



An

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

In association with
International Anglican Church to Colorado Springs and
Desert Breeze Community Church

Written by Sallie Ross
Arranged by Josh Tanner

To God be all glory!

Introduction to Advent Worship

Advent has its foundation in Christian hope. The essence of Advent is this: the intentional acknowledgment and surrender to the fact that we are saved and redeemed not because we have successfully made an effort to come to Him, but because He has made the surprising effort to come to us and that He is coming again for which we should prepare expectantly and repentantly.¹

The season of Advent is a time of waiting. The waiting, in fact, is not a sedentary process: it is quite active. While that may conjure up images of hustle and bustle, we need to seek other images. This is not about hurriedness or busyness but about *attentiveness*—attentiveness to the Father.

As with any birth or return, preparation is necessary. Preparation often requires humble observation and a willingness *work* and to *relinquish* that which should be relinquished. This is sanctifying work. It is actively working to tend to that which we have been given; new life. Together, during this Advent season, we will look to the One we are waiting for, we will discover our part in waiting, and we will be given new found joy as we wait together. We have an amazing Savior!

December 3rd

“His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.”

Luke 1:50

Fear of the Lord is truly seeing Him as He is: it is awe-inspiring. It is getting beyond ourselves, recognizing our limits and our needs. By doing so our sight is cleared, and we can see God in a way that shows both our incredible need and His unending provision.

When we can realize this certainty, when we can no longer stand because of the depth of the overwhelming reality of who He is, we see that we are recipients of His mercy. It may seem small or large, but that this mercy exists in any form is remarkable. It is unfathomable that God would extend His mercy to us!

But this amazing truth is who He is, and it is consistent of His nature. His faithfulness extends ‘from generation to generation’. This is another piece of the ability to see—to see His mercy in all situations. We tend to think of mercy as something that rescues us from difficult situations. Mercy may instead be the ability to remain in those tough situations. And He remains with us.

When we meditate on the One we are waiting for, when we look at our lives through Him rather than at Him through our lives, we see His brush strokes of mercy all over the canvas of our lives. And there is a signature on that canvas from the blood of Calvary. May we continue to be those who fear Him. Lord, hear our prayer.

Reflection and Prayer:

- *Where have you seen the Lord's mercy in your life?*
- *When have you most deeply felt that reverential awe?*
- *Where have you felt left without mercy? Can you remember the posture of your heart in that time?*
- *Ask the Lord to let you see Him in a deeper way today.*

December 4th

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”

Luke 1:52

The One we are waiting for is not One who fits neatly into the world’s view of things. He does not yield to the human patterns of how life should be done. And yet, ultimately, it is in His consistency that we can feel secure, as the writer of Hebrews tells us: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

The safety our God gives is much greater than our human understanding. For our safety does not lie in the walls that we build for ourselves, but in His purpose and plan. We must know that a lifetime of work on our own to establish position and security can be undone in a breath. It is not that God takes delight in undoing our accomplishments; His delight is being with us, meeting us where we are. In fact, what may seem to be so very important to us may be an obstacle to the accomplishment of His good purposes and perfect will in our lives.

He takes delight in our seeking of Him, in our looking to Him for the prompting of our hearts. In Isaiah 30:21 we read: “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’ “ When we are attuned to Him, then it is not about what is accomplished or what is left undone, it is about relationship—an intimate connection with God.

When we yield our aspirations and duties to Him, then we will be lifted up. We begin to see life from His perspective and not from the pulse of the world. When Christ lifts us up, we know we are “safe” as the word is truly meant.

Reflection and Prayer:

–Lord Jesus, there are places in my life where I feel like a ruler on a throne—not because you have placed me there, but because I have worked long and hard for those accomplishments. There are also places where I am humbled. Father, enable me to feel the difference. My true “royal position” is with you—that I am your child. Let me linger this day in reflection on that truth and may I be willing to lay down any work that is not called forth by your still, small voice.

December 5th

“He has filled the hungry with good things.”

Luke 1:53

The One we are waiting for created us to hunger: to hunger for His direction, to hunger for His companionship, to hunger for His intimacy. He created us to be in relationship with Him. We live our lives with that hunger gnawing at our souls.

In an effort to satisfy that deep hunger, our flesh seeks to feed it just as we have learned how to feed physical hunger. Too often, we make choices according to the prompting of convenience and ease. When we have physical hunger, it can be much easier to grab some fast food than to take the time to prepare and eat a meal that will offer us true nourishment. This makes us content for a time but not fully satisfied or healthily nourished. When our souls hunger, we can distract them with a myriad of activity: social media, shallow entertainment, to-do lists, superficial relationships, meaningless rituals, and numbing activity. But in such a manner we cannot be truly satisfied.

