

*Join us....*

Mark your calendars for December 3, 2017, at 6 PM, for an Epiclesis tradition and gift to the Sacramento community:



***A beautiful, simple service of  
Advent Lessons and Carols.***

We'll gather at **6 PM** in our Carmichael Chapel for a beautiful service of Scripture, sacred art, music, and some inspiring words from the Church Fathers.

***Our annual service is a lovely way to mark the  
beginning of Advent and the Season of Light.***

**Art and Other Credits:**

Front cover and p 3: "Oh, Bethlehem." Deborah Gall ([www.DeborahGall.com](http://www.DeborahGall.com)).

All Scripture is taken from the New Living Translation.

To learn more about the Church Fathers, including those quoted here, visit [www.AncientFutureFaithNetwork.org](http://www.AncientFutureFaithNetwork.org) and choose "The Chapel."

## Epiclesis

An Ancient-Future Faith Community...

**Worshiping Sundays at 10:30 AM, at the Carmichael Chapel**

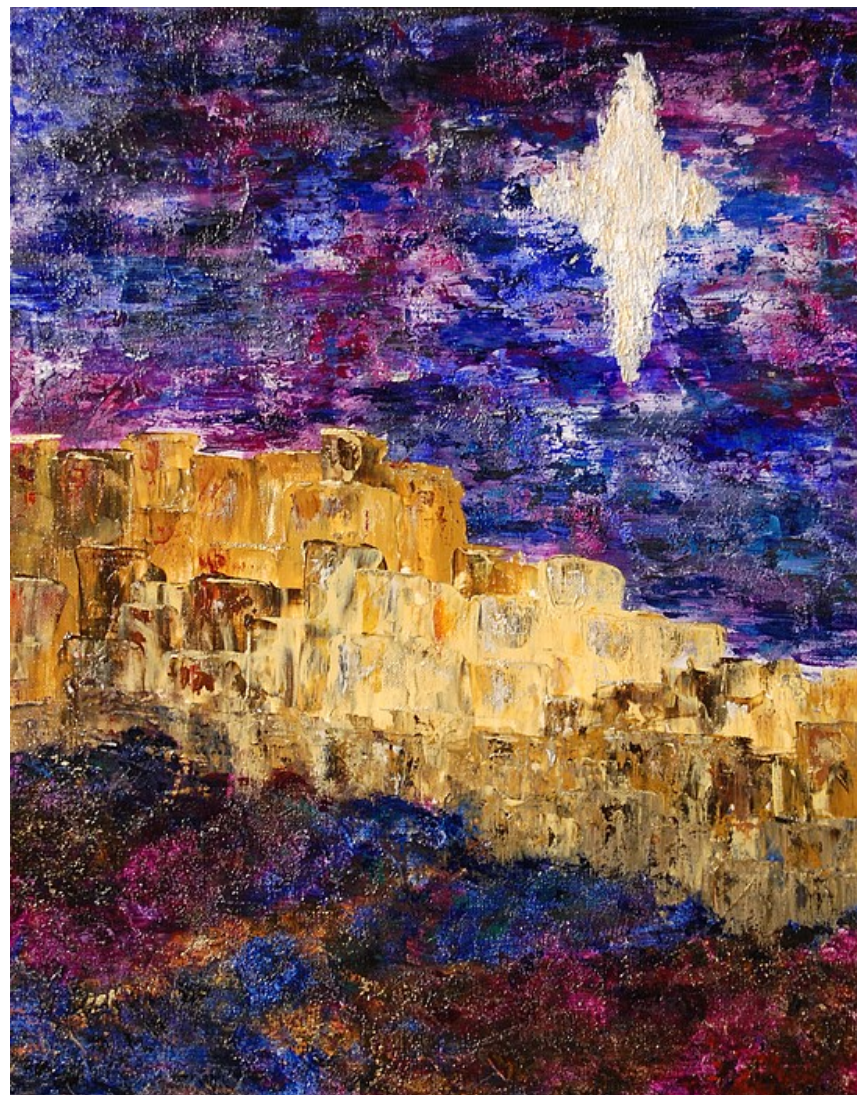
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## Read - Think Pray - Live Advent 2017 Devotional Booklet

Epiclesis: An Ancient-Future Faith Community

# Advent 2017 Devotional Booklet

## Introduction

Have you ever thought about Advent shaping your spirituality? That's a notion I'd love you to ponder especially this Advent season. Worship surely does shape us (at least it ought to), and so do the seasons of the Christian year.

