

# December 3

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

ISAIAH 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7 • 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9 • MARK 13:33-37

## Encounter Your Reality

*We are the clay and you our potter:  
we are all the work of your hand. ISAIAH 64:7*

“I’m a self-made man,” the candidate proclaimed from the debate stage. “I was born into nothing, handed nothing, and through hard work I built myself up into the person I am today.” His opponent replied with empathy, “How sad for you. Truly, I am sorry. I was God-made in God’s image, and by myself I remain nothing.”

Ego tricks us with the illusion that we create our own lives. When life is sunshine, we really want this to be true. But when hardship or illness hits, we know it’s not. Spirit, on the other hand, reveals the truth that we are created by love, in love, for love, and to love. In other words, we are created in the image and likeness of God.

Advent prepares us to come face to face with this reality. We are invited to encounter divinity not in the trappings of power, wealth, and worldly success but in the vulnerability of a helpless, homeless infant born in the middle of the night. Such is the true nature of everything.

**DAILY PRACTICE** • When you eat today, take a moment to remember that all is gift—the bread you eat, the water and wine you drink, the very air you breathe. Everything that makes your life possible comes through the love of God.

**ADVENT PRAYER** • *Loving Creator, you are the potter and I am the clay. You give me form and substance, and it is your breath of life that makes my heart beat. Teach me to love as you love.*

# December 4

MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK

*Saint John Damascene*

ISAIAH 2:1-5 • MATTHEW 8:5-11

## Encounter Holy Unity

*“Many will come from the east and the west.”*

MATTHEW 8:11

There are about 17,500 species of butterflies in the world. Think about that! It blows my mind. There are more than 20,000 identified species of fish and over 73,000 species of trees. I don't pretend to know the mind of God, but clearly God's plan for creation includes vast and wondrous diversity.

The real beauty is in how it all works in harmony. We walk in the woods and are moved with awe. The oak never tells the maple to be more oakish, nor does the wildflower tell the bumblebee it's not yellow enough. All are welcome, all are needed, all contribute to the unity of God's remarkable and unfolding creation. Even stinkweed.

Advent challenges us to open our eyes and hearts to the wondrous awe of God's full expression in rich splendor. It comes at us from all directions all the time, from east and west, speaking over 7,100 different languages. All is from God and of God, and incarnation unifies all of it.

**DAILY PRACTICE** • Identify at least five different living things in your own environment—plants, pets, people. How do they enrich your life and reveal God's wonderful creation?

**ADVENT PRAYER** • *Creator, Christ, Spirit: your very nature as three-being-One expresses your great diversity. Lead me to encounter the fullness of your revelation in all I meet this day.*

# December 5

TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK

ISAIAH 11:1-10 • LUKE 10:21-24

## Encounter Deep Insight

*“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.”*

LUKE 10:23

As Bruce got out of his car, he noticed how everyone else in the parking lot was looking upward at a bright-red hot air balloon floating across a clear blue sky. It was magical. Then he heard a tap-tap-tap-tap. Looking over, he saw a blind man with a cane approaching the intersection. Without thinking, he dashed over and asked the man if he would welcome assistance crossing the street.

While everyone else was distracted by the sight overhead, Bruce saw an opportunity to aid a vulnerable person. He saw what others didn't. It is ironically all too easy to miss the Christ among us when we are fixated on the heaven above us.

As we prepare to welcome Christ into the grit of our world, we are encouraged to look deeper—not just higher—to see his very real presence among us, around us, and even within us. Blessed indeed are the eyes that see.

**DAILY PRACTICE** • Challenge yourself today. Look into the face of someone you'd normally look past or otherwise avoid. Remind yourself that they love someone, that someone loves them, and that their love is very real.

**ADVENT PRAYER** • *Infant Christ, turned away at the inn and born among the shepherds, open my eyes that I might learn to see you in the most unexpected places and in the most vulnerable faces.*

# December 6

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK

*Saint Nicholas*

ISAIAH 25:6-10A • MATTHEW 15:29-37

## Encounter Possibility

*“How many loaves do you have?”*

MATTHEW 15:34

Tony and I started StreetLights Outreach with two grungy lawn chairs. That’s it. We had no money, no resources, and very little time open on our schedules—ten to midnight on a Friday night. All we had and all we brought to the street corner that first night was ourselves, our presence.

“How many loaves do you have?” Christ asked. “Two lawn chairs and two hours,” we answered. StreetLights Outreach has since grown to an army of volunteers who host block parties that feed hundreds of our homeless, marginalized, lost, and lonely brothers and sisters, and small teams who walk the streets in the evenings to offer positive encounter.