It is not about feeling good. It's about the intimacy of relationship- a relationship where we turn to Him to satisfy our hunger and we trust Him to be the ultimate spiritual dietitian who knows just what we need. It's about recognizing and acknowledging our hunger then coming to him in humility. It's about trusting the silences in His presence. It's about Him.

He promises to fill the hungry with Himself- the bread of life. But if we do not come to Him to eat, if we do not seek His heart, our hungering will merely produce a dissonant echo rather than a satisfied certainty.

Reflection and Prayer:

- Lord God, reveal my hunger and create a desire for You. Show me the things I fill myself with other than you and where my life is unhealthy as a result. Teach me how I can begin to turn to you in that aching, to drink and eat of your goodness.

“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.” Psalm 62:1-2

December 6th

“He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful.”

Luke 1:54

Psalm 124 begins with a terrifying visualization: “If the Lord had not been on our side. . .” If you allow your thoughts to take those words and imagine such a thing in your own life, it can certainly be paralyzing. There is so much we assume we are designing on our own, when in fact we are living in the mercy of the Father alone.

The One we are waiting for is on our side. He has established a covenant with us in which He remembers to be merciful, and He who promised is faithful. No matter how deep the darkness of the time in which we walk or the circumstances in which we find ourselves, the Lord “remembers” to be merciful.

We are to trust our Lord’s goodness and mercy. Our lives are testimony to His faithfulness from beginning to end. As we wait for our Lord, let us prayerfully plead to have eyes to see that mercy. Rather than gathering our own list of what His mercy might look like in this life, may we be able to see His Spirit moving, even in the smallest of ways, and know that He is in our midst, which is the greatest display of mercy.

Reflection and Prayer:

– Lord Jesus, there is much in my life that I give to you with blueprints of my plans of how to accomplish those things. Forgive me, Father. Give me the grace to open my hands and leave them open. Allow me to become so enamored with your heart that I long only for the way that you would unfold this life of mine.

December 7th

“Trust in the Lord and do good.”

Psalm 37:3a

We are not passively waiting on God to move for we have a part in the waiting. He is always working within us and we are to play an active role in that work. It is a working out that is more than words; it is a life lived.

It is amazingly easy for me to say that I trust God. I trust Him that the sun will rise, not looking for a rope to help hoist it into the sky each morning. I trust Him to give me breath, not spending time figuring out how to position myself to receive the maximum amount of oxygen. So I trust Him. Right?

Sometimes. But there are times when I am looking for that rope of control. There are times when I am positioning myself outside of the momentum of life, just in case God might forget that I sometimes get overwhelmed.

Here the psalmist simply writes, “trust in the Lord”. In some ways, our trust in Him is obvious, yet we need His counsel to show us where we fail to trust Him. The second part of the verse, I believe, helps us to gauge this. You see, if we are “doing good”, then most often we are not concerned about our own well-being but about the well-being of others. If we’re not concerned about ourselves, then we trust that a benevolent being- the One we are longing for- is in control.

There is a richness in losing ourselves as we serve those the Lord has put on our hearts, a richness in having Him guide our heart, a richness that allows us to get lost in Him. Where else would we long to be found?

Reflection and Prayer:

–Ask the Father to show you the places where you trust Him well and to reveal the places where you lean into your own abilities rather than into His adequacy.

– Pray that His grace would realign your heart to seek Him and to come to deeply know His ability to be fully trusted.

December 8th

“Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.”

Psalm 37:3b

We are called to dwell, to remain, and to affix our attention on the land the Lord has given us. Just as we don't wait well, we don't dwell well. But often we don't dwell well because we are looking all around rather than looking at the One who is our provision. When we train our hearts to be fixed on Jesus, it is so much easier to relinquish our momentum and simply be with Him. He becomes our vision.

He may walk us into hard places, but He will walk us rather than having us walk alone. He is our safe pasture. The One we are waiting for in this poignant season is the keeper of our souls. May we seek Him for gracefully teaching us to dwell.

Reflection and Prayer:

– Lord God, I flee from you daily. My lips say that I want to be in your presence, but then I design my own agenda. Sweet Shepherd, when I realize my desperate need of you and am drawn into your presence, I know such peace and safety for there I am dwelling. Thank you that you have prepared safe pasture for me; let that be enough for my wandering heart.

