



2016 Advent Devotional | Third Church

Advent, by Christina Rossetti

This Advent moon shines cold and clear,
These Advent nights are long;
Our lamps have burned year after year,
And still their flame is strong.
"Watchman, what of the night?" we cry,
Heart-sick with hope deferred:
"No speaking signs are in the sky,"
Is still the watchman's word.

The Porter watches at the gate,
The servants watch within;
The watch is long betimes and late,
The prize is slow to win.
"Watchman, what of the night?" but still
His answer sounds the same:
"No daybreak tops the utmost hill,
Nor pale our lamps of flame."

One to another hear them speak,
The patient virgins wise:
"Surely He is not far to seek,"--
"All night we watch and rise."
"The days are evil looking back,
The coming days are dim;
Yet count we not His promise slack,
But watch and wait for Him."

One with another, soul with soul,
They kindle fire from fire:
"Friends watch us who have touched the goal."
"They urge us, come up higher."
"With them shall rest our waysore feet,
With them is built our home,
With Christ." "They sweet, but He most sweet,
Sweeter than honeycomb."

There no more parting, no more pain,
The distant ones brought near,
The lost so long are found again,
Long lost but longer dear:
Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard,
Nor heart conceived that rest,
With them our good things long deferred,
With Jesus Christ our Best.

We weep because the night is long,
We laugh, for day shall rise,
We sing a slow contented song
And knock at Paradise.
Weeping we hold Him fast Who wept
For us,--we hold Him fast;
And will not let Him go except
He bless us first or last.

Weeping we hold Him fast to-night;
We will not let Him go
Till daybreak smite our wearied sight,
And summer smite the snow:
Then figs shall bud, and dove with dove
Shall coo the livelong day;
Then He shall say, "Arise, My love,
My fair one, come away."

Making Sense of Advent

Modern Americans have little patience for anything but the present. Events of the past seem irrelevant and dated; the future is unclear and speculative. Awash with endless products to consume, experiences to indulge, and cultural and political drama to scrutinize, we focus on the here and now.

For the Christian community, all our myopic focus on the present comes to a halt in Advent, the very beginning of the Christian year. Advent literally means “coming,” and the season calls us to slow down and meditate on the two comings of Jesus: one past, one future.

First, *we look back* to the first coming of Jesus in the Incarnation. In Advent, we imagine ourselves as the people of Israel, hoping and longing for the coming Messiah over many centuries.

Second, *we look forward* to the second coming of Jesus when he will return as Judge and King. We reflect on the fact that though the Messiah Jesus has already come and his Kingdom is advancing, he has not yet consummated his Kingdom in fullness. The broken world still rages on, and yet we believe in and anticipate the renewal of all things.

Looking back, looking forward. Each of the four Sundays of Advent we'll be looking back and looking forward through some famous and beautiful images of the coming Messiah in the Book of Isaiah. In each of these images, we recognize ways they were fulfilled in Jesus' first coming, but we also see how they will be ultimately fulfilled in his final coming again.

Celebrating Advent puts us out of step with the culture around us. As Christmas lights flash and carols get sung and parties are thrown, we take these weeks before Christmas to get in touch with the fact that we live in a profoundly broken world. We are a people filled with lament and longing even as we are people of great hope.

Lo, he comes! Do you believe this, dear family? It is our song and hope.

Pastor Corey Widmer

How to Use this Devotional

This devotional is designed to be used by an individual, a family or a group of friends during the season of Advent. We encourage you either as an individual or a family to set aside time at least once a week when you will stop and use these materials to help you focus on the themes of the Advent and prepare for Jesus.

Sections are divided by the four Weeks of Advent plus Christmas Eve. Each of the week's theme and Scripture corresponds to our focus each Sunday in our gathered worship.

