

ADVENT

at the Table



A Devotional *for Each Sunday of Advent*



VILLAGE CHURCH
Presbyterian (USA)

This devotional was written for your own personal reflection by Revs. Dr. Rodger Nishioka, Maggie Johnson Phillips, Zach Walker, and Anna Owens. We hope you have a blessed Christmas season!

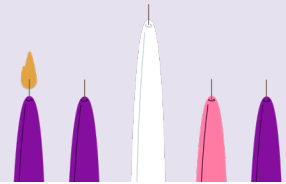
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Are Jr., Tom. *Joy Even On Your Worst Days*. Resource Publications, Eugene, OR, 2021.

Rossetti, Christina. "Christmastide." *Verses*, E. & J. B. Young, New York, 1893.

First Sunday in Advent



We light the candle of Hope.

Read

Psalm 130

"I cry out to you from the depths, Lord—my Lord, listen to my voice!
Let your ears pay close attention to my request for mercy!
If you kept track of sins, Lord—my Lord, who would stand a chance?
But forgiveness is with you—that's why you are honored.

I hope, Lord.

My whole being hopes, and I wait for God's promise.

My whole being waits for my Lord—

more than the night watch waits for the morning;

yes, more than the night watch waits for morning!

Israel, wait for the Lord!

Because faithful love is with the Lord;

because great redemption is with our God!

God is the one who will redeem Israel from all its sin."

Reflect

This psalm is one of 15 psalms of ascent. These are the songs that pilgrims would sing as they made their way to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. Imagine groups of faithful families singing these words together as they walked up the mountain.

Each of these songs sings of God's love and forgiveness. This song sings of our hope in God. As we begin this Advent season, remember that *advent* is a word that means

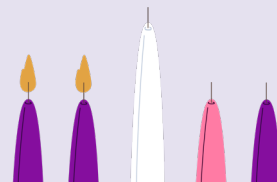
“coming” or “arrival.” We are waiting for the coming, the arrival, the birth of Jesus because Jesus is our hope.

Take a moment and reflect on the question: What are you hoping for as we wait for Jesus’ birth? If you are with your family, share your answers with one another.

Close with Prayer

Gracious God, we give thanks that you listen to us when we pray to you. We give thanks that you forgive and love us always. We give thanks that you give us hope. Help us to trust in your redeeming love. Help us to love you and love others and all of creation. Be with us as we wait for the birth of your son, our Lord, Jesus, on Christmas. We pray in his name, Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent



We light the candle of Peace.

Read

Numbers 6:24-26

“The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

Reflect

Peace is woven all throughout scripture. In fact, in the Old Testament alone, the word *shalom* or “peace” in Hebrew is mentioned 110 times. That must mean that peace is something that we need to pay attention to. The writers of scripture wanted us to know that peace is at the foundation of God’s love for us.

But what does this peace actually mean?

Shalom is peace that means completeness. It means wholeness. Biblical peace is the idea that God wants all of God’s people to feel whole and well and secure. There is an element of physical and emotional safety to this peace. There is a hope that all people are made well and have their needs met.

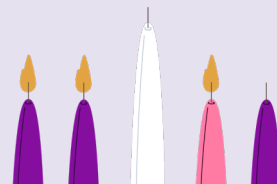
This blessing from the book of Numbers is a blessing towards this peace, a blessing to all people that we might be made new and whole in every way.

We have an invitation in this second week of Advent. As we light the peace candle, I wonder—what wholeness are you seeking in this season? What peace does the world desperately need?

Close with Prayer

God of peace,
We celebrate your gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love.
But on this day, we are particularly drawn to peace.
Your peace, Holy One.
Draw us closer to you.
Draw us closer to you so that we might know true peace.
Draw us closer to you so that all your children may someday know complete *shalom*.
In the name of the Prince of Peace we pray, Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent



We light the candle of Joy.

Read

Philippians 4:4-7, 10-13

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus...

“I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Reflect

Many of you might have read Rev. Tom Are's book, “Joy Even on Your Worst Days,” which was a reflection on Paul's letter to the Philippians. These verses were central to that book; we are reminded that Paul writes these words while he is in prison. Yet, even in his difficult circumstances, he encourages the church in Philippi to rejoice in all circumstances. It's one thing if you are told to rejoice by a stranger who is having an easy go of life. It is quite another when you are told to hold joy in all circumstances by a person you know well and who is in very difficult circumstances.

Tom writes, “The culture in which we live is not a particularly joyful culture. We are better at anger and understandably so. There is a lot of fear, and that’s not likely to change.” Those words have been echoing around my head a lot—both because they continue to ring true, and so does Paul’s call to be joyful.

