

Be Ready

An Advent Devotional

Week of Compassion

the relief, refugee, and development mission fund
of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Courtney Richards, editor



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press**

Saint Louis, Missouri

An imprint of Christian Board of Publication

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CcePress.com

PRINT: 9780827203310

EPUB: 9780827203327

EPDF: 9780827203334

Printed in the United States of America

Dear Reader ...

Advent is the Christian church's season of waiting, watching, preparation, and readiness. During the weeks leading to Christmas, individuals and the whole church traditionally spend time in prayer, reflection, service, and worship, marking the passage of the season with candles, song, and scripture. Advent helps us prepare our hearts, homes, and spirits—opening a broad path and a clear response to the joyous heart of our faith: the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, at Christmas.

Watching. Preparation. Readiness. Response.

All things we know a little about at Week of Compassion.

As the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Week of Compassion (weekofcompassion.org) works with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world. Whether keeping an eye on threatening weather in order to keep up with those in the path of a storm ... working with local churches and ecumenical partners to have action plans ready when a community need arises ... or sharing collaborative resources and imagination to empower sustainable development in the world's marginalized communities ... Week of Compassion envisions a world where God's people transform suffering into hope.

In these devotionals—beginning the first Sunday of Advent, moving through four full weeks into Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, then through the Twelve Days of Christmas and closing at Epiphany—our contributors engage the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament with focus, reflection, and prayer for each day of the season. (In the years that the fourth week isn't a full seven days, you'll want to jump to Christmas Eve at the right time!) In addition, a brief service for lighting each week's Advent candle will guide you individually, at home with family, or in a group or congregation, deeper into each week's theme.

For all the ways we serve, worship, and pursue justice and hope together, we are grateful. May you find those blessings and more in this Advent season.



Rev. Vy T. Nguyen
Executive Director, Week of Compassion

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

HOPE



Be Ready: Keep Awake

LIGHTING THE CANDLE FOR HOPE

Courtney Richards

Traditionally, a candle is lighted each of the four Sundays of Advent, and a fifth on Christmas Eve or Day. Usually, the four candles are purple (sometimes the third is pink - more on that on the third Sunday!), and the last is white. Perhaps the candles are placed in a circle to represent eternity, the unending love of God. Adding evergreen might remind us of growth and everlasting life.

However we build our Advent symbols, each time we light a candle, we reclaim Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, a light breaking past the shadows, a light that will not be overcome. Each week, a light is added, and our way grows brighter as we await the birth of the Christ Child.

The season of Advent: the start of the Christian year, and we begin with waiting. Waiting for the Christ Child. Waiting for the promised Savior. We wait in hope. We hope in more than just twinkling lights; our hope is quite truly in the Light of the World.

Waiting with hope, we need to believe that all can be well, praying for eyes opened and hearts prepared to receive the gift of the season—the one that comes without fanfare, to dispel fear—the one that comes without ceremony, to embody compassion—the one that comes, in hope, with hope, as hope, for hope. The one who comes humbly and bids us wait.

Today we light our first candle, **the candle for hope.**

Lord, keep our hearts awake, our spirits ready, that we might welcome The Hope of the World, for which we wait. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Caroline Hamilton-Arnold

When The Whole World Changes

Matthew 24:36-44

Mt 24:42 - Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

In my bedside table lives a battery/solar/crank-powered weather radio (complete with USB port and flashlight), which sounds an alert whenever a severe weather warning is issued for our county. When the tornado alerts chime in the night, I'll check the radar and warnings, half-asleep, and drag my spouse, toddler, and 45-pound dog into the coat-closet-turned-storm-shelter to wait out the storms.

In these verses, Jesus recalls the calamity of the Genesis flood, which caught the self-absorbed world unawares and which led to a new covenant between God and creation. In these verses, Jesus, whose very presence ushers in a renewed covenant, draws on the ancient story of the flood to urge his listeners—and us—to pay attention, to be prepared for when the whole world changes. By calamity and by incarnation, the world can be transformed. We are called, as followers of Jesus, to be ready—and to make God's presence known in the midst of both.

Would that we could have a battery/solar/crank-powered device to alert us to when God's presence is about to change everything! Perhaps this Advent season can serve such a purpose as we prepare to encounter God's transformative presence in the Christ child and as we prepare for God's continual and future in-breaking in the world.

In-breaking God, awaken in us an awareness to your presence and prepare us in this season to receive you again. Amen.

MONDAY

Nathan Russell

In Remembrance

Genesis 8:1-19

Gen 8:1 - But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark.

Noah navigated a flood of epic proportions as the waters swelled on the earth for 150 days. Noah was not a shipbuilder by trade; his first foray had to work. For months, he and his family lived in tight quarters and close proximity to animals of every kind. At day five, I would have weighed my options for going overboard, thinking that God had clearly forsaken me.

The narrator of scripture tells us that God remembered Noah (and the family of Noah). God's remembrance speaks of a covenant, an enduring promise that will never be broken no matter how tempest-tossed we are. We can take comfort in God's remembering, but we cannot stop there, for God's remembrance calls us to remember, too.

At every worship gathering, we recite words at the table: "Do this in *remembrance* of me." We remember Jesus to place his gospel at the forefront of our collective consciousness. In this season of Advent, we recall ancient stories to awaken our imaginations with hope for the future God wants and ultimately will have.

As we embody the very best, most beautiful, gospel good news of Jesus Christ, God calls us to remember our neighbors, especially those who are seeking relief amidst the raging flood.