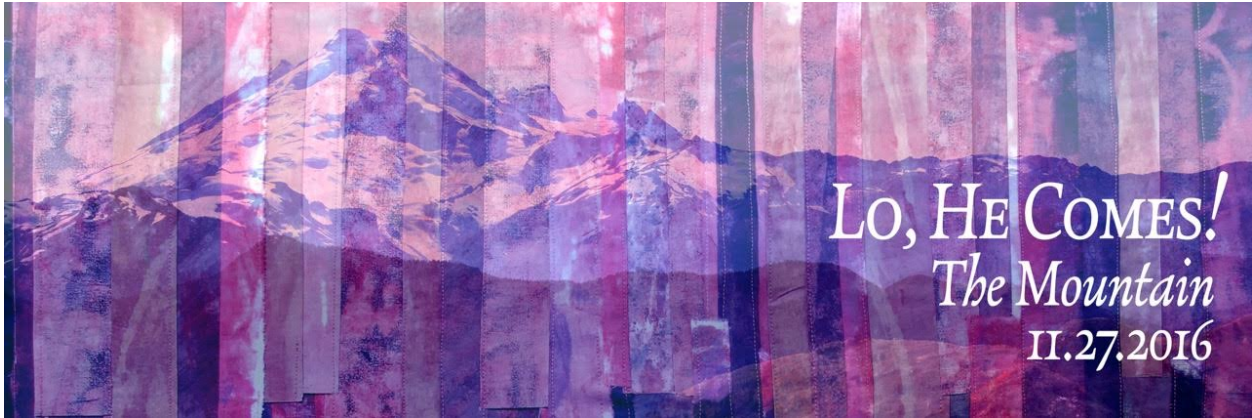
Each week's section includes:

- Theme and Image for the Week
- Scripture for the week
- Brief Reflection: to read aloud or privately
- Reflection Questions: to be used personally or discussed with others
- Prayers: both an adult prayer and a prayer for children
- Song: you could search for it online and listen to it or sing it together
- Coloring Page: for small children to engage with the theme

In addition, at the end of this devotional is a guide of daily readings that you could use each day in your own devotional life.

May the Lord deepen our longing for Jesus in this season of waiting for our coming King.

1 // The Week of November 27



"The Mountain" | Isaiah 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

In the last days

the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established

as the highest of the mountains;

it will be exalted above the hills,

and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,

so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He will judge between the nations

and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation,

nor will they train for war anymore.

Come, descendants of Jacob,

let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Reflection

A spirit of anticipation fills the season of Advent. Isaiah taps into this anticipation looking forward to the last days when “the mountain of the Lord’s Temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.” Given that Mt. Zion is not a tall mountain and that Isaiah recently prophesied its destruction, the vision of Zion as “exalted up above the hills” would be difficult to imagine! Somehow this lowly hill will become magnificent and connect all nations to the God of Jacob. God will dwell with the people in unexpected ways and display His authority over the world. We know that this promise was first fulfilled in Jesus as the lowly infant has now become the exalted Lord who draws all nations to himself. Ultimately, Isaiah promises a day when Jesus’ reign will cover the whole earth, and people from all nations will “walk in the light of the Lord.” Thanks be to God!

Discussion Questions

What longings do you have as we move together into Advent?

How would your life be different if you truly were “walking in the light of the Lord” in your family, your career, and your community?

Prayer for the Week (from the Book of Common Prayer)

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.