December 9th

“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

Psalm 37:4

When we look at the Father, we see an expansiveness of delight that is broader than our imaginings. It is fascinating that when we delight in Him, He becomes the desire of our heart. We hunger for Him. We know the richness of who He is and what He gives us of Himself. Even the most somber of occasions can become one that is outlined with delight, because Jesus is there in the midst.

Reflection and Prayer:

-Father in what do I delight? What grabs my attention other than you?

- Where are places it is easy for me to delight? Help me recall when I have seen you and delighted.

- Bring to mind what I know to be true of you, and let me spend some time sincerely delighting in you. Lord God, that you become the true desire of my heart.

December 10th

“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him.”

Psalm 37:5

In a world that flees from commitment, this is a haunting verse. Yet there is an incredible irony that lies within. When we flee from commitment, we are committing to not being committed! We tend to create in another form the very thing that we rebel against. It's not unlike when people come to visit, and even regularly attend a church. Some are so distracted by the liturgy that they are unable to enter in. Perhaps the music is “too loud” or “too slow”. Perhaps the sermon is not “deep enough” or isn't “lite enough”. All of this is evidence of a lack of trust and commitment to God and His church.

Let's remember these truths: It was God who created us, who calls us by name, who knows our every thought and the content of our every day. It is He who holds all power and knowledge— He who holds the world together. Looking at it from this perspective, it would seem to be incredibly wise to commit our ways to Him.

Sometimes we feel as though we should be able to handle things on our own. But the beauty is- we don't need to. As we read in scripture that the birds of the air do not reap, sow, or store up food, and yet, God feeds them. How much more would the God of the Universe find resource for our every need?

We commit ourselves to so much in this life. Often times, we are unaware of the things to which we have committed. For this reason, we should continually be asking whether the things that we are committing to are pools of living waters or stagnant water. The Lord God is worthy of our commitment and our trust. Not just because of His power, but also because of His love.

Reflection and Prayer:

—Father, there is much I boldly commit to, and yet often I shy from committing to you. I am afraid at times. I am afraid of what will be asked of me. I am afraid of the cost. And yet the cost is the death of death. Lord God, help me to look around and see others who have committed to you, and let me be gathered up in that great cloud of witnesses: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus!” Heb. 12:-1-2a

December 11th

“Be still before the Lord.”

Psalm 37:7a

Be still. Those words bring to mind a request for a young child to not only be quiet but also refrain from any and every bodily twitch that might take him captive. Especially in this day and age, this would seem impossible.

When are we still? When are we able to just be? When do our eyes and our thoughts stop darting and wondering and planning and calculating? I believe it happens when we are filled.

If we come to the Lord for only some of our nourishment, the places we have filled elsewhere will continue to be places of longing which we will not be able to still. However, if we come to the well of provision that God has for us, if we drink deeply, then we will be stilled by His provision as it has become our own.

It is not simply a matter of coming and being still for need screams most loudly when we try to contain it. It is a matter of coming, of feeding, and then giving way to the rest that we can find in Him alone.

Reflection and Prayer:

-Lord Jesus, I come. I come asking your forgiveness for the other wells I have stopped at along the way. Even though I drank, my spirit knew the waters were bitter. I come to you, you who are fresh and living water, with incredible thirst. Let me drink; let me not turn away when I am so inclined; let me drink. That then I may be still and see you for the glorious fullness of who you are.

December 12th

“Wait patiently for him.”

Psalm 37:7b

There is a deep discipline to patience. Throughout the Old Testament, God tells the Israelites to remember who He is and what He has done. That remembering is the active part that takes us to a place of patience. When we fix our eyes on Jesus and recount His presence in our own lives and in the lives of others, we begin to lose some of the frantic feel. We lose ourselves in the remembering in a way that lessens the urgency of now and increases our ability to “be” with Him in the midst of the momentum. Time and space loses its importance. The temporary tunnel vision is exchanged for an eternal perspective.

When we know the One we are waiting for, when we know His promises of never leaving us or forsaking us, when we remember His faithfulness in all situations, then we can open the hands we hold so tightly and be held rather than holding. When we know it is He, we can rest. We can be about the work of our lives and heart, knowing that in His perfect timing, He will come.

