

COME

*Desart,*

*King*

An Advent Devotional

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THE FOUNDRY  
PUBLISHING\*

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# Intend

Every year Christians prepare for the birth of Christ. We remember how Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph. We reflect on the beauty of the incarnation—God becoming human and dwelling among us. We often celebrate the greatest gift by giving gifts to one another. We do this every year. Advent helps us prepare for the birth of Christ again and again.

Advent isn't just preparation to remember a past moment. It is also a season when we look forward in hope to the second coming of Christ. The incarnation is a sign and symbol of the willingness of God, the Creator of the universe, to enter into our lives. This willingness wasn't just a one-time event. It changes everything for those of us who follow Jesus. Although this is a core focus of the Advent season, perhaps we ought to reflect on the second coming of Christ every day of our lives—not in trying to predict Christ's return or attempting to read the "signs of the times" or using anything and everything as an excuse that confirms the end is near. Instead, we should seek to order our lives in preparation for the new heaven and the new earth toward which Scripture points us.

# Anticipation

God's willingness to come and to come again is an invitation to us to live as if God is here now. God-with-us isn't a past experience or merely a future hope—it is a current reality. But to live this way requires that we respond to what God has already done, is doing, and will do; and it also requires a willingness to give ourselves fully to God.

This Advent season, as we remember the great gift of the incarnation and look forward to the return of our Lord and Savior and the renewal of all things, may we prepare by living faithfully and recognizing that all are invited to discipleship. May we participate in the redemptive work of God through the incarnation and in our anticipation of the culmination of God's work in the world.

So come, peasant, king, and everyone—come and follow the one who was, who is, and who is to come. God is with us. Will the shape of our lives reflect this truth?

A large, stylized red cursive graphic that resembles the letters 'H' and 'H' intertwined, with a central vertical line and a large loop on the left side. It is positioned at the top of the page, partially cut off by the top edge.

**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

November 28, 2021



## SCRIPTURE READING

*PSALM 25:1-10*

*I offer my life to you, LORD.*

*Make your ways known to me, LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth—teach it to me—because you are the God who saves me. I put my hope in you all day long. LORD, remember your compassion and faithful love—they are forever!*

*God guides the weak to justice, teaching them his way. All the LORD's paths are loving and faithful for those who keep his covenant and laws.*

*—PSALM 25:1, 4-6, 9-10*

Sometimes the world seems really dark and impossibly broken. Sometimes our families seem beyond hope and beyond repair. There are times when our churches are divided and bitter instead of united in love of God and neighbor. Sometimes our work feels meaningless and unproductive. The psalmist feels it too. There is shame, there are enemies, there is treachery, there is sin, there is injustice in Psalm 25. We can relate. But what do we do when all around feels like despair?

At Advent, we light a candle. The light of the single flame is a reminder to us of the in-breaking hope that flickers in the darkness of our world.

Of course, this isn't the only light that shines. There is hope all around us and within us as we remember again the incarnation of Christ, God with us, Emmanuel! There is hope all around us and within us as we anticipate the second coming of our Lord; the new heaven and the new earth; all things made new! There is great hope.

The psalmist reminds us that the difficulties of life bring hope too: God is trustworthy! God is our teacher! God's path will become our path! God is compassionate and forgiving! God brings justice to the weak! God is loving and faithful! There is great hope.

But the hope of Advent isn't just for those of us already worshipping God and gathering in communities of faith. It is meant to be a light that spreads and grows, transforming the shadowy corners of our world with life and light. If we simply light a candle in our sanctuaries and walk out the door unchanged, how will the world know of the Christ who is with us and the Christ



who is coming again? Maybe we can find the answer in these seven familiar words: “I offer my life to you, Lord.” This is where the psalmist begins, and it is where we need to begin this Advent season. In the face of the darkness, brokenness, divisiveness, suspicion, fear, sin, broken systems—in the face of all of that and more, may we say with the psalmist, “I offer my life to you, Lord.”

These are the kinds of words many of us have prayed at altars or bedsides. Isn't this what you do when you ask Jesus into your heart? Isn't this what it means to be saved? Aren't these seven words the same ones that invite the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, to fill us with love, to shape us into the image of Christ? We might think they are common words because we have used them and heard them and believe them. May we be reminded that these are *not* common words—instead, they are words of radical discipleship. They are the revolutionary work of the kingdom of God. These words change everything.