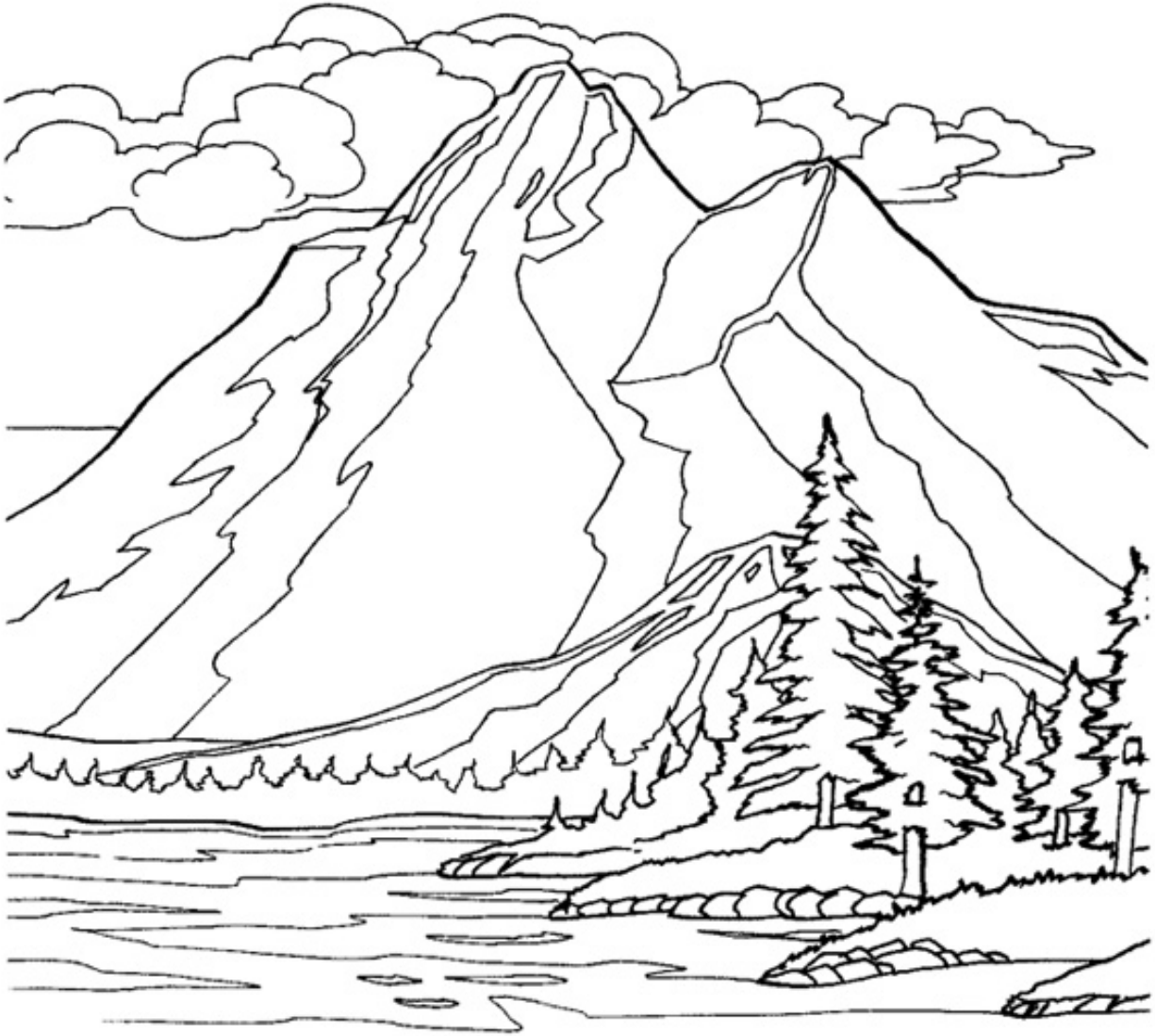
Amen.

Prayer for Children:

Lord Jesus, in this Advent season help us to know how wonderful it is that you came among us the first time, and how wonderful it will be when you come again! Amen.

Song (to listen to or sing together)

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel



“...the mountain of the Lord’s temple
will be established as chief
among the mountains.”

Isaiah 2:2

2 // *The Week of December 4*



"The Branch" | Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally
to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

Reflection

In verse 1, Isaiah prophesies that a shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse. The lineage of Jesse, the line of David, had sunk so low that this particular genealogical line was perceived to be dead and incapable of bearing fruit. That's the miracle of this passage — that life would come from death! Nature displays this phenomenon every spring, but it is often hard for us to imagine redemption in the darkest recesses of our lives. But in God, nothing is beyond redemption, not even death. He brings forth Jesus out of the line of Jesse, and he can bring forth new life out of the darkest places of our lives. Thanks be to God!

Discussion Questions

Why was it significant for salvation to come from the root of Jesse?

What aspects of your life are dead? Where have you given up? Do you believe that God can bring life to these areas?

Prayer for the Week (from the Book of Common Prayer)

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer for Children:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you came in a way that no one expected! Please come into my life and into my family in unexpected ways. Amen.