Reflection and Prayer:

- *What situations are the most difficult for you in terms of waiting? Ask the Lord for insight into why.*
- *Ask for the grace to relinquish the parts that are yours to relinquish.*
- *Spend some time rehearsing and reflecting what you know to be true about your faithful God.*

December 13th

“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath”

Psalm 37:8a

Anger and wrath are two things that can keep us from the Father. In order to take Him in fully, there are some circumstances that we need to be willing to surrender to His omniscience.

However, this is not a condemnation of anger. There is much in this fallen world about which to righteously angry, and the stirring up of those emotions can often result in some very productive changes. But much is also destroyed when anger becomes wrath and is lavishly unleashed.

Anger is an emotion that often comes when we are waiting or attempting to be patient. When we are looking at the situations of our lives and feeling slighted. When we are seeing people we love not getting a fair shake from others. When we are feeling inadequate. These and a multitude of other circumstances can leave us very angry. And that anger often ends up being unleashed in inappropriate ways.

Again, we are drawn to look upon the face of Jesus. The longer we look at the things that make us angry or remain in the circumstances in which we are wading in our own sin, the more likely we are to be unable to refrain or turn. But when we look to Him, we get a sense of insight that transcends circumstance for clocks and calendars no longer bind us. We are looking at the One who loves us enough to have taken away our sin by death on a cross. There is such an incredible inequity in that, which really catches us off guard and enables us to be moved from the place of anger into the place of hope.

Reflection and Prayer:

- What are the things that anger me that come out of my own sin or inadequacies? Ask the Father's forgiveness and healing.

- What are the things that anger me that I also know anger the Father? Pray for His guidance and direction in those areas.

December 14th

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:46-47

We are all waiting. But because we are often waiting within our own homes away from community, there is a sense that we are waiting alone. This is far from the truth. Still the enemy loves to paint isolating pictures in our mind with thoughts like: “He’ll never do that for you,” “Everyone else has it all together”, “You call yourself a Christian and have thoughts like that?!” You know the litany; you know the anguish.

It is time to come out of our homes– the places where we have isolated ourselves. God created us to make this journey together as the Body of Christ. Granted, some very destructive things have been done within the Body in the name of Christ. But God does not mean these for isolation. No, when we are let down by looking at people, we need to refocus and press in. We often think that human character is formed in isolation and shown off in relationships, but what is revealed in scripture is that character is formed in relationships and tested in isolation.

Scripture gives us some rich and wonderful pictures of how we are to wait together. Here we see the early believers living in the overflow of their love of the Lord. They are together not just at the temple, but also in their homes. They are joyfully living in the overflow, which gives them an expansiveness of spirit. May our hearts grow to do the same.

Reflection and Prayer:

- What areas of my life do I stay in my own “home”, unwilling to be vulnerable with others?
- Where do I count the cost of being an active part of the Body? What is my motive for sacrifice to the Body?
- Holy Father, show me how I can let go of myself and grab hold of you, relinquishing concern for self and basking in the expansiveness of you.

December 15th

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.”

Acts 2:1

In Acts 1, Jesus instructed the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. They prodded Him for dates and times, but He redirected their minds to the power they would receive—the power that would enable them to be His witnesses.

As was true with much that Jesus taught, there were not many specifics given. We are all inclined to feel more confident if we know specifics, but then there is little magnitude to our faith.

Together, they could strengthen the memory of what it was that He had taught them. When one might become weak of faith, another might retell a story and kindle the faith of the weaker brother. Iron sharpening iron- that’s how the Body works when it’s working well.

There is also something profound that happens when people share a common experience. We see here the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Having gone through this joint experience, they each represent a place of accountability for one another. So if one tries to pull back from the call of God, the others—sometimes not even by words but by presence— are living reminders of the experience.

Jesus instructed the apostles, and they obeyed. His presence was still so fresh in their hearts and minds. We, too, are called to keep His presence fresh for one another in the Body of Christ as we wait together for the coming of our Lord.

Reflection and Prayer:

—Lord God you instruct us to be together to remember you. Make our mouths instruments of praise—let our words build up as we encourage one another on this journey. And then, in your tender economy, we will be encouraged, too.

December 16th

“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’”

Exodus 32:1

Of course, we are also human beings. While in community with other humans there can be great godly encouragement, there can also be a mob mentality that corporately demands its own way.

As we read this story in Exodus we can see how the Israelite's were perhaps patient for a time but then their hearts and eyes began to wonder, focusing on themselves. We can be right on target, so connected with the Lord, but then the slightest wind comes and suddenly we're fearful, distracted, or compassionate towards evil.

