

First Sunday of Advent



The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord our justice." -Jeremiah 33:14-16

Reflection

In times of greatest darkness we find the scriptures filled with images of hope. Our readings throughout Advent link the promise of the Old Testament to its fulfillment in the New. As we brace ourselves for the daily dose of news of war, economic gloom and climate change risks to our very survival as a planet, we can identify with the people to whom the prophet Jeremiah spoke. Faced with calamity at the hands of the Babylonians and the Egyptians, Jeremiah reminded his people of their status as the chosen ones of God and God's promise of a messiah.

We Christians see that promise fulfilled in the person of Jesus, the human form of justice and righteousness. Because Jesus inaugurated the Reign of God, we live in hope that our efforts to bring justice and peace will bear fruit. Hope does not deny the real ugliness of our world, rather, hope confirms that we can overcome. Hope is the tool God provides that allows us to continue to engage the broken world.

Theologian Karl Rahner wrote, "... hope is not simply the attitude of one who is weak and at the same time hungering for a fulfillment that has yet to be achieved, but rather the courage to commit oneself in thought

and deed to the incomprehensible and the uncontrollable which permeates our existence, and, as the future to which it is open, sustains it. ... [S]uch courage has the power to dare more than what can be arrived at merely by planning and calculations. ... [I]n the final and definitive consummation, hope still prevails and endures, because this definitive consummation is God." -*The Practice of Faith*, pg. 260

Consider

Name something you have accomplished that went far beyond anything you could have hoped or imagined.

Let us pray

*Good and gracious God,
How is it that you place such trust in us, your people?
What do you see in us that we have yet to find?
You are hope and light for our doubting hearts.
Only in you can we stand with open hands and willing spirits.
Only in you can we dare to make this journey together.
Keep us firm in our desire to respond to your call*

Intercessions

That the Church may be hope to the poor, identifying with those who are oppressed and helping to ease the burden of all those who suffer, we pray.

That leaders of nations of all faiths may recognize our common humanity and work for peace, we pray.

That all members of our parish communities may witness to the Advent season by works of charity and justice, we pray.

That all who work for justice and peace may be renewed in hope this Advent season, we pray.

Second Sunday of Advent



John went through the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." -Luke 3:3-7

Reflection

John walks into our desert this day and calls **"STOP!"** What? I can't stop now, I have to go by Walmart on the way to Wegmans and pick up...I said I would bring the appetizers for tomorrow's Christmas party at work...I need to figure out what to give my daughter to bring to her troop's gift exchange... The car needs an oil change before we leave for a visit to my folks in Ohio...

But John is persistent—**PREPARE**. In what valley of loneliness is someone close to you living? Do you even notice? What mountain of bigotry or vengeance are you still trying to climb without even being aware of the ice in your heart? What winding road of denial of a difficult relationship are you struggling along? What rough times can you smooth a little for someone who is jobless or homeless or hungry? Prepare the way that Christ needs in order to come into our world.

Put your carts away and search your heart for the gifts that Christ has to give.

Consider

How can I re-focus my energy and attention to the relationships that really matter?

Let Us Pray

Circle us, Lord
Circle us with the light of your presence, bright within this dark world.
Enable us to be overcomers of fear and temptation.
Enable us to be victors over sin and despair.
Enable us to become that which you would desire
Circle us, Lord.

Circle our family within the shelter of your outstretched arms.
Protect them in each moment of their daily lives.
Protect them in the decisions that they face.
Protect their homes and relationships.
Circle our families with the light of your presence.

Circle this nation with Advent love and hope.
Create a desire to listen to the Advent message.
Create a willingness to understand and respond.
Create a need to reach out to the Christ Child.
Circle our nation with the light of your presence.

Circle this world with the joy of your salvation.
Where there is sickness and disease bring healing.
Where there is hunger and despair bring hope.
Where there is torture and oppression bring release.
Circle this world with the light of your presence.
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Intercessions

That we may not be deaf to the cries of the poor, and indifferent to those who have needs; that we may identify with those who are oppressed and help to bear the burden of those who suffer about us, we pray.

For families, still yearning for reconciliation, still striving in faith through the daily struggles of life, may they be abundantly blessed with thanksgiving for all that has been and hope for what is to come, we pray.