You don't have to look far in the pages of Scripture to find that, when a person commits their life to God, everything changes. They are called to move. They are invited to speak. They are compelled to stand up against injustice. They birth babies who were unexpected but desperately prayed for. They are mocked and scorned because of their obedience. Some are even killed for offering their lives to God. Everything changes when we live into these seven words.

Not just saying these words but really *meaning* them implies we will trust in God and no one else. We won't

trust in our abilities or our intellect—although those can be used by God. We won't rely on our finances or our possessions—because those are God's anyway. We won't lean on our favorite political agenda or party to save us—because we know those systems are not kingdom-of-God systems. We will trust in God. And, like the flickering of a lone candle in a dark room, our trust may feel small and weak, but the more we seek God's grace and offer our lives to him, the more our trust will grow. As it does, we will experience the hope that only comes from the God who has come, is with us, and is coming again.

During World War II, a dark time filled with despair, Maria Skobtsova became a nun. She longed to help refugees and the poor as she sought to follow Christ. She was instrumental in saving the lives of many Jews who would have been sent to the gas chambers. Later arrested and sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, Mother Maria was ultimately executed by the Nazis. Before her arrest, she penned these words: "I am your message, Lord. Throw me like a blazing torch into the night, that all may see and understand what it is to be a disciple."

May our lives be a flickering candle or a blazing torch in the darkness of our world as we hope expectantly and shine forth the light of Christ for all to see. This Advent season, let us say and truly mean: "I offer my life to you, Lord."

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# FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. In your life, where do you feel hopeless? What seems insurmountable right now?

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2. Where can you see a flicker of hope, however small, in the world around you?

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3. What would hold you back from offering your life, fully, to the Lord?

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Monday, November 29, 2021

## SCRIPTURE READING

*JOHN 9:1-7*

*As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. Jesus's disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?"*

*Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God's mighty works might be displayed in him. While it's daytime, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." After he said this, he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the man's eyes. Jesus said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (this word means sent). So the man went away and washed. When he returned, he could see.*

—*JOHN 9:1-7*

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Have you ever experienced complete darkness, where your eyes are open but you can't see anything? You know where you are, but everything feels different. Your ears suddenly hear sounds you normally miss—your pounding heart, the quickness of your own breath.

For those of us with the ability to see, complete darkness can quickly become overwhelming. For some, on the other hand, darkness is a way of life. In our world, being blind has both disadvantages and advantages.

There is danger and lack of opportunity, and there are challenges in the path of one whose vision is impaired. But there are also some advantages for someone who lives blind in a seeing world. Those of us who rely on our sight often find ourselves overwhelmed by our other senses that are awakened and heightened in the darkness, but those who live without sight learn to perceive the world around them in ways that those who have sight often miss. Vision isn't everything.

So why would Jesus heal the man born blind? If vision isn't everything, why not leave him be and teach the disciples that there is more to life than seeing? Jesus needed to address the reality that plagued the world around him: to be blind, or not able-bodied in some other way, was understood to be a sign of and punishment for sin. Jesus made clear this is not so. And, before we think we have matured beyond this thinking in our age, we must recognize the ways we still prefer the able-bodied in our churches, workplaces, schools, and communities. We may not attribute the differences to sin, but contemporary society certainly struggles to honor, dignify, provide for, and celebrate those differences in our lives. We lack vision.

Jesus—in the midst of reshaping the disciples' understanding of sin, affliction, disability, and God's goodness—says these words: “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” In our passage today there is a man who has no physical vision, and there are disciples who have the wrong spiritual vision. Jesus, the Light of the world, is here to bring healing for both.

In Jesus's day being "whole" in the eyes of society was crucial. To be blind or disabled in any way came at great cost to one's place in the community. This isn't too different from our world today, which often values the able-bodied above all. We need the healing work of God to open our spiritually blind eyes. We need to recognize that Jesus is the Light of the world. We need our blindness to be made into holy sight for the glory of God. Our vision isn't healed for our sake alone—it restores the community that only comes as we allow Christ to be the Light of the world.

Blindness made it impossible for the man to be part of the community of faith because of their view of sin—but Christ brought healing. Spiritual blindness kept the disciples from seeing the true nature of God's community—but Christ brought healing. May the eyes of our hearts be opened and God's community formed in us as we together follow the Light of the world.

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# FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

- 1. Are there people who don't fit in for one reason or another at your church? How can you work to help bring healing to the community you are part of?

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- 2. It is so hopeful that Jesus is the Light of the world. What are some places in your life, your community, that need that hope? How can you shine Jesus's light in those places?

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