Advent calls us out of our focus on the world’s problems and into an attitude of possibility. Everything we need to love our neighbors is already within us. Are we willing to share it with each other?

**DAILY PRACTICE** • Take inventory today. How many loaves do you have? Choose three items and one loving action you can give to someone else.

**ADVENT PRAYER** • *Giver of All Life and Love, you have created me in your own image and have planted within me the gifts needed to share life and love with others. Open me to a deep awareness of the possibilities and opportunities to bring your joy to the world.*

# December 7

SAINT AMBROSE

ISAIAH 26:1-6 • MATTHEW 7:21, 24-27

## Encounter Real Trust

*Trust in the Lord forever! For the Lord is an eternal Rock.* ISAIAH 26:4

Alberto looked back on his life from the age of 50. He had done everything right—education, career, house, marriage, family, savings, and investments. Still, he was restless and felt as insecure as ever. How could this be? When explaining this to his father, the older man simply and softly quoted Psalm 62: “Only in God will your soul be at rest.”

Indeed! Faith in anything other than the infinite love we call God is an investment in fool’s gold. Everything else is temporary; it can and will be taken from us. Eventually, the mountains will erode and even the sun will burn out. But God’s love endures. It is the source of all peace, joy, security, hope, and mercy in this life and all life ever after.

Incarnation, the birth of Christ, brings this reality into the here and now. We don’t have to wait for it! We can walk with it, hold it, breathe it into our lungs, and share it with each other right here, right now! The only thing holding us back is...what? Fear? Selfishness? Anger? What do we need to let go of in order to accept the light of Christ’s love?

**DAILY PRACTICE** • Take time today to reflect on how you have grown in the past year. How are you wiser? How are you more grateful? How are you more patient with yourself and others?

**ADVENT PRAYER** • *Holy Source of My Life, thank you for not forming me from the shifting sands of perfection but choosing instead to hew me from the steadfast rock of your real and authentic love.*

# December 8

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

GENESIS 3:9–15, 20 • EPHESIANS 1:3–6, 11–12 • LUKE 1:26–38

## Encounter God's Timing

*"May it be done to me according to your word."* LUKE 1:38

My wife, Michelle, asked me the most challenging question of my life when I was only 26 years old: "If building a career is more important to you than having children now, when will family become more important than your career?" Yikes. She called me to align my priorities with my values, and to do so right now, not later, when it would be more convenient.

God's timing in all things, while perhaps cosmically perfect, is often inconvenient. It seldom considers our plans. How much simpler would life be if God would just work the divine agenda around my human agenda? It can be a lot easier to keep life superficial and avoid spiritual depths. That way we can tune out the whispers of the angels in our midst.

Advent awakens us to a realization that the kingdom of God is upon us. Now. Right now. Christmas won't wait for us to finish baking cookies and wrapping gifts. God doesn't call ahead and request an appointment, and love won't wait for us to clear our schedules.

**DAILY PRACTICE** • Say yes to something today—coffee with a neighbor, wine with a friend, a phone call to a family member. Identify something you've been putting off until there is time and do it now.

**ADVENT PRAYER** • *Let your time be my time, and your mission be my mission. Let your priority be my priority, and your joy be my joy. Let your love be my love, and your life be my life.*

# December 9

SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK    *Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin*

ISAIAH 30:19–21, 23–26 • MATTHEW 9:35—10:1, 5A, 6–8

## Encounter Your Spirit Gifts

*The Lord will give you bread in adversity  
and water in affliction.* ISAAH 30:20

“I hate you. You’re so mean!” Paige spoke with the razor sharpness of a thirteen-year-old wrestling with her own emotional power. Jacquie choked back tears as she looked at her daughter. Ugh. Where would she find the strength, the fortitude, and the wisdom to navigate the drama of these early teen years?

Somehow love perseveres. We discover that compassion, patience, forgiveness, mercy, and humility are layered like mortar between the bricks of joy, laughter, delight, gratitude, and awe. Love is like that, simultaneously giving us everything we want and everything we need.

In the middle of the night, in the middle of nowhere, love comes to life in defiance of all odds. When all feels lost, when cold darkness holds a tightening grip, love finds a way. The Holy Spirit inspires. Somehow we find everything we need to love one another as Christ loves us.

**DAILY PRACTICE** • Acknowledge that the hardest things you’ve faced in life stirred something within you that helped you love more deeply. Name them and express gratitude for them.

**ADVENT PRAYER** • *Come, Holy Spirit! Drain from me my arrogance, my stubbornness, and my insecurity, and replace them with the gifts of your strength, your fortitude, and your wisdom.*