That we may recognize that at this time and in this place Christ comes into our world through our hands, feet and voices, we pray.

Third Sunday of Advent



Brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord always! I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.—
Philippians 4:4-7

Reflection

Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.

Leon Bloy, French novelist

In a poetic song of praise, Zechariah, husband of Elizabeth and father of John the Baptizer, rejoices at the birth of his late born son, exclaiming, *In the tender compassion of our Lord the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Luke 1:76-79

Like Zechariah we, too, have reason to rejoice as we await the great feast of Christmas. Indeed, the “radiant dawn” in the form of Jesus has broken upon the world calling us to be confident and unafraid, inciting in us a joy that is deep, and lasting. God is so near, even in our hearts.

This Advent Sunday calls us to deepen our awareness of God in our midst, of God in us. This is possible only if we live in the “now”, open to God’s presence in the people and events of our day. In whatever circumstances we find ourselves God can bring new

life. We can be alive to the possibility that at any moment we can be the instrument of God’s peace to another. How can we help but rejoice?

Look for ways this week to deepen your prayer, your reflection, and your quest to find joy in the midst of the quiet desert of your heart. Through scripture, meditation, and journaling, find opportunities to allow your openness to be an invitation for God’s love and joy to find a home in you, so that you may know richly, the joy of God dwelling within.

Consider

What do you believe robs you of your joy and peace?

Let Us Pray

For the desert places in which we walk,
The streets we roam, the paths we cross
Guide our feet, take us to places where you would go.
Give us words that you would use
that in this Advent season of promise and preparation
we might point the way with John the Baptist to the
Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world

Intercessions

For peace among all peoples of faith, for lasting reconciliation among Muslims, Christians, and Jews, for an end to war in the Middle East, for the Spirit of forgiveness to lead us to reconciliation.
We pray to the Lord.

For the Church, still waiting, still seeking the fullness of the revelation of our Lord Jesus, may we be unafraid to dream, alert to God’s presence, and awake to hear Christ’s call. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those in need; the poor, the sick, the homeless, unemployed people and refugees, and those in prison. Let us try to make sure that they share in the joy of Christ’s coming, we pray.

Fourth Sunday of Advent



You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times. He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord, in the majestic name of the Lord, his God; and they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace. -Micah 5:1-4

Behold, I come to do your will. -Hebrews 10:8

Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled. -Luke 1:45

Reflection

The readings of the Fourth Sunday of Advent speak of fidelity to promises made and kept. Micah speaks of the promise God made to the Israelites that one would come who would inaugurate a reign of justice and peace. The promise is fulfilled in Jesus who says, *I come to do your will*. God promises Mary that she will be the mother of the Messiah. Elizabeth calls Mary “blessed” for her fidelity to God and to God’s will. Mary will be the instrument through which God’s plan for Jesus will be realized.

In the great narrative that is the history of the Church countless women and men have responded to God’s call to be co-creators in bringing forth a reign of justice and peace. By our baptism we share in this mission of Jesus. As we place lights on our trees and in our windows, let us look into our hearts to see the light of Christ. Let us renew our promise to be faithful to the Word and to God’s will for us.

Consider

To whom and to what do you try to be faithful?

Let Us Pray

Come, Lord Jesus

Gather us as one with our many voices, cultures, traditions;

Come, Lord Jesus,

Lead us to a deeper conversion of mind and heart;

Come Lord Jesus,

Inspire us to invite home those who have strayed from the faith;

Come, Lord Jesus,

Give us voices calling for justice and peace;

Come, Lord Jesus,

Guide us that we may seek to know more fully the treasures of our faith;

Come, Lord Jesus,

Form us as disciples with generous hearts who see Christ in all;

Come, Lord Jesus,

Help us to imagine our community vibrant with your gifts of love and mercy; Amen.

Intercessions

That the gift of justice may transform our land, making secure the lives of the poor, the vulnerable, and the unborn, we pray

For the leaders of the world, still divided, still unable to see God’s face in the poor, may they be roused from their sleep to work untiringly for a world where all are fed, sheltered, we pray.

For those still waiting for welcome, still searching for meaning, still hoping for compassion, forgiveness, and love, may we be watchful for the many, surprising ways God comes to us, we pray.

