

## Welcome

This devotional continues a centuries-old Christian tradition of setting aside time to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth, rejoice at his arrival in our lives today, and anticipate his future return. The Advent season then unfolds in the joy of the twelve days of Christmas and the day of Epiphany.

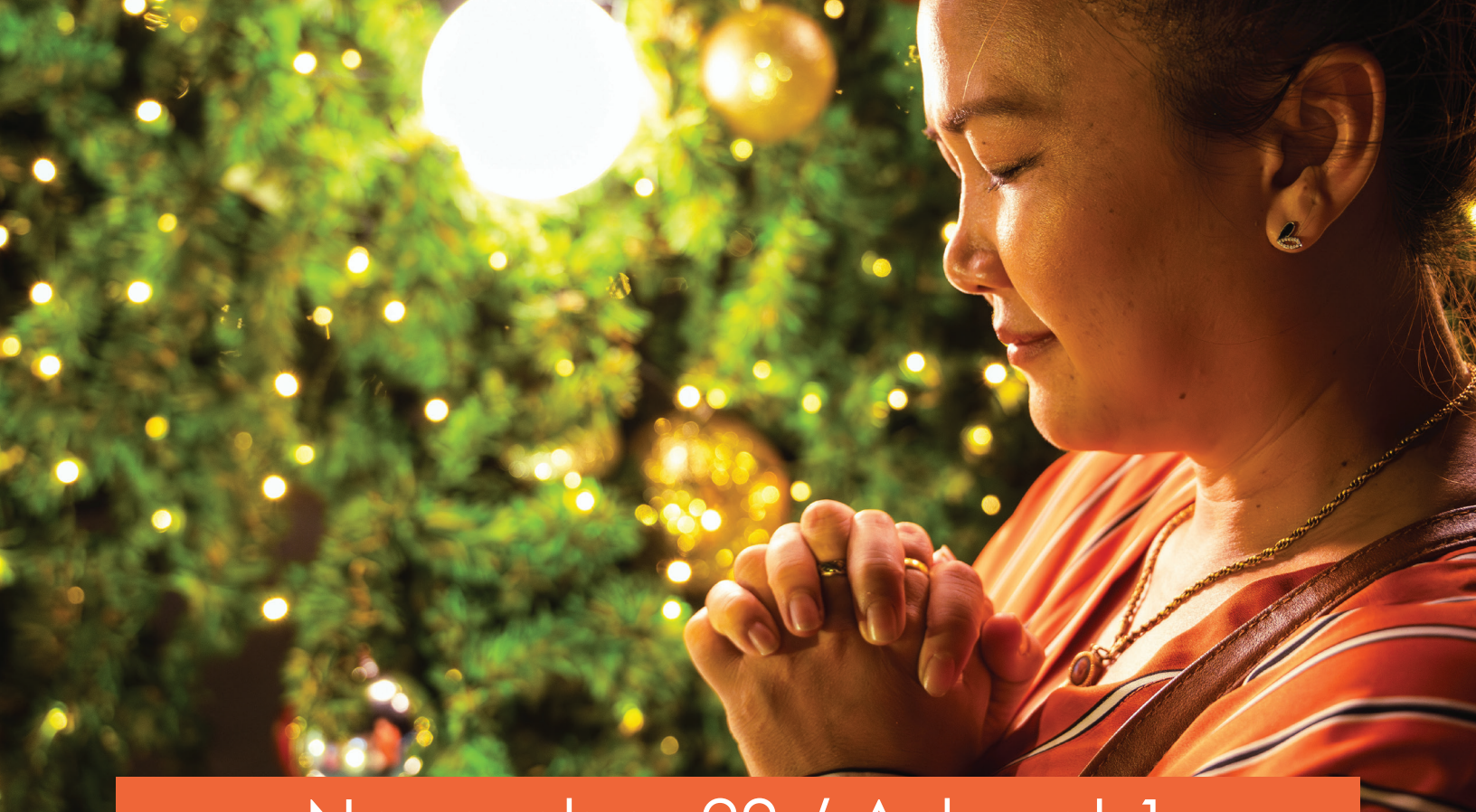
*Comfort and Joy* provides daily devotions for the first Sunday of Advent (November 29, 2026) through Epiphany (January 6, 2027). These devotions explore year B texts (first readings and gospel texts in the Revised Common Lectionary) for the Sundays of Advent and Christmas, as well as for the festival days of Christmas and Epiphany. Each reading is accompanied by an image, a reflection, and a prayer. The writers bring their unique voices and pastoral wisdom to these texts, and offer the voices of other witnesses in the quotations they have chosen for the “To ponder” sections. The devotional also provides household blessings and prayers (see pages 82–94) to enrich your preparations and celebrations during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Jesus comes to us at Christmas—and in each day—and he will come again. May his presence and promise send us out to share the good news, bringing comfort and joy to all the world!