But there's something remarkably counter-cultural about Advent in particular. Our society is an instant one: we expect and demand immediate attention, and we expect and demand near immediate satisfaction. But Advent says "wait." These days no one really wants to wait for anything. Waiting is hard in a culture that is fast and loud.

This Advent season I urge you to slow down the pace, tune out the noise, and ask yourself this important question: What might waiting teach me about the Christ life?

I'm enormously grateful to Pastor Rick for putting this Advent devotional together. As a congregation, we are going to take time to focus on the same set of Scriptures each week and see what the Spirit has to say. Let's linger in the season of Advent, let's listen along the way, and let's discover together what good can come in our spiritual lives from waiting.

*The Lord be with you!*  
Pastor Chris



"Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior— yes, the Messiah, the Lord— has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven,  
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other,

"Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

### And what happens after Advent?

After the preparation time of Advent, and beginning at sundown on Christmas Eve, the Church observes **Christmas**,

*Christmas*

the festival of the birth of Christ and the celebration of the Incarnation. The Christ candle, typically a white candle that often stands in the center of the Advent wreath, is lit on Christmas Eve (or Christmas Day). A 12-day period from December 25 to January 5, and includes either one or two Sundays, Christmas is traditionally signified with the colors white or gold which represent purity and joy.

**He is coming to judge the earth.**  
He will judge the world with justice,  
and the nations with his truth.

#### **Titus 2:11-14**

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.

#### **Luke 2:1-14: A dramatic reading for several voices**

##### **Cast:**

Narrator - Black

Angel - Green

Host of Angels - Red

Shepherds - Blue

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them:

#### **Why do we “do” Advent?**

First, we choose to follow the wisdom of the ancient church and how our spiritual ancestors practiced individual and corporate faith. Second, Advent's themes of waiting and preparation stand opposed to the temptation of a frenetic, consumeristic existence leading up to Christmas. Advent slows us down, roots us in the faithfulness of God, and calls us to the light and life we find in our Savior.

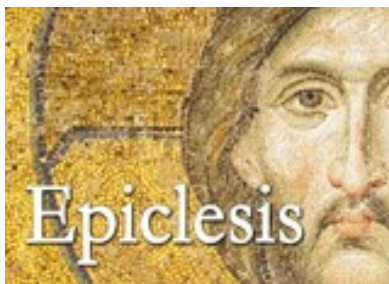
Advent is not about works or earning God's favor. He can't love you any more than he already does because of who Jesus is and what he has done for us! Advent is about our discovering deeper levels of our relationship with God and uniting as a worshipping community to embrace and live out the amazing story of God's great love for us. Advent challenges us to review/renew our baptismal commitment to Jesus and his church. Advent is stepping on the spiritual accelerator pedal of our lives for the next 4 weeks! Are you ready to be changed?

Advent  
2017



## Advent worship at Epiclesis

The season of Advent is a time of waiting— of expectant longing and hope for the coming of the Lord. We often say that Advent bends, or folds, time, bringing together the transcendent reality and redemptive work of the past and future. In this four-week season, we remember that Jesus became incarnate over 2,000 years ago, and we joyfully look forward to the Christmas celebration of the first coming of the Word made flesh. At the same time, we watch and wait expectantly for His second Advent, when He will come again in all His glory and triumphant power at the end of the age. And while we watch and wait, we meditate on the Advent of Christ into our own lives, and we thank Him for calling us into His story. Robert Webber put it this way: “In Advent we celebrate the beginning and ending of Christ’s victory over the powers of evil, and we call upon God to accomplish that victory in our own lives, to break in on us, to be born in our hearts, and to create us anew.”



