

**book *of* faith**  
Advent Reflections  
Making All Things New



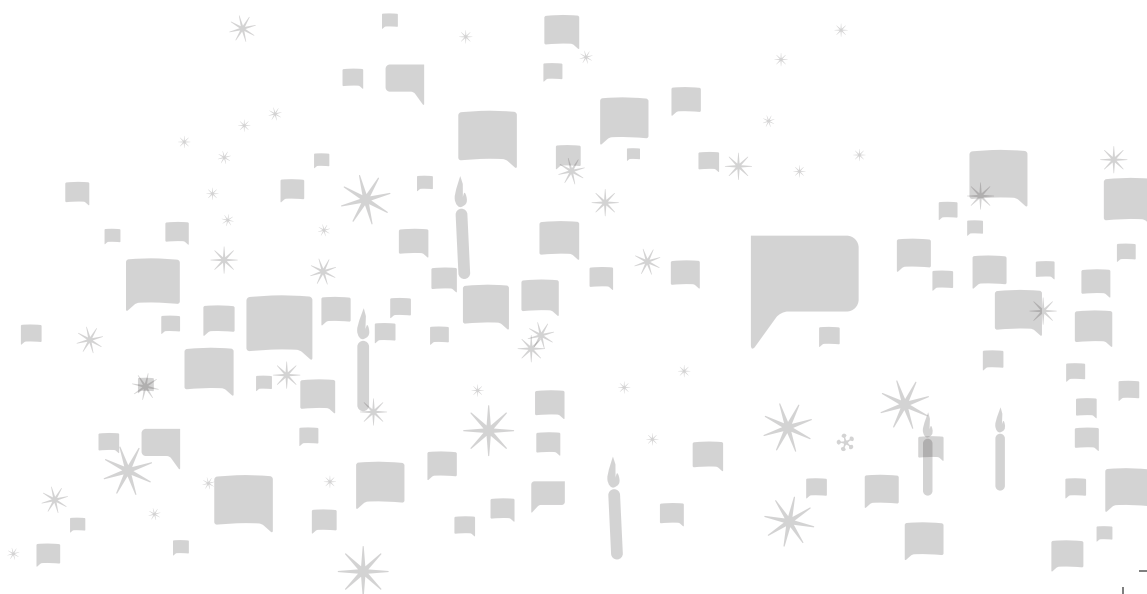


# book *of* faith

## Advent Reflections

### Making All Things New

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BOOK OF FAITH ADVENT REFLECTIONS  
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## Introduction

For centuries, the season of Advent has been a holy time of reflection and preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth. For many of us, however, Advent has become one of the most hectic times of the year. We deck the halls, send Christmas cards or e-cards, shop for gifts, wrap the gifts, bake and cook, attend special events, and travel to spend time with family and friends, all the while wondering how we'll get everything done in four short weeks. When the countdown to Christmas is over and the presents are all ripped open, we're too run-down and exhausted to welcome the Prince of Peace into our hearts and lives.

While we're so focused on what we're doing and what still needs to be done, it's easy to overlook what God is doing. And God is up to something, during Advent and Christmas and each day of every season. God is not only busy, but getting things done, in us and through us and in the world. God is at work—renewing, redeeming, refreshing, reenergizing, reinventing—to make all things new!

*Advent Reflections: Making All Things New* celebrates what God is up to. Through daily reflections, weekly Bible studies, and hands-on activities, you will explore how God renews all things, particularly our stories, our days, our spirits, and our ways. God redeems and renews our stories and the world's story, and forever weaves them into God's story. God takes our days out of the "same old, same old" and gives us a fresh start each morning, calling us to serve Jesus and others and leading us toward promise. By grace through faith, God forgives us and completely renews our spirits, our very selves. God makes us new creations, giving us not only new ways, but new life in Christ. This work of making all things new is God's gracious gift to us and to the world.