*O tidings of comfort and joy,  
comfort and joy;*

*O tidings of comfort and joy.*

—“God rest ye merry, gentlemen”



November 29 / Advent 1

### **Isaiah 64:1-3**

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—  
as when fire kindles brushwood  
and the fire causes water to boil—  
to make your name known to your adversaries,  
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!  
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence.

### **To ponder**

Oh God, these feel like darkening days, with little hope to be found. We cry out: Where are you, God? . . . O God, help us in our exhaustion and in our desperation. When

we're tempted to throw our hands up in surrender, anchor us in hope.—Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie, *The Lives We Actually Have*

## **We need someone to come down**

I was home alone with two small children when a massive earthquake hit. No one was injured, but broken glass littered the floor, and my children remained scared for weeks.

Why would Isaiah ask for quaking mountains, kindling fire, trembling nations, torn heavens? Why would someone long for this kind of destructive power? This section of Isaiah was written after the ancient people of Israel returned from exile in Babylon. Disoriented and grieving, they rebuilt their temple and their lives, but also contended with land battles, divisions, and power struggles. Isaiah cried out to God to tear open the heavens, imagery that evokes the rending of a garment, a cultural expression of grief and lament.

We start this Advent season as people in need of hope. There is brokenness in our lives. There are losses we need to grieve. There are situations that need repair, unjust structures that need to be demolished. We can't do this on our own. We need the power of God. We need someone to come down.

## **Prayer**

Mighty God, tear open the heavens and come down!  
Surprise us with your presence and power this Advent season. Amen.



November 30

### **Isaiah 64:4-5**

From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.  
You meet those who gladly do right,  
those who remember you in your ways.

### **To ponder**

“Living backwards!” Alice repeated in great astonishment.  
“I never heard of such a thing!”

[Queen:] “—but there’s one great advantage in it, that  
one’s memory works both ways.”

“I’m sure mine only works one way,” Alice remarked.

“I can’t remember things before they happen.”

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,” the Queen remarked.—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

## **Remember**

A seminary professor once said that the entire Old Testament can be summarized in one word: *remember*. God reminds the Israelites—multiple times—to remember their safe passage out of Egypt, but the people forget, complain, and turn away. Scripture includes many more reminders for people to recall God’s love, presence, and power . . . with similar results. It is much too easy for us to forget all that God has done.

For years scientists have studied memory and what happens in the brain when we remember and when we forget. Some have defined memory as a source of data that helps us make sense of the present and predict the future. Remembering our source—God and all that God has already done—helps us, as people of faith, to make sense of the present and feel more confident about the future. We go forward in hope when we remember what God has done for us and trust in all that God will do in the days ahead.

## **Prayer**

Remember me, O God, and help me recall your deeds of power and your boundless love. Keep your praises on my lips and your presence in my heart. Amen.



December 22

### **Luke 1:34-38**

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

### **To ponder**

No threshold need be a threat, but rather an invitation and a promise.—John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us*

## **How can this be?**

Mary's first words are a question. Her incredulity makes her human, someone we can relate to in our own moments of shock and surprise.

Sixteen years ago I learned that I was pregnant (surprise!) with our third child, the day before I got on a bus with fifty high schoolers to make the fifteen-hour drive to New Orleans for the ELCA Youth Gathering! So many questions were racing through my head. It seemed like terrible timing.

That long bus ride wasn't exactly fun, but as it turned out, there was no better place I could have been that week than the youth gathering. Speakers, worship leaders, and the gathered assembly strengthened me with their stories of God's faithfulness in their lives. I felt embraced by God's love.