Our Advent worship reflects our constant watchful expectation that God will break through. As we journey through the four Sundays of the season— Hope, Love, Joy, Peace— the readings, prayers, professions and music direct out hearts and minds to this threefold longing for His coming, and we experience the mystery of Christ anew. In our worship space, you’ll notice the use of the traditional Advent color purple, which calls to mind the royalty of Christ. You’ll see the Advent wreath, with each candle lit in turn, and the tree decorated with Chrismon (“Christ monogram”) ornaments. And, because we are expectantly waiting, we reserve the familiar Christmas carols for the season of Christmas, and our songs and hymns during Advent echo the cry of our hearts: “O Come, O come, Emmanuel!”

*Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!*  
Dr. Ellen Koehler, Pastor of Worship and Liturgy

For a child is born to us,  
a son is given to us.

**The government will rest on his shoulders.**

**And he will be called:**

Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**,  
Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**.

His government and its peace  
will never end.

**He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.**

The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies  
will make this happen!

## Psalm 96

Sing a new song to the Lord!

**Let the whole earth sing to the Lord!**

Sing to the Lord; praise his name.

**Each day proclaim the good news that he saves.**

Publish his glorious deeds among the nations.

**Tell everyone about the amazing things he does.**

Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise!

**He is to be feared above all gods.**

The gods of other nations are mere idols,

**but the Lord made the heavens!**

Honor and majesty surround him;

**strength and beauty fill his sanctuary.**

O nations of the world, recognize the Lord;

**recognize that the Lord is glorious and strong.**

Give to the Lord the glory he deserves!

**Bring your offering and come into his courts.**

Worship the Lord in all his holy splendor.

**Let all the earth tremble before him.**

Tell all the nations, “The Lord reigns!”

**The world stands firm and cannot be shaken.**

He will judge all peoples fairly.

**Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice!**

Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise!

**Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy!**

Let the trees of the forest sing for joy  
before the Lord, for he is coming!

## Devotional Readings for Christmas Eve/Day. "Christ is Born!"



Light of life, you came in flesh,  
born into human pain and joy,  
and gave us power to be your children.  
Grant us faith, O Christ, to see your presence among us,  
so that all of creation may sing new songs of gladness  
and walk in the way of peace. Amen.

### Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walk in darkness  
will see a great light.

**For those who live in a land of deep darkness,  
a light will shine.**

You will enlarge the nation of Israel,  
and its people will rejoice.

**They will rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest  
and like warriors dividing the plunder.**

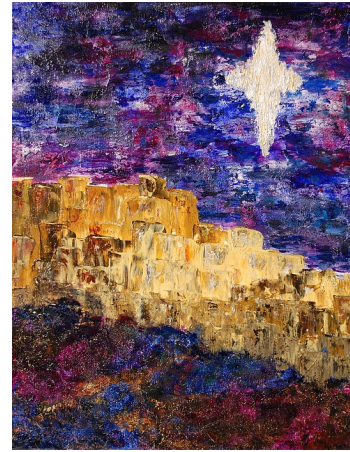
For you will break the yoke of their slavery  
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,  
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

**The boots of the warrior  
and the uniforms bloodstained by war  
will all be burned.**

**They will be fuel for the fire.**

## How to get the most out of this booklet



This booklet is designed for individuals, couples, families or any others who want to explore the richness of the Scriptures together during Advent. You can use this "devo" at breakfast, lunch, dinner, bedtime, or another time that makes sense in your daily schedule. It contains 16 Scripture readings for use leading up to and during Advent (starting Sunday, November 26). It also contains a Christmas eve/day devotional as well.

Each week explores a different theme, and the themes collectively build towards Christmas. Some days have reflections from the ancient Church Fathers to consider as well. You will get the most out of this booklet if you stay committed to it each day. Whether you have 8, 18, or 28 minutes, if you make space daily to hear from God's word, you will be changed and you will be prepared to celebrate Christmas in a fresh new way this year!

