are amazed.



Here's a quaint and poignant Christmas carol that doesn't even mention God or the advent events. It is a wee narrative about "Boxing Day" when traditionally the wealthy boxed up the goodies of the festive season to share with those in poverty. Yes, patronizing and unconscious of the injustices they were complicit in, but still demonstrating kindness and mercy in the steps of Jesus. Note also that this good king was marking the memory of the first martyr Stephen. In many ways, the carol is worlds away from our contexts of 21st century New Zealand, India, Europe, but God's truth threads through.

Good King Wenceslas looked out on the feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about deep and crisp and even
Brightly shone the moon that night though the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight gath'ring winter fuel.

"Hither, page, and stand by me if thou know'st it, telling
Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence underneath the mountain
Right against the forest fence by Saint Agnes' fountain."

"Bring me flesh and bring me wine bring me pine logs hither
Thou and I will see him dine when we bear him thither."
Page and monarch forth they went forth they went together
Through the rude wind's wild lament and the bitter weather.

"Sire, the night is darker now and the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart, I know not how, I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, my good page; tread thou in them boldly
Thou shalt find the winter's rage freeze thy blood less coldly."

In his master's steps he trod where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank possessing
Ye who now will bless the poor, shall yourselves find blessing.

Return now to any of the laments, and prophetic passages in these Advent meditations; read again, and consider asking God for the gifts you need to fulfil a prophetic and advocacy role for justice in our world today.

You may find now is a good time to enter into silent and centered prayer....

Using your sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within, sit comfortably with eyes closed, and silently breathe your word several times.

- Become still and wordless.
- When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word, thereby reaffirming your choice to be united with God.
- Let go again and again the distractions, the sounds, the feelings, the thoughts.
- Remain in stillness and silence, for 15 or 20 minutes.
- At the end of the prayer period, open your eyes and stay still and silent for a couple more minutes.
- Be grateful. . .

Eternal God, grant to me this day and every day, such readiness and delight in following Christ, That whether my life is short or long I shall have lived abundantly.
AMEN

- New Zealand Prayer Book (2005),p.106

Today is the Last Day in Advent

With all five candles alight, we bring our meditations to rest, thankful again for the prophets and longing peoples, the perceptive and loving parents, the presence and worship of majestic angels and ordinary shepherds, the mystery and knowing of wise ones, and above all, thankful for the Most High who is content to gently reveal Godself as a vulnerable child – and to wait for us to notice.



Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know
Be still
Be

silence

Where were the places of greatest resonance in your meditations this week?

Return to that reading and reflection again.

Ask God to take you deeper in what God's Spirit revealed to you. Wait for God.

Eternal God, grant to me this day and every day, such readiness and delight in following Christ, That whether my life is short or long I shall have lived abundantly.
AMEN

- New Zealand Prayer Book (2005), p.106



Into the New Year

Several prayerful practices have been part of our Advent Wreath meditations: Lectio Divina was introduced on day 1, Week One; Gospel Contemplation on day 1, Week Two; Centering Prayer is developed in Week Three; the Examen in Week Four; and repetition and going deeper is the invitation at the end of each week.

Each of these helps me to take care, take heart, and take time to be with the Lover of my soul.

Here is some more on the examen for you to take with you into the New Year ahead.

The examen is an old term used to describe a time of reflection at day's end. Through this simple prayerful practice, we learn to recognize those things which give us life and energy or which drag energy away from us, leaving us feeling drained and empty instead of renewed and encouraged. The examen can also help us identify patterns in our responses which might need our attention, such as a tendency to avoid conflict or to keep silent instead of speaking out about something important. Consistent attention to these interior movements can help us resolve problems and discern a way forward which will enable us to live out our unique way of giving and receiving love.

o Set aside ten to twenty minutes. Do whatever helps you to relax (e.g. light a candle, play some short reflective music) and breathe in the love of God and breathe out your worries.

o With your hand on your heart and ask the Holy One to bring to your heart your response to one of these sets of questions:

- When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, to others, to God?
- When did I have the least sense of belonging?
- When did I give and receive the most love today?
- When did I give and receive the least love today?
- How was I most aware of grace in my life today?
- How was I least aware of grace in my life today?
- For which moment in the day am I most grateful?
- For which am I least grateful? (you can make up your own questions too.)

o Let your feelings come to the surface. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just the way you are.

o Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. You may like to journal your learnings or share them with a family member or friend.