Song (to listen to or sing together)

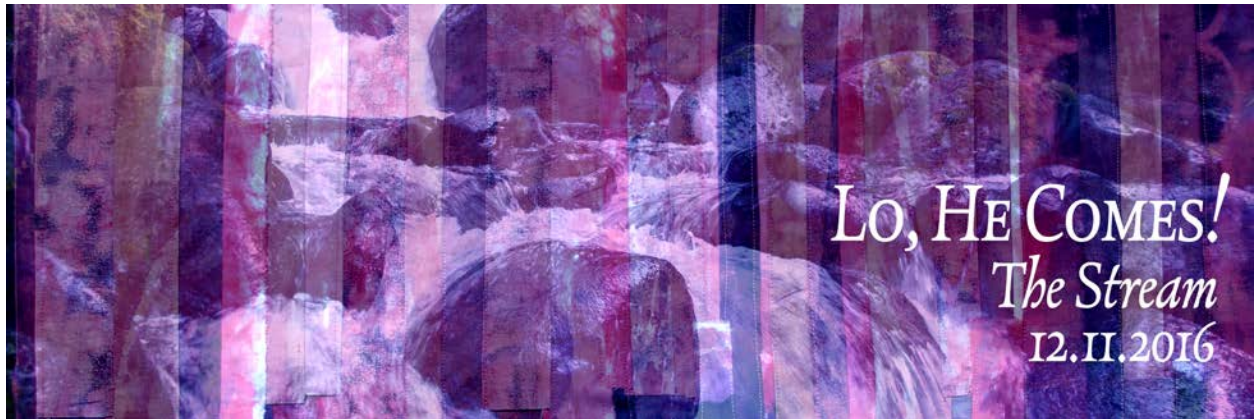
Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus



“A shoot will come up
from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

Isaiah 11:1

3 // The Week of December 11



"The Stream" | Isaiah 35:1-10

The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.

The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;

say to those with fearful hearts,

"Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you."

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.

The burning sand will become a pool,

the thirsty ground bubbling springs.
In the haunts where jackals once lay,
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.
And a highway will be there;
it will be called the Way of Holiness;
it will be for those who walk on that Way.
The unclean will not journey on it;
wicked fools will not go about on it.
No lion will be there,
nor any ravenous beast;
they will not be found there.
But only the redeemed will walk there,
and those the Lord has rescued will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Reflection

Again, Isaiah contrasts a time without hope, this time portrayed as a desert, with our anticipation of a better time to come, here embodied by a stream. The represents a living hope in the form of Jesus. Whatever our deserts are, the contrasting hope exists in Christ. In deserts of division— whether economic, racial, or political – Jesus provides a stream of unity. In deserts of idolatry — from selfishness and distraction – Jesus provides a stream of sacrifice. In deserts of isolation— from broken relationships or self-imposed separation – Jesus provides a stream of community. Whatever our desert, Jesus will return and provide “everlasting joy.”

Discussion Questions

What are your deserts in this time of your life?

What hope does the stream of Christ give you in that place of desert? What could you pray and ask for from him?

Prayer for the Week (from the Book of Common Prayer)

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, 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.

Prayer for Children:

Jesus, thank you that when I feel sad or scared, you are always ready to come and help me. Please help all those who need you today. Amen.

Song (to listen to or sing together)

Come Light Our Hearts (by Sandra McCracken)



“Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.”

Isaiah 11:1

4 // *The Week of December 18*



“The Sign” | Isaiah 7:10-16

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”

Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

Reflection

Finally, the images of the mountain, the branch, and the stream coalesce into a corporeal sign: a son named Immanuel. The entire narrative of the Old Testament has pointed to this birth, of a baby with humble origins. Can you imagine the excitement of the Israelites who had previously been granted access to God through the tabernacle, the cloud and the pillar of smoke, and in God’s designation of earthly leaders – that God was now going to truly enter the world in the form of His son? Previously God had provided temporary redemption, now He was promising eternal salvation. The ultimate sign of hope is Christmas: the birth of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

How do you think Isaiah's audience felt about this sign?

Do we have a similar feeling of anticipation today? Why or why not?

