

**“BUT YOU, O BETHLEHEM EPHRATHAH,
YOU ARE TOO LITTLE TO BE AMONG THE CLANS OF JUDAH,
FROM YOU SHALL COME FORTH FOR ME THE ONE WHO IS TO BE
THE RULER OF ISRAEL, WHOSE COMING FORTH IS FROM OF OLD,
FROM THE ANCIENT OF DAYS.”
— MICAH 5:2 —**



SEEING SHEPHERDS | DANIEL BONNELL

INTRODUCTION

— THE SEASON OF ADVENT —

The Christian Year helps Christians mark time differently. Time shaped by the story of God bringing salvation rather than primarily sales, schools, or weather seasons, which dominate our culture. Advent marks the beginning of the Christian Year, beginning four Sundays prior to Christmas Day. In this season the church does two things simultaneously. First, we anticipate; joining the prophets of old who longed for the coming of God's Messiah who would put the world right; judging the wicked, mending the broken, and establishing justice and peace. Secondly, we look back in remembrance to Christ's original advent when the "Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

In Advent we prepare, anticipate and reflect. Advent invites the Church to slow down in order to feel both sorrow for what is broken and joy for what is good in the world. This intentional *slowing* prepares us for the joy of Christmas and enables it to permeate our everyday lives as we celebrate and experience God's light shining in the darkness never to be extinguished!

— HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE —

This guide is an adaptation of Sacred Space, a method of prayer and Scripture reading developed by the Irish Jesuits (www.sacredspace.ie), that helps us create space in our busy lives for stillness, engagement with God's Word, and honest conversation with him.

Begin on the left side of the guide; spending a few moments with the artwork and thought each day as a way to settle in before beginning to pray. The right side will lead you through seven movements of prayer and Scripture reading that help turn our eyes into ears; so that God's word is received as God's voice.

- We begin by offering God the **hospitality of silence**, stilling our restless bodies, hearts, and minds, which allows us to prepare to commune with him.
- Next, we recognize God's loving **presence** with us. We are being invited to deeper love, deeper truth, and deeper intimacy with our loving Lord.
- We then use the **freedom** God has given us by opening ourselves to his guidance. "You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!" (Ps. 119:4-5)
- The next stage, **consciousness**, calls us to awareness of ourselves—our thoughts, feelings, and/or the events of the past day.
- We then read **the Word of God**. Ask the Lord to cause a word, phrase or theme to stand out. Linger over it. Imagine the scene playing out around you, noticing what strikes you about the passage or what thoughts, questions, and emotions emerge as you read.

- This leads to **conversation** with Jesus, where we speak honestly about what is on our hearts and minds after engaging with Scripture.
- We end with the **conclusion**, which includes a Collect (set prayer) for that particular week and singing the Doxology. You may wish to simply sit in silence for awhile, enjoying God's peace and presence.

— JESSE TREE READINGS —

The *Jesse Tree* readings take their cue from the promise of God in **Isaiah 11** to provide a leader, the true King, who will come from appears to be the abandoned, forgotten line of David. (Jesse was king David's father.) Isaiah's ministry was well after the golden years of David's reign. Poor spiritual leadership from the kings and priests who followed David allowed and encouraged repeated rebellion against God, such that Israel found themselves under the severe curses they were warned of when God established his covenant through Moses (**Duet. 27-28**).

Their rebellion divided the kingdom; Israel in the north, Judah in the south. Then enemy nations threatened and oppressed the people. Eventually both nations were overthrown and the line of David seemed to be cut short. In this context God speaks a word of hope through the prophet Isaiah. Like new growth rising from the ashes, something new would rise from the stump of Jesse, that would bring life to the world. The readings paint this picture of promise before leading us through the story of the Bible to Jesus, the promised true King.

This devotional takes us through both Advent and into the Christmas seasons. To make the most of this season and your journey through Scripture, commit to our community services and keep a journal nearby:

Community Worship & Evangelism

- Advent Sunday Services: **Advent 1 (12.1)**; **Advent 2 (12.8)**; **Advent 3 (12.15)**; **Advent 4 (12.22)**
- Covenant Fellowship Meal & Christmas Party, Sunday, **12.15** — after worship
- Christmas Caroling, Saturday, **12.21** — **7pm**
- Christmas Eve Service: Tuesday, **12.24** — **3pm**

Daily Devotions

- Write down questions stirred by the Holy Spirit as you read
- take note of the words, phrases, and themes that catch your attention
- Ask: *Where am I? Where is Jesus? and What is his invitation to me?*

For many, this narrative arc of loving and longing from creation to Christ get's lost in the minutia and divergent storylines within the Old Testament. This devotional is designed to keep you situated properly within that narrative arc and to empower you to retell it.