No human beings are immune. Even leaders and pastors fall this way. Listen to Aaron when Moses confronts him about the sacred calf. First he says: “You know how prone these people are to evil.” And then, “They gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

If we are to be the Body as God has designed us to be, we must be focused on Him—not what He can do for us or how loving Him will make our lives better—just on Him. When we are immersed in His presence, then the temptation that besets us all will have so much quieter a voice, perhaps even inaudible. It is for our Lord that we wait, let us help one another to silence the competing voices.

Reflection and Prayer:

—Lord God, I know my condition. I know that I, too, am inclined to throw in the gold and seek other gods.

Forgive me that sin. Let me be bold enough to know that I need my brothers and sisters in Christ to steer me to your heart and your heart alone, and let me do the same for them.

December 17th

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There He was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’”

Mark 9:2-5

When we experience the presence and the power of God corporately, it is more than profound. That we get to be together is second only to being able to be there at all. And there is a deep longing to stay in that time, to remain on the mountaintop.

When I read this scripture, I am Peter! “Let me stay, Lord! This is good!” Perhaps it comes from the fact that no place this side of heaven is ever home, but when we are unquestionably in the presence of the Lord, we do not want to leave. It is as though we have caught a glimpse of our true home, the one for which we long.

We assume that, if we stay, we would never lose that fullness— that we would be able to live as God has created us to live. And that would be good. Interesting that in Mark we don’t read a response to Peter from Jesus. Sometimes the unfolding of circumstances reveals what we already know, and we don’t need a response.

And so they came back down the mountain. But together they had tasted of the fullness of the Lord and had experienced a corporate sense of Him serving as reminders for each other when life’s circumstances became so confusing and unclear. Surely this is how the Lord has created us to be together in Him.

Reflection and Prayer:

–Remember experiences that you have had of God’s presence with others. Have you revisited those places with those people?

–Think of a person with whom you are close in faith. Ask the Lord to show you a means of experiencing Him with that person—that it might be used as a means of growing in faith.

The “O” Antiphons

In the historical church, its liturgy generally included a great prayer from Luke 1:46–55, commonly known as the Magnificat. Each day, the Magnificat is preceded by a short verse or "antiphon" that links the prayer to the feast of the day or the season of the year. In the last seven days of Advent (December 17-24), the antiphons before the Magnificat are very special. Each begins with the exclamation "O" and ends with a plea for the Messiah to come. As Christmas approaches the cry becomes increasingly urgent. These moving "O Antiphons" were composed in the seventh or eighth century when monks put together texts from the Old Testament, particularly from the prophet Isaiah, which looked forward to the coming of our salvation. These Antiphons form a rich, interlocking mosaic of scriptural images. The great "O Antiphons" became very popular in the Middle Ages when it became traditional to ring the great bells of the church each evening as they were being sung.

Each of the O Antiphons highlights a different title for the Messiah: O Sapientia (O Wisdom), O Adonai (O Lord), O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse), O Clavis David (O Key of David), O Oriens (O Rising Sun), O Rex Gentium (O King of the Nations), and O Emmanuel (O God With Us). Also, each one refers to the prophecy of Isaiah of the coming of the Messiah. A particularly fascinating feature of the “O” Antiphons is that the first letter of each invocation, when read backwards, forms an acrostic in Latin: the first letters of Sapientia, Adonai, Radix, Clavis, Oriens, Rex, and Emmanuel in reverse form the Latin words: ERO CRAS. These can be understood as if Christ is responding to his people's plea, saying "Tomorrow I will be there."

Meditate on the “O” Antiphons in the next seven days prior to Christmas. Add in the Antiphon reading/meditation starting on December 18th, ending with the last Antiphon on December 24th to the daily devotion. To make this devotion more fruitful, take the necessary time to read and meditate on the Scripture texts on which the antiphons are based. Journal specifically about God’s incredible attributes revealed through these texts.

December 18th | 1st Antiphon

“He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

1Thessalonians 5:10-11

There is to be no separation. Whether we are awake or asleep, whether we are alone or with others, whether circumstances are bright or darkness is falling, we are to live together with Him. But we need one another in order to do that.

In this verse of Thessalonians, Paul calls us to encourage one another and build each other up. What does that look like? We have developed a cultural posture that sees encouraging and building up as merely saying good things about a person. It's wonderful when you can share good things about a person, and it certainly is nice to receive such kind words. But Paul doesn't say, "encourage only those who are worthy of encouragement and build up those who are doing good things." We are to encourage and build up all.