Prayer for the Week (from the Book of Common Prayer)

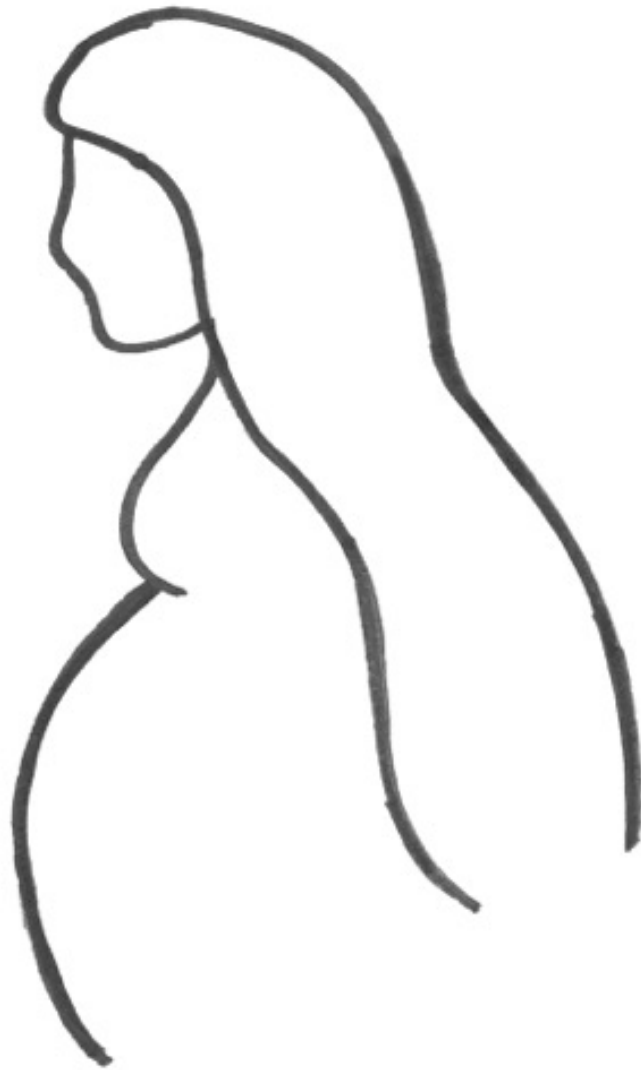
Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer for Children:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you came into the world just like I did! Tiny and helpless, with a mommy and daddy just like me. Help me to remember you are with me and you are coming again to make everything right. Amen.

Song (to listen to or sing together)

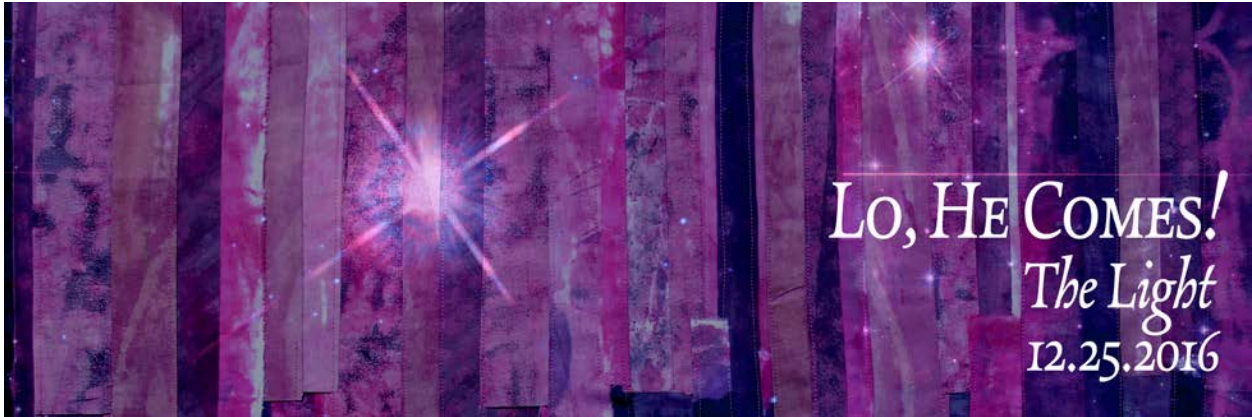
Lo, He Comes



“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign:
the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,
and will call him Immanuel.”

