

# A Light Upon My Path

## Daily Devotions for Advent & Christmas

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# Editor's Note

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In the middle of the ocean, the stars are magnificent. No longer obscured by light pollution, they delight the night, sparkling, a few flitting here and there.

I imagine the shepherds enjoyed the same celestial dance. Without artificial light, they could see the glory of creation on a nightly basis. What an amazing backdrop for the angel of the Lord, who brings “good news of great joy.” The light of the stars guides the shepherds on their path to see the child “born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah” (Luke 2:10-11).

In the Gospel of Matthew, we hear of another star playing a, well, starring role. Sent on a journey to “search diligently for the child,” the Wise Men follow the star of Bethlehem to the house where the child was “with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage” (Matthew 2:11). How brilliantly that star must have shone to stand out among all the others in the night sky to serve as a beacon—a guiding light—for the Wise Men.

During the seasons of Advent and Christmas, we hear a great deal about light. Indeed, we await and then celebrate the arrival of the Light of the World. My hope is that these meditations, offered faithfully by talented writers—clergy and lay—will be a companion on your journey. I pray that as you seek and serve the Light, these reflections may be like the tapestry of stars guiding the shepherds, a beacon for the wise men and women still seeking the child today.

This book can be used each year as you make your way toward the manger. The meditations are drawn from Year One or Two of the Daily Office readings or Years A, B, or C of the Revised Common Lectionary readings for the seasons. In addition, depending upon when Christmas lands, I invite you to skip ahead to that meditation and then follow along through the twelve days of Christmas (and, if you have time, go back and read the reflections you skipped!).

Sometime during this journey, I also hope you will take time to go outside, away from city lights. In a field, perhaps, or atop a mountain. Spend time with the stars and with all of creation, giving thanks for their light upon your path.

*Richelle Thompson*  
*Editor*

# I Advent

SAMPLE

# Sunday

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Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.

Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

—LUKE 21:34-36



Jesus isn't trying to scare us with these words from the Gospel of Luke. He's urging us to wake up.

Advent is a season of anticipation. But we're not talking about the anticipation of what presents may be waiting for us underneath the Christmas tree.

Advent is about the arrival of Jesus, the Light of the World stepping into the darkest of places. This reading calls us to pay attention, to open our eyes, and to see where Christ's light is already breaking through.

Jesus says in Luke 21:28, "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

This is a reminder that no matter how heavy, chaotic, or dark life feels, God's plan continues to unfold. The same God who promised a Savior to Israel keeps promises today. That promise? Redemption is near.

Maybe the signs Jesus describes aren't so different from what we experience now. Headlines scream news of wars, disasters, and division. It's easy to feel like the world is falling apart. But Advent flips our perspective. Instead of looking at the chaos and despair, we're invited to look for hope—to seek out the flickers of Christ's light, sometimes faint but always present.

Jesus urges us to stay awake, not in fear but in hope. Hope that the worst things will never be the last thing. Hope that the light will grow brighter, revealing God's kingdom here on earth.

So, how do we stay awake? We stay awake by noticing where God is at work in our lives and the world. We show kindness when it's easier to remain indifferent. We pray, even when words feel hard to find. And we trust that God's redemption is as real today as it was when Jesus was born.

In the season of Advent, we're called to wait. But this is not a passive waiting. It's active, expectant, and grounded in faith. Think of a fig tree, as Jesus mentions earlier in Luke. When the tree sprouts leaves, you know summer is near. The signs of God's kingdom are just as real—if we pay attention. A kind word to a stranger. A reconciliation long overdue. A small act of generosity. These are the leaves sprouting in our world, pointing us to the hope of Christ's light.

This Advent, let us stay awake. Let us stay hopeful. And let us remember: the story doesn't end in darkness. Jesus is the Light who came into our world, and his light still shines. Stand tall. Raise your head. Redemption is near.

—Joseph Yoo

## PRAY

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JESUS, LIGHT OF THE WORLD, help me to stay awake this Advent season. Open my eyes to the signs of your love and your kingdom breaking through. When fear and doubt creep in, remind me of your promise: redemption is near. May I carry your light into the world, bringing hope to those who need it most. *Amen.*



# Monday

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They are like trees planted by streams  
of water, bearing fruit in due season,  
with leaves that do not wither;  
everything they do shall prosper.

—PSALM 1:3



I think of this metaphor often. Not the one about the righteous prospering and the wicked losing because that, frankly, doesn't feel very honest to what I see and know from the world. Rather, I often think about being planted by streams of water. Jesus frequently refers to himself as living water in the gospels, a crucial source of nourishment and refreshment. Water is so basic to life: to growth, to hygiene, to survival. We cannot live without water.