Encouragement of personal virtue falls flat in no time. Building up a person in anything other than the Lord is Hallmark sentimentality. The way to encourage one another is to hold up Jesus to one another by encouraging one another towards godliness, holding up His standard of holiness, and cheering one another on in that direction. It is to walk alongside, to lift one another up when we fall, to pray for one another through our darkness and rejoice with one another when the light returns again.

It is a beautiful gift that we are given, to be able to encourage one another. It is an awesome responsibility, to be a light on the road that another travels. Just remember that He is the One who gives us that light; we are called to take our eyes off of ourselves and tend that light for one another. We must wait *together* for Him, that we might receive the gifts He has for us in one another.

Reflection and Prayer:

– *Where do you find yourself offering godly encouragement to others? Where is it a struggle for you? Ask the Father to help you to take your eyes off of yourself and be able to offer that encouragement even when it is difficult.*

– *Give thanks for those who have “held the Christ light for you.”*

O Sapientia (O Wisdom)

“O Wisdom, O Holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation.”

Isaiah 40:3-5

3 A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Journal:

December 19th | 2nd Antiphon

“Then the angel left her. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!’”

Luke 1:39-42

The news that Mary had received could have been enough to cause her to withdraw into her home, barring visitors and pining away in fear and self-pity. What made the difference is that Mary knew that God had come to her. She recognized Him; she yielded to Him. When one has been in the presence of God, it is not easy to keep quiet.

So Mary “hurried” to the hill country of Judea to visit her relative Elizabeth. The angel had told her that Elizabeth was with child. With that, God gave her a place to go, a person to empathize with who had also been a recipient of God’s favor. That is such an incredible picture of His heart towards us.

There is an amazing economy to God’s love. He uses us for one another in myriad ways. Mary went to Elizabeth so the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leaped in response to Mary and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. What a blessing for Elizabeth! Then Elizabeth exclaimed to Mary “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.” What encouragement for Mary! God meets us as only He can and then gives us one another in which to find confirmation of His love.

Reflection and Prayer:

–Lord Jesus, I long for your encouragement. I know you are breathing it into my life every day, but I confess that I cannot always hear it or know it for certain. Thank you for the people you have and will continue to put in my life to turn me to you, that I might hear more clearly than be steadied and strengthened to do your work. Thank you for the people whose life you will put me in, that I may do the same for them.

O Adonai (O Lord)

“O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.”

Exodus 6:2-6

2 God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, [a] but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. 4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. 6 Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

Journal:

December 20th | 3rd Antiphon

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”

John 20:19-20

We can only imagine the disciples' world. Out of certainty had come apparent failure. Not only did they lose their Lord and teacher, their own lives were at risk. They who had followed the Lord so closely now felt as though there was no foundation on which to stand.

From the description of doors being locked in fear, we know that His coming was a tremendous gift. He didn't give a great cosmic shout: "Don't worry—I'm here". No, He knew that they needed to visit with Him, to see where His wounds were, to be encouraged by His presence.

We need the encouragement of His presence as well, and we are called to be that for one another. We can't know how that will be played out— sometimes with great sacrifice, other times with great joy and ease. But in our willingness to be that for one another comes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who enables us. And how amazing is it, that we might be used to bring Him to one another. There is no more holy ground.

Reflection and Prayer:

–Where do you need to see the Lord right now? Ask Him to come in a way that you will know without question.

– Where do you have opportunity to bring the Lord to someone right now? Pray that He orchestrate those encounters in His amazing way.

O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse)

“O Flower of Jesse’s stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep You from coming to our aid.”

Isaiah 11:10

10 In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Romans 15:12

12 And again Isaiah says,
“The root of Jesse will come,
 even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope.”

Journal:

December 21st | 4th Antiphon

“But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.’”

Luke 1:30

Our God is not a distant God. Our God became flesh and lived on this earth among us. Our God did not wind up the universe and go off for coffee. He stands along side each one of us on every step of the journey. We have a God who is close enough to touch.

Sometimes that is terrifying. Our flesh tells us we want distance, but that isn't what the deepest part of our hearts long for. We long for His touch.

The angel came to Mary, and like so many other times in Scripture when God makes his presence known, the first words are “do not be afraid” or “peace”. It has to be a gloriously terrifying thing to have such an encounter. And then come the words “You have found favor with God.”