Isaiah 7:14

Christmas Eve // December 24



'The Light' | Isaiah 9:2-7

The people walking in darkness
 have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
 a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation
 and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
 as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
 when dividing the plunder.
For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
 you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
 the bar across their shoulders,
 the rod of their oppressor.
Every warrior's boot used in battle
 and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
 will be fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given,
 and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

Reflection

Isaiah speaks of a global transformation. God will provide a great light in the midst of great darkness. Christmas brings joy and triumph over burdens and struggles. The "Wonderful Counselor" brings healing to our pains; the "Mighty God" provides strength for our weakness; the "Everlasting Father" embodies eternal hope for our ephemeral existence; and the "Prince of Peace" has the power to end our divisions. For each question, doubt, or failing, Jesus is the answer.

C.S. Lewis described the incarnation as the "central miracle" which every other miracle in the bible either "prepares for," "exhibits," or "results from." This is the singular shock of the Bible — that God loves us so much that He sent His son into the World. Thanks be to God!

Discussion Questions

Reflect on the sacrificial love necessary for the incarnation. What does that love mean to you?

What transformation do you need this Christmas?

Prayer for Christmas Eve (from the Book of Common Prayer)

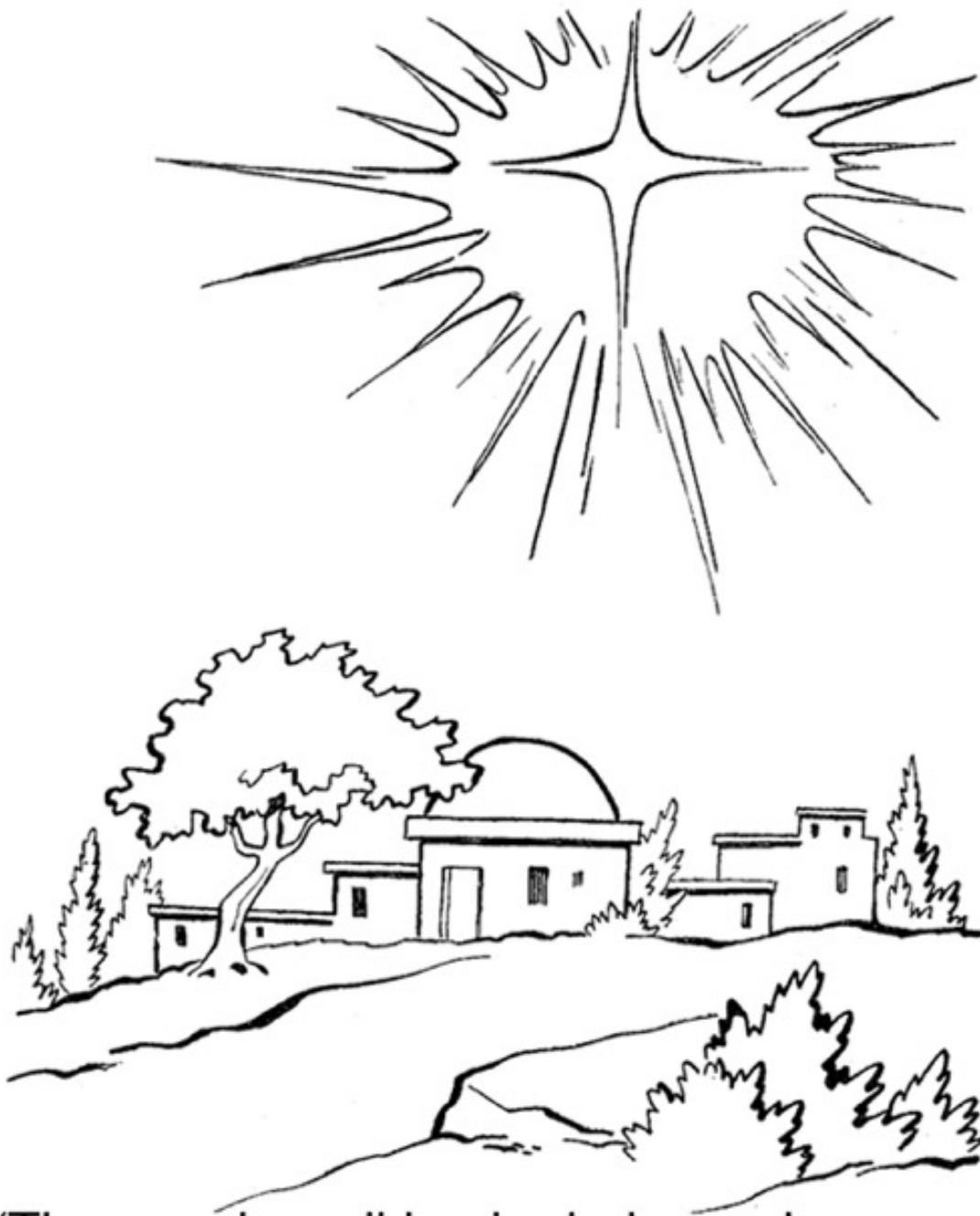
O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Prayer for Children:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you came into the world on a night like this so many years ago! Please come into my heart and bring your joy and peace. Amen.

