

Daily Devotional During “Social Distancing”

The following provides a daily meditation for this season of “social distancing.” Following the Spirit of the Living God into the world, we have entered the Season of Advent, or “coming,” acknowledging the gift of God “coming” into the world in Jesus. May we journey together into the new life that Christ has brought us and the Holy Spirit continually imparts to us. May the Church grow ever deeper into the love and hope of God.

Advent

Monday, December 21

Read: Luke 1:46-55

Reflection:

The “Magnificat,” as this portion of text is known, has been cherished by generations who saw in Mary’s prayer the great upside-down Kingdom. God’s power was such that it did not simply observe the imbalance of resources on earth – it would *transform* them. God’s future for creation was bound with *justice*, with true *restoration*.

This reversal of fortunes was one not only longed by Israel, but by *all* who lament from the margins of society. Thus, what hope it is that God actually enters humanity *from* those same margins! God brings deliverance, not from the halls of earthly power, but from the roots of the people! Jesus is born not in a palace, but a cave, a lowly cattle stall. This is just the beginning of the One who truly dwells *with* the people.

This song was “good news” because it revealed that God was a *redeemer*. God was not an abstract creator, but an *active* and *present* “Savior” of human history. This Advent, how can we praise the God who seeks to transform our existence into a more just and equitable creation?

Prayer: *My soul magnifies in You, O LORD, because You see and You act. You hear Your people’s cries and respond in faithfulness. By Your mercy, keep us active in Your good works. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 22

Read: Hebrews 8:1-13

Reflection:

Hebrews provides a perspective on Christ through the language of the temple system. The priest was always a representative of the people before God, bearing their sins symbolically before the altar in the Holy of holies. Jesus may be understood as serving this priestly role, in that he, as *truly* human, represents *all* people before God, bearing *humanity's* sins in the heart of the Divine.

And yet the temple system was never a true restoration of human wrongs – it was always *pointing* towards Jesus and God's redeeming Presence in him. What the writer to the Hebrews wanted us to imagine was Christ unfolding the big picture before our eyes: the “new covenant.” In Jesus, God has brought the Kingdom within human reach in a way formerly unobtained, but now, is accessible by all humanity.

Advent reminds us that God *comes close*. We do not belong to a God “beyond” reach – but *through* Christ, God is available to each and every person, wrong or right, rich or poor, male or female – no matter what, God comes *to us*.

Prayer: *Thank You, LORD, for this more excellent ministry through Christ, which has placed a new law upon our hearts, bringing us redemption and righteousness, enabling us to truly be Your people in this world. Amen.*

Wednesday, December 23

Read: Mark 11:1-11

Reflection:

We normally read Jesus' Triumphant entry during Lent, but it has just as much connection during Advent. God has already entered the world in triumph in Jesus – though to all eyes it seems such an ordinary and mundane birth. Yet thus is the beauty of God's Kingdom – it is *through* the average and unseen, the *everyday*, that God truly “triumphs.”

Jesus did not enter Jerusalem as a conqueror or even as a dignitary – he came in humility and promise, just as he was born. He came surrounded by the poor and meek, the lost and lonely – he came as *part* of the crowds, in solidarity with all the longing of humanity. He came willing to face the abuse of worldly empires, refusing to do violence but embrace it for the sake of others, all for the revelation of God's Kingdom.

How might we follow the Humble One this Advent? How might we welcome Jesus again into the world through our discipleship? Do we wait until Palm Sunday to wave branches in Jesus' Name, or do we begin even now to make way for Christ the King in our midst? The Church must declare through its actions, no matter the season: “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD!” (v. 9)

Prayer: *Make Your way in my life, King Jesus. May I follow Your humility with my own sacrifice and love, mercifully living by Your gentle rule. Amen.*

Thursday, December 24 – “Christmas Eve”

<https://boxcast.tv/view/christmas-eve---1st-service-997456>

Read: Luke 2:1-20

Reflection:

The Gospel of Luke offers a counternarrative to the emperor-worship of Rome. Caesars had their own legendary stories of birth, miraculous accounts of their ordination by the gods, and their divine right to rule. Luke crafts Jesus’ birth as a perspective of what the *true* “Lord” looks like through an origins story.

Jesus is born not to rule by might or sword or control, but to *love*. Jesus’ birth is an act of God’s *promise*, the fulfillment of Israel’s longing and the transition of God’s mission to the ends of the earth. The word of Caesar may go out to require registration for taxation and empire-building, but the Word of God goes forth to transform hearts and lives into a redeemed and restored humanity. The Word Made Flesh offers people a place in the Story of God.

Christmas is not about the value of gifts, not the lights on the tree or any decorations. It’s not even our time with family and friends and food. Christmas is about the story of *belonging* – it’s about finding our true place in God’s heart, being named as Christ’s *own*, fellow children of God. Christmas is the story of God’s Kingdom, settling on earth. It’s a challenge of “who” will we serve – Caesar or Christ? There is only one Name that will truly bring “peace” (v. 14)

Prayer: *God of shepherds and angels, Magi and Mary, to You we give thanks that all the gifts in the world pale in comparison to the Gift of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

Friday, December 25 – “Christmas Day”

Read: Psalm 97

Reflection:

“The LORD is king!” the psalmist is saying. This was a cry of God’s sovereignty, God’s authority over the world. There were many kings that sought Israel’s domination, but only the *LORD* ruled *all* the earth in love. God alone ruled over creation and would be responsible for its final transformation.

In a season where we have all seen our share of brokenness and pain, I hope you’ll join me in singing (even behind a mask) the *LORD is King! King* over our hurts, over our losses, our hopes and dreams, our family and friends, our nation, the whole world. *God rules the world*, and because of that power and promise, we *can* face the future. We can live another day.

Rejoice, because God *is* good. Rejoice, because God *is* love. Rejoice, because you and I are not “objects” or randomly-destined particles. We are God’s *own*. Rejoice, and Merry Christmas!

Prayer: *Joy to the world, the LORD is come. May we all continue to receive our King. Amen.*

Saturday, December 26

There are no texts for today. Instead, practice a true “Sabbath” and rest in the knowledge that You are loved by the God of the universe. Be true to that, and cease striving for anything else.

Prayer: *Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, for You are good, and Your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.*

Sunday, December 27 – “Christmas Sunday” – Virtual Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-432410> . Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: All glory to You, great God, for the gift of Your Son, whom You sent to save us. With singing angels, we praise Your Name and tell the earth Christ’s story, that all may rejoice in Your wondrous love.

All: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. We have beheld His glory, and ask to live always in His peace. Alleluia!

Reflection: Psalm 148; Luke 2:22-40

Whether you join for virtual worship or study on your own, consider these questions:

- The psalmist invites all creation to praise God for all creation is *dependent* upon God for salvation – how might our discipleship include a similar holistic approach?
- The episode with Simeon, Anna, and the infant Jesus is another way to portray the longing of Israel for the Messiah – what kind of praise do we give for recognizing Jesus as the hope of all our longing?
- Do we so willingly share, not only in word, but also deed, the “good news” that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s visions for Kingdom life?

Lord’s Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*

Doxology

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. Amen.

Blessing

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Risen One, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you now and forever. Amen.