If both things are true, then I have some work to do. I can’t change the culture around me, but I can change—or at least pay attention to—how I operate in the midst of it. If I am called to rejoice in all things, it means joy is the lens through which I view this life and how I operate in it. Joy will be what anchors me. If I can hold on to that, it changes how I live and how I respond to what is happening around me.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are some areas in your life where joy is easy to find?
2. Where are some areas in your life where joy feels distant?
3. What is one way you can bring joy into an area of your life that needs it?
4. Who is someone you can show joy to in the coming week? How will you do that?

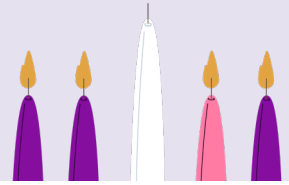
Close with Prayer

God, there is much I struggle with; there are a lot of reasons to be angry or fearful. Listen as I name a few of those things that give rise to anger and/or fear in me...

But I also know, God, I am called to rejoice. I am called to this because there are certainly reasons for joy in my life such as...

I am also called, God, to live with a foundation of joy even when I am angry and fearful. In this Advent season, keep joy as an undercurrent in my life. I pray that I would not ignore my anger or my fear, but that my response to those feelings would be informed by joy. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Advent



We light the candle of Love.

Read

*Love shall be our token,
Love shall be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

from Christina Rossetti's poem "Christmastide"

Reflect

We've arrived here to the winter solstice and shortest day of the year, and it seems apt that we would light our final candle of the Advent season on this day: the candle of love. You may be reading this at your kitchen table or in your living room. You may be surrounded by loved ones in person, in spirit, or maybe even online. You may be filled with hope and wonder or you may be overwhelmed and barely hanging on. In whatever place or season of life you light this candle, the same mystery that breathed love and life into our incarnate God envelops you and holds you close.

As Christina Rossetti writes, love is our token. Love is our plea and gift and sign. Love is the warmth in the bitter cold. Love is the light that brightens even the darkest night. We might even go so far as to say that love is the whole point of this whole endeavor we call Christ's church, and the lives we live as Christ's people. As your candles shine on this longest night, so too does God's love shine for the world. Take a moment with all four candles lit to ponder and give thanks for God's love in your life, and to remember the ultimate love that arrives as we light the center candle in just a few days.

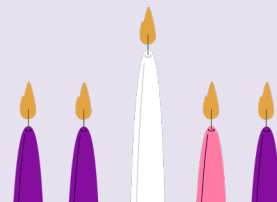
Questions for Reflection:

1. Consider or share a time when you've found yourself lifted up by the love of others. What was that experience like? Did it change you? If so, how?
2. Love has been the subject of countless songs, poems, and stories through the ages. The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth that the greatest of these (faith, hope, and love) is love. What is it about love that's so compelling? Do you think that love has the power to change the world? What might embodied love look like in our world today?

Close with Prayer

God of love, we thank you for the gift of your light. Make us even more like you—even more loving, and ever more faithful. Be with us as we await love come down, our token and our sign. Amen.

Christmas Day



**We light the Advent candles of hope, peace, joy, and love.
Then we light the Christ candle.**

Read

Isaiah 9:6

“A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

Luke 2:8-20

“Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord’s angel stood before them, the Lord’s glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

“The angel said, ‘Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, ‘Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.’

“When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, ‘Let’s go right now to Bethlehem and see what’s happened. Let’s confirm what the Lord has revealed to us.’ They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.”

Reflect

Eight hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote about the birth of a child who would change the world. And on the night Jesus was born, an angel appeared to some unsuspecting shepherds. They were startled, of course, but when they heard the good news, they left the fields and ran to the manger and saw the baby Jesus and they praised God. They realized then that what Isaiah had predicted had come true. They realized that this little baby was sent by God. They realized that this infant would change the world.

God could have come to us in another form. God could have come to us riding on a stallion out of the sun. God could have come to us emerging from a volcano with fire all around. But no, God chose to come to us in the quiet of night in a manger in a small town. On this Christmas day, we remember that moment over 2,000 years ago when God became flesh and was born in a manger in Bethlehem.

Take a moment and reflect on the question: What does it mean that God chose to be with us in the form of the infant Jesus?

Close with Prayer

Loving God, we give you thanks for your coming to be with us in Jesus. We are in awe that you chose to come to us in the form of a helpless baby.

As we celebrate this day, help us live as your son taught us—loving you with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving others as we want to be loved and loving your creation.

Thank you, Emmanuel, God with us. We love you.

Amen.