Whatever kind of news God is communicating to you today, it's okay to question how it can possibly work. You don't have to have it all together—that's God's job. And nothing is impossible with God.

## **Prayer**

God, you call us to surprising and unexpected ventures. When we are overwhelmed by doubt and fear, assure us that with you all things are possible. Amen.



December 28

### **Luke 2:22-24**

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Jesus' parents] brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

### **To ponder**

By accepting all the scruffy and magnificent details of your human condition, and allowing seemingly contradictory things to be equally true, you banish the conditioned voice that designates some things as holy and others as profane.  
—Mirabai Starr, *Ordinary Mysticism*

## **A holy present**

Jesus was designated as holy to the Lord in remembrance of God liberating the Hebrews from Egypt. We might think of this as Jesus being given back to God as a present. We, too, can honor and offer our lives as gifts, dedicating them as living signs of God's grace and liberation for the world around us.

Our son's baptism was a moment of releasing and entrusting him to the care of God and a community of family, friends, and the faithful in the body of Christ. Handing him to the pastor, we enacted this release from our little family into the fullness and riches of God's expansive family.

God dons flesh, walks among us, and so sanctifies the blessed ordinariness of life. We, too, are blessed and empowered to make Christ's love and presence incarnate and tangible to others in flesh and blood, laughter and tears, encouragement, tender caregiving, and much more. This is also what we're blessed to receive from others, and what we hope our son learns in the community of the faithful. What a present for all of us!

## **Prayer**

Jesus, continue to remind us and reveal to us that you make ordinary lives a place for the holy. Amen.



## Household Blessings and Prayers

### **Advent**

In the days of Advent, Christians prepare to celebrate the presence of God's Word among us in our own day. During these four weeks, we pray that the reign of God, which Jesus preached and lived, would come among us. We pray that God's justice would flourish in our land, that the people of the earth would live in peace, that the weak and the sick and the hungry would be strengthened, healed, and fed with God's merciful presence.

During the last days of Advent, Christians welcome Christ with names inspired by the prophets: wisdom, liberator of slaves, mighty power, radiant dawn and sun of justice, the keystone of the arch of humanity, and Emmanuel—God with us.

## **The Advent wreath**

One of the best-known customs for the season is the Advent wreath. The wreath and winter candle-lighting in the midst of growing darkness strengthen some of the Advent images found in the Bible. The unbroken circle of greens is clearly an image of everlasting life, a victory wreath, the crown of Christ, or the wheel of time itself. Christians use the wreath as a sign that Christ reaches into our time to lead us to the light of everlasting life. The four candles mark the progress of the four weeks of Advent and the growth of light. Sometimes the wreath is embellished with natural dried flowers or fruit. Its evergreen branches lead the household and the congregation to the evergreen Christmas tree. In many homes, the family gathers for prayer around the wreath.

## **An evening service of light for Advent**

*This brief order may be used on any evening during the season of Advent. If the household has an Advent wreath (one candle for each of the four weeks of Advent), it may be lighted during this service. Alternatively, one simple candle (perhaps a votive candle) may be lighted instead.*

### *Lighting the Advent wreath*

May this candle/these candles be a sign of the coming light of Christ.

*One or more candles may be lighted.*

*Week 1: Lighting the first candle*

Blessed are you, God of Jacob, for you promise to transform weapons of war into implements of planting and harvest and to teach us your way of peace; you promise that our night of sin is far gone and that your day of salvation is dawning.

As we light the first Advent candle, wake us from our sleep, wrap us in your light, empower us to live honorably, and guide us along your path of peace.

O house of Jacob, come,  
let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

*Week 2: Lighting the first two candles*

Blessed are you, God of hope, for you promise to bring forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse who will bring justice to the poor, who will deliver the needy and crush the oppressor, who will stand as a signal of hope for all people.

As we light these candles, turn our wills to bear the fruit of repentance, transform our hearts to live in justice and harmony with one another, and fix our eyes on the shoot from Jesse, Jesus Christ, the hope of all nations.

O people of hope, come,  
let us rejoice in the faithfulness of the Lord. Amen.