Rehearsing and retelling this story is crucial for the missional task set before the Church. Don't follow the crowd, racing to participate in an overly commercialized Christmas. Rather, slow down; listen to the story of God's love and faithfulness; embrace the longing for God to act in the past and even now in our present, as we hope for his glorious return. And, along the way, receive the promise of Christ as the great news he is meant to be.

**1ST SUNDAY OF
ADVENT**
Dec 1 — Dec 7

SUN. 12.01 — Isaiah 11:1-5
MON. 12.02— Genesis 1:26-2:3
TUES. 12.03— Genesis 3:1-24
WED. 12.04 — Genesis 6:11-14; 7:17-8:1; 9:8-13
THUR. 12.05— Genesis 12:1-7
FRI. 12.06 — Genesis 15:1-6
SAT. 12.07 — Genesis 37:1-36



PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO ALL | JACLYN STUART

“[Jesus] wants us to draw on his grace and mercy because it is who he is. He drew near to us in the incarnation so that his joy and ours could rise and fall together—his in giving mercy, ours in receiving it.”

— Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*

Sunday, December 1 — Saturday, December 7

THE HOSPITALITY OF SILENCE

The world is harsh and dark. But Jesus, “the light of the world” (John 8:12) comes to you. Still yourself. Be attentive. Light a candle to welcome his presence.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” says the psalmist in Psalm 130:5. This hope is not vain, for indeed, the living Lord meets those who wait on him.

I am here to meet Jesus, *my* living Lord. Lord Jesus, I am humbled and glad you are here.

FREEDOM

To be truly abandoned to God, to be formed by his grace, is a gift for every disciple. Lord Jesus, give me the grace to trust myself completely into your hands.

CONSCIOUSNESS

In God’s loving presence, I unwind the last 24 hours, starting from now and looking back, moment-by-moment. For what am I most grateful? For what am I least grateful? I express my gratitude and my sorrow to God.

THE WORD OF GOD

Please turn to the assigned Scripture and read it aloud to let yourself hear the words with your own ears. Be watchful for a particular phrase or image that attracts your attention or imagination.

CONVERSATION

Talk with Jesus about this section of Scripture. You may find that a phrase, image, or idea naturally sparks a conversation with Jesus. Or you may ask him, “What does this mean for me today and how does it relate to my life right now?”

CONCLUSION — COLLECT 1ST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall Come to thee of Israel*

— chorus of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

**2ND SUNDAY OF
ADVENT**
Dec 8 — Dec 14

SUN. 12.08 — Deuteronomy 5:1-22
MON. 12.09— Joshua 2:1-21
TUES. 12.10— Ruth 1:1- 5, 15-18; 2:1-2, 17-20; 4:13-17
WED. 12.11 — 1 Samuel 16:1-13
THUR. 12.12— 2 Samuel 5:1-5
FRI. 12.13 — 1 Kings 5:2-5 (1 Kings 6)
SAT. 12.14 — Esther 4:1-17



ANGELS ANNOUNCING CHRIST'S BIRTH TO SHEPHERDS | GOVAERT FLINCK

“The divine announcement is not an oracle of judgment but the declaration of a gift.
The newborn King is born for us.”

— R.C. Sproul, *The Glory of Christmas*

Sunday, December 08 — Saturday, December 14

THE HOSPITALITY OF SILENCE

Waiting is not done easily. Calm your harried mind. Recognize Jesus is “the light of the world” (John 8:12); shining in the darkness. Rest in his grace and nearness.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The one thing in life that is truly indispensable is that I hear Christ, “gaze on him, and remain under his great light” (Mariano Magrassi). Heavenly Father, please give me the grace to see, with the eyes of faith, the living Christ who is present to me now.

FREEDOM

Revelation 3 pictures Jesus knocking at the door of hearts. When opened, he enters. Jesus, please give me the grace to be free from the busyness, distraction, and pride that shuts the door of my heart to you.

CONSCIOUSNESS

“How do I find myself today? Where am I with God? With others? Do I have something to be grateful for? Then I give thanks. Is there something I am sorry for? Then I ask forgiveness” (*Sacred Space*).

THE WORD OF GOD

As I read Scripture in God’s presence, he speaks to me. I need to read slowly and attentively.

CONVERSATION

“Conversation requires talking and listening. As I talk to Jesus, may I also learn to be still and listen. I picture the gentleness in his eyes and the smile full of love as he gazes on me. I can be totally honest with Jesus as I tell him my worries and my cares. I will open up my heart to him as I tell him of my fears and doubts. I will ask him to help me to place myself fully in his care, to abandon myself to him, knowing that he always wants what is best for me” (*Sacred Space*).