*Advent Reflections* is a Book of Faith resource. In 2007 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) affirmed the centrality of the Bible to Christian life and faith, and at the same time recognized the reality of biblical

illiteracy in the church. This resulted in the Book of Faith initiative, which invites us to open Scripture and join the conversation. By looking at the Bible through different lenses—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional—we can enter into a dialogue with God’s Word in ways that lead to deeper understanding and spiritual growth. The emphasis in this book is on the devotional lens, but the other lenses are used to provide insights into Scripture as well. As a Book of Faith resource, *Advent Reflections* offers opportunities to open Scripture, look at it through different lenses, and join conversations with the Bible, with friends or family, with a small group, and, ultimately, with God.



## *How to Use This Book*

Start this book on the first Sunday in Advent (four Sundays before Christmas), if possible. Put it in a prominent place in your home, purse, backpack, or briefcase, so you'll be reminded to use it every day. Use the daily reflections, weekly Bible studies, and activities during the Advent season to explore and celebrate God's work of making all things new.

### **Advent Reflections**

This section guides you in a daily devotional time with a reflection, questions, and a prayer for every day in Advent. (See pp. 13–69.) Have a Bible handy each day so that you can read the text and then the reflection. Spend a few moments thinking about the “Questions to Ponder.” Close your devotional time with the prayer, perhaps followed by a prayer of your own or a few moments of silence.

You can connect this devotional time with things that are already part of your daily routine. Here are a few suggestions for doing this. Ask others for their ideas as well. Read the Bible text, reflection, and prayer during a meal, coffee break, or bus ride. Consider the “Questions to Ponder” as you take a walk, wait in line, or spend some quiet time thinking and praying. When you are with friends and family members, talk about what you are reading and learning. Open your heart to the Spirit's work of renewal.

### **Bible Studies**

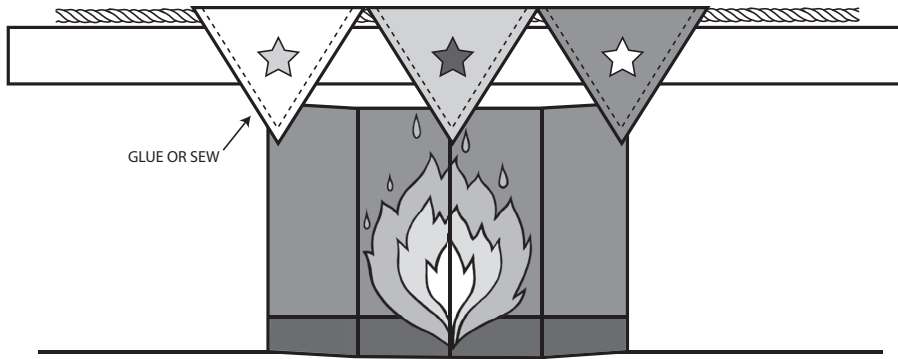
Four Bible studies, one for each week in Advent, highlight the four main themes used in the daily reflections: Renew Our Stories, Renew Our Days, Renew Our Spirits, Renew Our Ways (see pp. 71–79). Use these Bible studies once a week on your own, with a friend or family member, in a small group that already exists, or in a new group formed with other people who are reading this book. If you are in a small group using the Bible studies in this book, be sure to take time for the daily reflections as well.



## Activities

The Activities section (pp. 81–101) provides many hands-on ways for families with younger children to celebrate the Advent season. You may want to scan this entire section before Advent begins and pick out one or two activities for each week, or simply choose activities as the season goes along. Either way, focus on what is most doable and meaningful for your family, not on finishing every activity provided.

The Faith Flag Banner is an activity that you can begin at the start of the season and build on each week. Hanging over a mantel, in a doorway, or along a banister, this banner will help you celebrate Advent and remember that God makes all things new.





## Our Writers

### Week 1 Reflections and Bible Study: Renew Our Stories

*Kae Evensen* is a pastor at Mercy Seat Lutheran Church in northeast Minneapolis, Minnesota. She works with her amazing pastoral colleague Mark Stenberg and lives with her wonderful family, Marty, Jimmy, and Emily.