What we must realize is that those are words for all of us. Proof that we have found favor with God was embodied in Jesus as He hung on the cross. Listen to the words He speaks to us in Isaiah 43: **“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not overcome you.”**

We have found tangible, palpable favor with God. The God we are waiting for is with us.

Reflection and Prayer:

–Lord Jesus, it's so amazing that I am precious and honored in your sight and that you love me. While that is often hard for me to believe, it is the truth of your heart as recorded in your Word. Let me linger this day in the knowledge that I am waiting for One who has found favor with me.

O Clavis David (O Key of David)

“O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel, controlling at your will the gate of heaven: come, break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in the darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people into freedom.”

Isaiah 22:22

22 And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

Psalms 107:14

14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
and burst their bonds apart.

Luke 1:79

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

Journal:

December 22nd | 5th Antiphon

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’”

Luke 2:8-10

Once again we see a visitation, heaven breaking through to earth. Ordinary men about their work, ordinary men keeping watch. There is a posture of attentiveness there that beckons our notice. Can one see the Lord if they are not actively seeking Him?

I love that the angel came to ordinary people going about their day, not looking for God. The religious were looking for the coming Messiah, but they had their own picture of how and where the King would come. They missed the glory of the Lord shining around them because they were blinded by their expectations. The shepherds, however, saw it and were terrified.

Again the words of comfort “Do not be afraid.” Not only that, but great encouragement follows: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” What greater confirmation of amazing love than such a word spoken to ordinary men?

There is such deception in the teaching that we must get our act together to see the Lord, to receive the Lord, to be in the presence of the Lord. We end up spending our lives trying to accomplish something that will never be accomplished. We must instead look to the One who finished the work for us, then encourage others to do the same.

God has come; God is coming. And as we watch together, even the most ordinary of lives will be illumined by the glory of the Lord. What an amazing Father!

Reflection and Prayer:

–Amazing Father, you revealed yourself to me. I do not fully understand why you chose to reveal yourself to me, but I confess that I do not deserve the grace you have freely given. I am humbled by the mercy you have shown. Teach me to love you. Teach me to see the glory shining in my ordinary life. Teach me to help others to lift their eyes to you. You have come; you are coming. Lord bless us all as we wait—that we may gather ordinary others to be in the family of extraordinary you!

O Oriens (O Rising Sun)

“O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”

Isaiah 58:8

8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Luke 1:78-79

78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow
of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Journal:

December 23rd | 6th Antiphon

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . .the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”

John 1:1, 14

What would make you come? What would make you pierce the distance between heaven and earth? Love would make you come.

This is the sort of thing that can take our imaginations and cause them to fly. What was it like in the beginning? What was it like to journey from heaven to earth? What was it like to be God and man? What was it like on the cross? What was it like to return to your Father?

A God who is close enough to touch beckons questions. We question when we are interested. We imagine when our hearts have been taken captive. We linger when we know that we are safe.

We are safe with Him; we are safe in Him. Although the entire world is uncertain and unsafe—He are our certainty. From that security we go out, that others may be gathered into His fold, that others might come close enough to hear the heartbeat of the God of all creation.

Reflection and Prayer:

—God our Father, I stand in awe. You came and dwelt in our midst; you continue to reside there. You came and took upon yourself all the sin of the world, my sin, and still you want to be with me. Lord, while I cannot understand you, I know I am known by you. And in being known I am given incredible freedom. Loving Father, let me be found only in you.

O Rex Gentium (O King of Nations)

“O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; O Keystone of the mighty arch of man: come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.”

Isaiah 28:16

16 therefore thus says the Lord God,
“Behold, I am the one who has laid[a] as a foundation in Zion,
a stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’

Ephesians 2:14

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

Genesis 2:7

7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Journal:

December 24th | 7th Antiphon

“Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind Him and touched the edge of His cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch His cloak, I will be healed.’”

Matthew 9:20-21

There is something about “knowing”, something deep and profound. I remember the morning after my first son was born. My husband and I were taking a (slow) walk down the hall of the hospital when I heard a cry from the nursery. There were perhaps 15 babies in the nursery at that time, and it could have been any one of them. But when I heard the cry, I knew – that was my son. And it was.

I imagine the crying out that this woman had been doing for years—crying that wasn’t often heard, as she would have been ostracized for her “uncleanness”. And yet she somehow “knew” that if she could only get close enough to Jesus she would be healed.

And Jesus, in the account that Luke records of this story, “knew” He had been touched even in the midst of a huge crowd. He said “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.”