CONCLUSION — COLLECT 2ND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of your holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and then Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall Come to thee of Israel
— chorus of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”*

**3RD SUNDAY OF
ADVENT**
Dec 15 — Dec 21

SUN. 12.15 — Isaiah 9:2-7
MON. 12.16— Isaiah 11:6-10
TUES. 12.17— Jonah 3:1- 5
WED. 12.18— Daniel 6:1-13
THUR. 12.19— Micah 5:1-5
FRI. 12.20 — Luke 1:5-25
SAT. 12.21 — Matthew 3:1-6



THE ANGELS APPEARING TO SHEPHERDS | THOMAS COLE

“We must always remember that union with Christ is possible because of the Son’s descent to earth, not because of our ascent into heaven. The basis of our union with Christ is Christ’s union with us in the incarnation. He became one with us so that we might become one with Him.”

— Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*

Sunday, December 15 — Saturday, December 21

THE HOSPITALITY OF SILENCE

The invitation to come away from rush and hurry must be intentionally answered. Pause; breathe slowly; light a candle. Jesus, who is “the light of the world” (John 8:12), promises peace in his presence.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

In the midst of Jeremiah’s lament he holds and claims this truth: “The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.” (Lamentation 3:25). I am seeking Jesus, who graciously draws near.

FREEDOM

The Bible makes much of trusting the Lord. Those who trust the Lord experience his steadfast love, his power to save and his promised presence. A lack of trust blinds and hardens the heart to God’s work. Lord, open my heart, mind and soul to trust you.

CONSCIOUSNESS

With the light and joy of Christmas shining over the horizon, I bring my heart—sullen and sullied—to the Lord who loves me and longs for my renewal.

THE WORD OF GOD

Through Scripture Jesus teaches us how to live in his kingdom here and now. Turn to the assigned reading and note what words, phrases, or themes the Lord stirs in your heart.

CONVERSATION

“The church only lives as it prays; Christians only grow in faith, hope, and love as they learn how to pray” (Gordon T. Smith, *Teach Us To Prayer*). Talk to God about the Scriptures you’ve read. Entrust yourself to his ways and care.

CONCLUSION — COLLECT 3RD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

O Lord Jesus Christ, you sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise make ready your way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient toward the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world, we may be found a people acceptable in your sight; for with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall Come to thee of Israel
— chorus of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”*

**4TH SUNDAY OF
ADVENT**
Dec 22 — Dec 28

SUN. 12.22 — Luke 1:26-38
MON. 12.23— Matthew 1:18-25
TUES. 12.24— Luke 2:1-5
WED. 12.25— Luke 2:6-21
THUR. 12.26— Acts 6:1-15
FRI. 12.27 — John 1:1-18
SAT. 12.28 — Matthew 2:16-18



ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS | BARTOLOME ESTEBAN MURILLO

“Immanuel, God with us in our nature, in our sorrow, in our lifework, in our punishment, in our grave, and now with us, or rather we with Him, in resurrection, ascension, triumph, and Second Advent splendor.”

— Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning & Evening*

Sunday, December 22 — Saturday, December 28

THE HOSPITALITY OF SILENCE

The darkness of the world and our own hearts is deep but, Jesus, “the light of the world” (John 8:12), is not overcome by it.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

“And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you” (Ps. 39:7). God delights to reveal himself to his children. Knowing this, I quiet my mind, body and heart to wait for the King of Heaven.

FREEDOM

“A thick and shapeless tree-trunk would never believe that it could become a statue, admired as a miracle of sculpture, and would never submit itself to the chisel of the sculptor, who sees by its genius, what he can make of it” (Ignatius). Lord Jesus, give me the grace to trust myself completely into your hands.

CONSCIOUSNESS

Because God loves me unconditionally, I can be honest with him. In the presence of Christ, I look over the last 24 hours. When did I give or receive the most love? When did I give or receive the least love?

THE WORD OF GOD

Christ is present on every page of Scripture, speaking to us and “revealing his power from beginning to end, touching the depths of our soul” (Mariano Magrassi). I need to listen to him.

CONVERSATION

In order to pray we don’t need to rack our brains; all we need is to react in the presence of the Scripture we’ve read with free and spontaneous prayer.

CONCLUSION — COLLECT 4TH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us, and as we are sorely hindered by our sins from running the race that is set before us, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

— COLLECT FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall Come to thee of Israel*

— chorus of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”



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