Similarly, we cannot live without Jesus. He is crucial to our systems and to our lives. The Word of God sustains and nourishes us, cleansing and refreshing our souls.

So, how do we plant ourselves near that living stream? How do we ensure our roots are deep and drinking from the flow Jesus provides?

One of the ways we are nourished in the Spirit is through scripture. Now, don't get me wrong: I don't wake up every morning and spend time reading the Bible. I wish I did, but that pattern doesn't work in my chaotic life. Instead, I get in my scripture time through sermon preparation. I sit deeply with the readings assigned, letting them nourish my roots. Perhaps your practice is reading these devotions or taking home the Sunday worship bulletin to study. Your spiritual practice doesn't have to be hard—but it does need to be practiced!

Another way we plant our roots in the living stream is through prayer. Again, I don't have a stringent prayer practice; my way of prayer is more conversational. I chitchat with God, remarking on the beauty of a cloud, giving thanks for crossing off a task from my to-do list, or asking for help to focus. Prayer can look a thousand different ways, but I think we know when we are praying

because of how we feel. For me, I come away from prayer with an inner peace.

The last way I think we are nourished by God's flowing stream of living water is through time spent together. Sometimes this is in scripture, and sometimes in prayer. But I also believe an essential element of my relationship with Christ is nourished by being with God—just sitting and recognizing God's presence in and around me. I don't need to talk or read or do anything—just pause for a moment and feel.

—Jazzy Bostock

## PRAY

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**G**OOD AND GRACIOUS GOD, with this next breath I take, nourish me. Let me feel your water flowing over my heart, refreshing and renewing. Help me to stay rooted here, in this place with you, that whatever may come my way, and whatever this day may hold, I would be able to feel your strength in this place and hold on to your peace. *Amen.*

# Tuesday

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Therefore the wicked shall not stand  
upright when judgment comes,  
nor the sinner in the council of the  
righteous. For the LORD knows  
the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked is doomed.

—PSALM 1:5-6



As we enter into this holy season of preparation to celebrate the coming of Jesus, I invite you to join me in examining these words from Psalm 1: “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed.” Without mincing words, this passage calls us

to evaluate how we can act to further unity, not separation, and nurture much-needed transformation and hope.

In this psalm, we are called to a life firmly planted in the love and goodness of God. This call has nothing to do with a checklist of rights and wrongs or judging how valuable we are based on how much good we've done. It's about living in the kingdom where we are dependent on one another, dependent on God, and dependent on the gift of creation.

We are interconnected. As a South African Californian shaped by a Sub-Saharan African theology, I am reminded of this interconnectedness. In 2002, I spent nearly 8,000 miles in a van, crossing the United States and visiting places of deep pain and violence for an initiative called Hands in Healing. These experiences led me to embrace the African Ubuntu wisdom, "I am because you are." I cannot heal without you. Without each other, we cannot recover from wounds of division, injustice, and neglect.

Psalm 1 paints a beautiful picture of this truth in the tree planted by streams of water. This tree doesn't fight or force; it stands and is fed from its source and, over time, grows and produces fruit. Righteousness is hinged upon God's love, not out of work and effort but as an answer to grace.

Advent calls us to live out that love by nurturing creation and seeking justice. This is not an easy task. Seeking racial justice, caring for our earth, and working for equity can seem overwhelming and impossible. But Psalm 1 reassures us that we are not alone. As a tree cannot live without water, we cannot live without the infinite love and light of God.

The early Christian desert mothers and fathers knew something about this. Still and strong, they were. Rooting themselves in God's love, they reminded us to take time to quietly draw closer to God's presence so we might be renewed for the journey.

This Advent, may we, guided by God's love and light, recognize we are one people, one family, and one force of love and light. Armed with the insight, wisdom, and traditions of the people of the Way, we stand together in Christ's calling for justice, care of the earth, and nurturing relationships that mirror God's reign where everyone has a seat at the table.

May we stand like trees by rivers of living water bearing fruit in due season, not a casualty of life's storms. Let us flee from the passing away of evil things, which are like grass that withers in the sun. When we travel this way, God walks beside us and carries us with love, directing our

way with light and urging us to spread that light into a tired world.

May this Advent time fill us with the love and light of God.