God Who Remembers, ignite our memory and prepare us for the myriad ways in which you arrive. Amen.

TUESDAY

Milca Rivera

Something Better

Hebrews 11:32–40

*Heb 11:40 - God had provided something better for us,
that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

Two years ago, I prepared for several events that occurred in the night sky. Things I knew nothing about, really, but which sounded fascinating! I wanted to see what the big deal was. Most of these events are best viewed late at night or very early in the morning; however, this would require me to keep awake much longer than I am accustomed. I knew that unless I was intentional, I would miss it—the beauty, the wonder, the awe. So, in anticipation of the events, I blocked off distraction-free time. I set the alarm. I rested during the day and kept my coffee hot at night. All so I could make sure to keep awake when it mattered.

During this season, we also prepare in anticipation—not of a beautiful natural phenomenon that will end when the sun comes up, but rather in expectation of the “something better” that God has planned for us. The time when we, along with the men and women of faith who came before us, will be made perfect. We don’t want to miss it because we were distracted or forgetful or unprepared. We certainly don’t want to miss it because we were asleep. So, what are we doing to prepare? What are we doing to keep awake?

God, you have planned something better. Help us keep awake in anticipation of the fulfillment of the promise. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Alan Dicken

The Lord Is on Our Side

Psalm 124

Ps 124:1a - *If it had not been the Lord who was on our side . . .*

This Psalm is sometimes read as a psalm of thanksgiving for Israel's deliverance. The poet focuses not so much on the blessings of safety as on the narrow escape from certain doom. The salvific element—the part where we are saved—in the text is found in the opening line, so important it must be repeated: *"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side...then they would have swallowed us up."*

We must remember that the Lord is always on our side *and* we are often called to be instruments of the Lord. We are called to be the embodiment of love and justice so that people may know that the Lord is on their side. We take this Advent season to prepare for the coming of Christ into the world, and we focus on the hope that the Savior's arrival will bring. How can we go about preparing to be the loving neighbor Christ calls us to be? How can we prepare ourselves to provide hope for others when disaster looms?

God, we know that you are always on the side of those who cry out to you; may we be ready to be instruments of your hope for a world that needs to know that you are always there. Amen.

THURSDAY

Miseon Choi

Being a Shelter for Each Other

Isaiah 4:2-6

Isa 4:6 - It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

The whole world is in shock following the war that Russia caused in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Though the situation was already precarious politically, this incident was even more shocking since people did not anticipate that Russia would actually use military force. Furthermore, Russian troops indiscriminately attacked not only military facilities of Ukraine, but also civilian areas, causing severe damage and violence.

In this situation, many refugees have fled, and children are surviving the sub-zero cold and desperately searching for assistance. Fortunately, many countries have tried to help and protect the millions of refugees, including a disproportionate number of Ukrainian women and children. Throughout the world, national leaders and non-governmental agencies have provided health, hygiene, and emergency educational supplies. They have supplied drinking water to conflict areas, responded to abuse and violence, and provided psychological assistance to children.

This current conflict has provided us with many suggestions as to what true prayers for neighbors in need look like. God in the passage creates smoke, clouds, and lights with burning flames for Israel's recovery. God also provides shade and serves as a shelter to prevent rain and storms. Just like God, for the recovery and well-being of our neighbors, we will also have to face them with action and truth.

We will serve as a shelter for our neighbors as you have done for us. Amen.

FRIDAY

Raiza Spratt

Breathing Hope

Isaiah 40:25–31

*Isa 40:31 - ...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary;
they will walk and not be faint.*

For the last two years, my personal prayer has been a simple breath prayer: *Breathe in Trust, exhale Hope.*

During disaster response work, we share with people the self-care practice of slowly exhaling their tensions as a way to relax. The key of reducing the tension is the slow, deliberate, intentional exhale. I recognize that during emergencies, when we are faced with losing material possessions and quite often are grieving the loss of life, exhaling hope is not the first thing that comes to mind.

Yet part of the church's job is to spread hope. To hope with love in our hearts, reminding people of the hope that is found in the new covenant. Through our actions, we share the news of hope and salvation with the world. In return, hope renews our strength so we don't grow weary. Let's take a deep breath and exhale hope to the world—to fill the world with the good news that serves as our rock and strength.

God of hope, we trust in you and we breathe. We inhale and are filled with the trust that you are our rock and our salvation. We exhale the hope that the world will be filled with your peace and the love that conquers all. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SATURDAY

Vy Nguyen

Connected to Creation

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Ps 72:3-4 - *May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in the righteousness.*

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

Generations of families have settled in a small village in West Pokot, Kenya, using the land to support their community and way of life. Recently, access to water has been scarce as the dry season lengthens. The other extreme is also life threatening—the rainy season produces too much water, causing dangerous flooding. The water from the mountain pours down into the village, drenching crops and destroying much of the vegetation. What was once a land of abundance has turned into a land of extremes and scarcity.

Landscapes are changing in many communities all over the world. Land that once supplied food for generations is now unlivable and dangerous. At one point the land, mountains, and rivers yielded tremendous life. For many communities, that is no longer the reality.

In this season, as we await the coming of Christ, we are reminded of the ways we are connected to creation, to God's people, and to one another. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. explained, "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Indeed, we are tied to one another and to all of creation. When creation hurts, God hurts. When there is hurt and pain, God calls us to stand on the side of creation, with communities that are hurting, and to work for justice.

Holy God, open our hearts to your creation. Remind us of its beauty and our connection to you and to one another. Amen.