The "O" Antiphons

The O Antiphons of Advent are ancient verses used the week before Christmas as part of the Liturgy of the Hours. These verses are the basis of the Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," put to music in 15th century France. The "O" Antiphons make a wonderful addition to grace before meals or as part of your Advent wreath prayer.

December 17

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

Reflection: Do I daily seek the wisdom of God to help me make the decisions of each day and to see the events of my life as God sees them?

Prayer: Gracious God, as you nourish us with your word, give us also your Spirit of Wisdom, so that we may be radiant with joy at the coming of Christ your Son, who is Lord for ever.

*O come, O Wisdom from on high, who orders all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

December 18

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.

Reflection: To what or to whom are we slaves--the expectations of others, the demands of our culture that shouts at us to buy more, prepare more, decorate more, till we drop from exhaustion or disillusionment? God frees us from these demands and makes only one--love more.

Prayer: Loving God, you never give up on those you have chosen. Help us not to give up on ourselves. Keep us free to place you first in our time, our heart, in all our priorities. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

*O come, O come, great Lord of might, who to your tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times once gave the law, in cloud and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

December 19

Come, Flower of Jesse's stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; world leaders stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you; come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.

Reflection Today we proclaim that Jesus indeed reigns. Do people see Christ reflected in us? Are we a sign to the battle (or mall) weary shoppers that true preparation is interior, that the light in our hearts is more important than the lights on our tree?

Prayer: Help us, O Lord, to be a sign for others, a light that proclaims your reign.

*O come, O rod of Jesse's stem, from every foe deliver them
That trust your mighty power to save, and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

December 20

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 darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people into freedom.

Reflection We sit in the darkness of our own longing, lured by false promises into the shadows. Let us reflect on those times when the doors of darkness have been thrown open, when the shadows have dissipated and we have felt the nearness of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, we dare envision a world resplendent with your glory; a world without fear, without death. Help us to be the key which unlocks the doors to your love and peace for others. Enable us during this holy season to free even one person from the burdens they think they must carry by themselves. Help us to reach out to the person who needs us the most and offer them the key to a new life in you.

*O come, O Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

December 21

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice; come, shine on those lost in the darkness of death!

Reflection: Dawn--daybreak--such a powerful image of the Christ. One only has to venture out before daybreak and wait for the first rays of the rising sun in order to capture the majesty of Christ. No situation can be too bleak for the light of Christ to penetrate it. In Zechariah's words, "In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us." It means hope in a hopeless situation, light in the darkness, trust in God's providential love. Let us reflect on those times when it has been the promise of Christ that has helped us through a difficult situation. Do we share that message of hope with others?

Prayer: Creator God, maker of light, you sent your only Son to be light to a world grown dark with sin and death, sadness and pain, despair and doubt. We ask to be used to bring Christ, the light, to all the world, but especially to the world we live in--the world of our parish, our families, our friends. By the light of our faith shining through us, may others find life, hope, and faith. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*O come, O Dayspring from on high and cheer us by your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel*

December 22

O Ruler of all nations and true desire of our hearts! You are the cornerstone binding us all into a home for God. Come and free us whom you formed from earth.

Reflection

St. Paul explains God's plan for the world. "In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, *to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and earth*. Christ has come to bring together all creation.

How do I support the will of Christ? Do I strive to bring people together? Do I work for peace among those who differ? Do I pray and act and speak to sow harmony and reconciliation?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, reign in my heart. Help me to work for unity among all peoples. Give me the words that will bring people together. Guide my actions that everything I do promotes harmony among those with whom I live and work. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

*O come, Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of humankind;
O bid our sad divisions cease, and be for us our King of Peace
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel*

December 23

Emmanuel, desire of the nations, savior of all people; come and set us free, **Lord our God**.

Reflection: What is Jesus “Lord of” in my life? He is “Lord of” only what we allow him to be. Do we assign the Lord a little corner of our lives while we try to manage the rest on our own? Do we clutch our fears and worries in tight fists, relying on our own resources? Is he “Lord of” certain bits of leftover time? Or do we allow Jesus to be Lord of all our being, entrusting everything to him, relying on his spirit to guide us in all things, and handing over to his providence the things over which we have no control?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of faith which allows us to say with Thomas and with Martha, “My Lord and my God!” Come, Lord Jesus, come.

*O Come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appears,
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