Our God is close enough to touch, He is enough to heal us. We have the choice of whether we stay outside and away or press in and reach out. We will be known, and that may be uncomfortable. Yet we will be healed, and that will be freeing.

Reflection and Prayer:

–Lord God, there are many things that have bled from me for years. There are relationships that have lost life, there are dreams that have faded, there are places where I need only reach out for you, but I hold back. I hold back in fear, I hold back in unbelief, I hold back for reasons I don’t even know. I ask for the strength—in the driest of places— to reach out and touch you. I ask for the grace to believe that not only will new life come to me, but you will turn and see me, and I will be known. Lord, hear my prayer.

O Emmanuel (O God With Us)

“O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God.”

Isaiah 7:14

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 33:22

22 For the Lord is our judge; the Lord is our lawgiver;
the Lord is our king; he will save us.

Psalms 46:7

7 The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Journal:

Christmas Day

“So they (the shepherds) hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”

Luke 2:16-18

The shepherds left their sheep- those who stayed with their sheep day and night to protect them. They hurried off in response to the angel of the Lord; they hurried off to find a baby in a manger. They knew something eternally profound had occurred.

And so our Lord has arrived. Will we go? What must we leave behind? Will we leave our livelihood? Will we abandon those worldly things that we have worked so hard for and come to mean so much to us?

Oh, I pray so- for myself as well as for all of us. When we are willing to respond to the overwhelming presence of God, when we are willing to take no thought of the cost or what is left behind, we will find life like we have never known before.

We have looked at the One we are waiting for. We have seen our part in waiting. We have come to understand the strength of waiting together, and now He is here. Will we come to Him?

Coming will not be a destination, but instead another part of the journey. The shepherds saw Him but then it says “When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.” When we see Him, we are moved to spread the word, to let others know.

And then here is the beautiful picture “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

It's just as we have been told, all the promises of God manifest in the baby born in that manger. May we return together glorifying and praising God. May what has begun on this day change our hearts forever, together, in Him.

O Come let us adore Him!

A Brief History of Advent Worship

To be serious about the Christian faith, is to be serious about its history. To be sensitive to the history of God's people is to be responsive to the movement of time. The God "in whom we live, and move, and have our being" is made known to us and interacts with us in history. In certain dynamic moments, God invades our time and our history, and affords us a divine-human encounter, a glimpse, a momentary revelation. The ultimate act of God's invasion into history is Jesus Christ- incarnate, crucified, dead, risen, ascended, and coming again.

Advent is the time of preparation for the birth of Christ. Historically, however, Advent was not the beginning of the Christian year, but the end. The original themes of Advent focused on the second coming of Jesus. Gradually Advent also came to mean preparing for the coming of Christ. Today we inherit both themes: the end of the Christian year and the expectation of the second coming of Christ as well as the beginning of the Christian year and the expectancy of the birth of Christ, the Redeemer.

The origin of Advent leads us to two principal locales: the missionary region of the churches expansion in northern and western Europe and the city of Rome itself. The beginning of Advent in the missionary territory first appear near the end of the fourth century. It started as baptismal preparation, known as Epiphany, but shifted to Nativity or Christmas preparation, which did not shift the penitential character of Advent. In Rome there is no trace of Advent until the sixth century. Advent in Rome was rooted in preparation for Christmas and not Epiphany. The focus was on joyful, celebratory preparation for the historical incarnation of Christ- the point in time that marks the beginning of God's salvatory action in Christ. It followed that the emphasis was decidedly eschatological, focusing not on the coming of Christ in the flesh at Bethlehem, but of the final coming of the exalted Christ. Through the change in focus, the celebratory liturgy was stripped of its festival elements, the color became penitential black (or one of its derivatives) and its mood became increasingly somber. Contemporary practice yields two themes- our anticipation of Christ's Second Advent yet to be and His first Advent in Bethlehem.

Historically, theologically and pastorally, this is where we draw that Advent's foundation is immersed in Christian hope. Richard C. Hoefler writes, "We are saved and redeemed not because we have successfully made the effort to come to Him, but because He has made the surprising effort to come to us." The people of Israel awaited their Anointed One, the Messiah. Today God's people celebrate that the Messiah came, we experience a holy joy and peaceful excitement about God's presence in our lives and in the world today, and penitentially reflect and rejoice that Christ is coming again.

1. Webber, Robert E. *The Services of the Christian Year*. Vol. 5, Star Song Pub. Group, 1994.