Song (to listen to or sing together)

Joy to the World



“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

Isaiah 9:2

Daily Readings for Advent

As you read the passages for each day, we suggest you follow this simple plan:

- **Read:** read through each of the Scripture passages slowly, asking for insight from the Holy Spirit
- **Reflect:** Reflect on what struck you and was meaningful to you. Perhaps write it down, ask God to show you why He highlighted that particular word or phrase
- **Respond:** Pray the scripture back to God, spending some time adoring, confessing, and interceding
- **Rest:** Spend some time resting in God's presence
- **Remember:** Take a few moments throughout the day to remember what you reflected on in the morning

Week 1

Monday (November 28, 2016): Psalm 124; Genesis 8:1-19; Romans 6:1-11
Tuesday (November 29, 2016): Psalm 124; Genesis 9:1-17; Hebrews 11:32-40
Wednesday (November 30, 2016): Psalm 124; Isaiah 54:1-10; Matthew 24:23-35
Thursday (December 1, 2016): Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 1:12-17, 21-26
Friday (December 2, 2016): Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 30:19-26; Acts 13:16-25
Saturday (December 3, 2016): Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 40:1-11; John 1:19-28

Week 2

Monday (December 5, 2016): Psalm 21; Isaiah 24:1-16a; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
Tuesday (December 6, 2016): Psalm 21; Isaiah 41:14-20; Romans 15:14-21
Wednesday (December 7, 2016): Psalm 21; Genesis 15:1-18; Matthew 12:33-37
Thursday (December 8, 2016): Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 1:6-18; 2 Peter 3:1-10
Friday (December 9, 2016): Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:11-18
Saturday (December 10, 2016): Psalm 146:5-10; 1 Samuel 2:1-8; Luke 3:1-18

Week 3

Monday (December 12, 2016): Psalm 42; Isaiah 29:17-24; Acts 5:12-16
Tuesday (December 13, 2016): Psalm 42; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Jude 17-25
Wednesday (December 14, 2016): Psalm 42; Zechariah 8:1-17; Matthew 8:14-17, 28-34
Thursday (December 15, 2016): Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Galatians 3:23-29
Friday (December 16, 2016): Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:18-22; Galatians 4:1-7
Saturday (December 17, 2016): Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:23-29; John 3:31-36

Week 4

Monday (December 19, 2016): 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Genesis 17:15-22; Galatians 4:8-20
Tuesday (December 20, 2016): 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Genesis 21:1-21; Galatians 4:21-5:1
Wednesday (December 21, 2016): 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Genesis 37:2-11; Matthew 1:1-17
Thursday (December 22, 2016): Luke 1:46b-55; Isaiah 33:17-22; Revelation 22:6-7, 18-20
Friday (December 23, 2016): Luke 1:46b-55; 2 Samuel 7:18, 23-29; Galatians 3:6-14

Christian Calendar