—Lester Mackenzie

## PRAY

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**O** GOD OF MERCY AND JUSTICE, you watch over those who walk in your way. May you fill our hearts with the peace of knowing you are in our midst, walking beside us every step of the way. Give us the strength to make this journey. Root us deeply in your love in this season of waiting. Help us to care for the earth in which you have placed us. Give us strength to stand boldly against this broken world and to rise with courage to seek integrity. Let us keep our hearts set on the hope of the coming of Christ. Make us steadfast when the road is hard. Remind us of your peace when we are weary. Tear down the walls of oppression and build communities of righteousness and grace. *Amen.*

# Wednesday

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When the scribes and chief priests  
realized that he had told this parable  
against them, they wanted to lay hands  
on him at that very hour,  
but they feared the people.  
So they watched him.

—LUKE 20:19-20A



Advent is the first season of the church year, beginning four Sundays before Christmas. Advent, from a Latin root that means “arrival” or “waiting,” developed in some ways as a mini-Lent, a preparation time before the Feast of the Nativity. In the ancient church, Advent may have encompassed the six Sundays before Christmas, which



would mess up the symmetry of Advent candles and wreaths in our modern church. We eventually settled on four. Traditions of Advent have included fasting and penance, as in Lent. But Advent is not Lent. They might be sister seasons, but they are distinct, as well. While Lent is a season of penance, Advent is a season of waiting.

And that probably explains why we make Advent a season it is not. Instead of dropping into the deep wretchedness at worst and annoyance at best of waiting, we divert ourselves from this particular quality of Advent by leaning very much into Christmas.

And I completely understand why.

Waiting is not fun.

Spend a day at the local department of motor vehicles. Go on the last day of the month, when all the people who didn't renew their tags or licenses are there. Go there and stand. And wait. And stand. And wait. And wait.

Go on.

I'll wait.

Or go to an event where the speaker is fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes late. How quickly do we start to complain and make observations about the leader not being

courteous during our time? How quickly do we become annoyed that we have to wait?

See, waiting isn't fun. It's annoying, troubling, and hard. It's difficult to find the holiness in waiting. We are, by and large, an impatient people. From our ancestors in the faith to the current church, we want God to act now and with haste on our timetable.

And God just laughs.

Because waiting is anything but speedy. Waiting is that moment after you've pruned the tree. It looks bare and ragged. Gashes show where old branches used to grow, the ones that had become too heavy or were dying or needed to be pruned to encourage new growth. Waiting is the space between the actual pruning and the spring blooms, where the tree seems to be doing nothing but looking scraggly. Waiting is the moment between Good Friday and the Resurrection, when the tomb is sealed and filled with the dead body of Christ. Waiting is the silence after Jesus says, "Then give to the emperor the things that are emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." We know the people who asked him the question were waiting for him to pick door number one (pay taxes, which would mean support the Roman Empire) or door number two (don't pay taxes, which would break the law). So, there

they were, waiting to respond with their answer. Not all waiting is holy.

But some is—and Advent calls us into that holy waiting where we settle, however uncomfortably, into the slow work of God.

Advent is best understood as a season pregnant with hope for what is to come. Mary figures quite prominently in Advent, as she should. It is a season of the holy feminine, carrying something new within us, within our community, that which is waiting to be born yet needs time to gestate.

This wisdom, in part, is that a life of faith involves cycles of waiting, when the old has been removed but the new has not yet been born. God needs holy things to gestate within our souls and our communities. These holy ideas, understandings, insights, and actions all need time to become. If they are born too early, at our demanding impatience, they cannot survive. God knows the exact time of birth. We usually do not.

And so we must wait. We must wait for the growth to begin, to mature. We must wait through the discomfort, even the sickness, as we allow the new thing to develop. We must wait for the labor pangs. We must wait for the water and blood to rush forth, heralding the birth. We must wait.

Advent draws us into this truth of life, of the immense importance of waiting. For four Sundays, we hear the cries of a people, of our own souls, wanting to know when, how, and why. For four Sundays, we encounter Mary, a young woman heavy with the holy Child gestating within her, waiting. For Advent, we stand in lines, pace the halls, feel uncomfortable, and sit in tears at our frustration with the act of waiting for something, anything, to be born.

We do not like waiting. And yet, God knows that we must wait as God waits.

The poet Rilke writes, “You must give birth to your images. They are the future waiting to be born. Fear not.... The future must enter you long before it happens. Just wait for the birth, for the hour of new clarity.”

Advent matters because it is the holy season of waiting for the birth. The birth of Jesus, the birth of new ideas, the birth of courage, the birth of new songs and dreams, and the birth of what God has impregnated within us that is gestating.

—Laurie Brock

## PRAY

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**G**OD OF SLOW WORK AND SILENT WAITING, give us grace and courage to see the holiness in the events that unfold gradually, the dreams that unhurriedly gestate before they can be born, and the wisdom whose meaning comes in minute revelations rather than immediate insight. May we, with Mary, wait for your love to be born into our lives; through your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. *Amen.*