### Week 2 Reflections and Bible Study: Renew Our Days

*Carolyn Coon Mowchan* is a pastor whose work has been seen in devotions, Bible studies, curriculum, and *The Lutheran* and *Partners* magazines. She has written two books in the Lutheran Voices series: *Connecting with God in a Disconnected World* (coauthored with Damian Anthony Vraniak, 2003) and *Holy Purpose* (2007). She lives with her husband, Will, also a pastor, in the north woods of Wisconsin.

### Week 3 Reflections and Bible Study: Renew Our Spirits

*Margaret A. Krych* is an ordained pastor and published author who served as a faculty member and associate dean of graduate education at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. As the Charles F. Norton professor emerita of Christian Education and Theology, she continues teaching occasional courses at the seminary. She lives in Pennsylvania with her husband, Arden, also a retired pastor.

### Week 4 Reflections and Bible Study: Renew Our Ways

*Peter W. Marty* is senior pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa. He preaches and speaks frequently at colleges, churches, and conferences across the country. Marty is the author of *The Anatomy of Grace* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008), among many writings. From 2004 to 2009, he was host of the national radio broadcast *Grace Matters*. The Academy of Parish Clergy named him Parish Pastor of the Year in 2010.

## Activities

*Debbie Trafton O'Neal* is an author, educator, and consultant who lives in the Seattle, Washington, area. She has written more than fifty books for children, families, and educators, and has developed, written, and edited curriculum for more than twenty-five years. Creative, hands-on experiences are her favorite ways to teach and learn.



The background of the page is decorated with a repeating pattern of stylized, light gray icons. These icons include five-pointed stars of various sizes, lit candles with flames, and speech bubbles of different shapes and orientations. The pattern is distributed across the entire page, with a slightly higher density of icons in the top and bottom sections, framing the central text area.

# Advent Reflections




## Week 1: Renew Our Stories

### *Day 1: Sunday*

#### What Are We Waiting For?

Mark 13:32-37

 *Key Verse:* Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. Mark 13:35-36

These days, it's hard to figure out what's urgent and what's not; all our stories feel that way. Yet this is the season of Advent, an urgent season full of Bible texts that bump up against our stories. Advent is the season of hope, of waiting, of expectation, of longing, and yet it is also the season when we read and hear texts that push at our hearts and rack our brains because often they seem to come up short on promise. So we comb through them carefully, trying not to snuff out their hope, while still allowing them to breathe out their lovely, revelatory life.

This passage from the Gospel of Mark is one of these difficult texts. We try to tame it by corralling it, so maybe it won't seem so foreign and disruptive. Yet in this Advent season, the rawness of Mark 13:32-37 comes to us bearing a truth, a passion, and a beckoning, and we don't need to try to manufacture any compulsion to fix it.

What we tend to forget is that beneath this difficult text is the *who*. Who is asking us to wait, who is asking us to keep awake? When we shift the focus to who is speaking, we discover that we don't have to worry so much, that our urgent needs are covered, that we can let go, because the hard work is already done. We find the heavy lifting is over. There is good news here because of the

one who speaks, Jesus Christ. Our story—all our stories—already have been folded into his promise.

Because of Christ and his crazy, amazing love for us, because of who he is, our stories are now his. We do not need to worry; we do not need to beat ourselves up to meet this text's demands. Christ has already met them, and the Christ upon whom we wait is the same Christ who will soon come to us in the form of a child, the same Christ who goes to the cross, the same Christ who walks away from the tomb before the disciples have a chance to rub the sleep from their eyes. Beneath the difficult words of Mark 13:32-37 is a greater promise, a deeper story—a promise we are merely given, a story that not only bears our past but keeps us wide-eyed and awake, to give us faith and to recognize real hope.

#### *Questions to Ponder*

- What keeps you awake at night? What is your greatest worry?
- In what ways is it helpful for you to know that you and your loved ones are already taken into God's story, a story brimming with promise?

#### *Prayer*

Gracious Christ, it is your deepest joy to gather our story into yours. Keep us awake to your promises, promises that renew us each moment, each day. Amen.