### ***After each Scripture reading, you will do 4 simple things:***

**1. Read:** Read the text selected for the day (maybe even 2 or 3 times)

**2. Think:** Ask yourself, "What do I hear, what themes or words stand out to me/us?"

**3. Pray:** Ask God, "What is it you want me/us to discover from these themes/words?"

*\* Take some time to hear God and contemplate the themes/words*

**4. Live:** Ask, "How do I/we live this out practically today?"

*\*HINT: Make notes, write stuff down, add prayer requests.*

*\*\*HINT: Make the "Live" action step measurable and/or tangible.*

One final note: Some days feature both regular and **bold** text. If you are using this devo with two or more people, consider reading out loud on those days.

*May you be blessed in your Advent journey,  
may you discover life and light,  
and may you be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit!*

*The Lord be with you!*

Dr. Rick Asche, Pastor of Intergenerational Discipleship

## 5 Tips for Family Devotions

- Start. Even if you miss a day or week, just start again. Perfection is not the aim; Transformation is. God will honor your efforts even if you feel the time was a “disaster.”
- Choose a time and day and be consistent. Know that you will be challenged as you choose to lead your family in devotions. Pray through Eph 6:9-13. *Dads, what a great opportunity to lead your family.*
- Make it simple and fun! Enjoy your time with your family and don’t sweat the inevitable interruptions. Laugh. Kids attention spans are short so use your time accordingly. A good rule of thumb is that a child’s focus on one thing correlates with their age.
- If your children have a Bible, encourage them to find the passages with you and, if old enough, read some of them for your family devotions.
- Pray a blessing over your child that correlates with the devotional. This might happen in response to your family time or at bedtime or even before they go to school. By adding the physical sense of touch during this prayer, you will be leaving an impression that will last a lifetime.



## Week 4 - Gospel Reading

### Luke 1:46-55

Mary responded, “Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.  
How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

**For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,  
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.**

For the Mighty One is holy,  
and he has done great things for me.

**He shows mercy from generation to generation  
to all who fear him.**

His mighty arm has done tremendous things!

He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

**He has brought down princes from their thrones  
and exalted the humble.**

He has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away with empty hands.

**He has helped his servant Israel  
and remembered to be merciful.**

For he made this promise to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and his children forever.”

READ - THINK - PRAY - *LIVE!*

## Week 4 - Gospel Reading

### Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

*Wonder! God has come among humanity; he who cannot be contained in a womb, the timeless enters time, a great mystery.*  
- John the Monk

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 1 - Hope. "God is Faithful"

(Beginning Sun., Nov. 26)



God of justice and peace,  
from the heavens you rain down mercy and kindness,  
that all on earth may stand in awe and wonder  
before your marvelous deeds.  
Raise our heads in expectation,  
that we may yearn for the coming day of the Lord  
and stand without blame before your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

## Week 1 - Old Testament Reading

### Isaiah 64:1-9

Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down!  
How the mountains would quake in your presence!  
As fire causes wood to burn  
and water to boil,  
your coming would make the nations tremble.  
Then your enemies would learn the reason for your fame!  
When you came down long ago,  
you did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations.  
And oh, how the mountains quaked!  
For since the world began,  
no ear has heard  
and no eye has seen a God like you,  
who works for those who wait for him!  
You welcome those who gladly do good,  
who follow godly ways.  
But you have been very angry with us,  
for we are not godly.  
We are constant sinners;  
how can people like us be saved?  
We are all infected and impure with sin.  
When we display our righteous deeds,  
they are nothing but filthy rags.  
Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall,  
and our sins sweep us away like the wind.  
Yet no one calls on your name  
or pleads with you for mercy.  
Therefore, you have turned away from us  
and turned us over to our sins.  
And yet, O Lord, you are our Father.  
We are the clay, and you are the potter.  
We all are formed by your hand.  
Don't be so angry with us, LORD.  
Please don't remember our sins forever.  
Look at us, we pray,  
and see that we are all your people.

*The brightness of the true light will not be able to be  
seen by unclean sight. - Leo the Great*

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 4 - Epistle Reading

### Romans 16:25-27

Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen.

*Without Christ, nothing is complete,  
because all things are through him. - Ambrosiaster*

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!



## Week 4 - Epistle Reading

### 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

When King David was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all the surrounding enemies, the king summoned Nathan the prophet. "Look," David said, "I am living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of God is out there in a tent!"

Nathan replied to the king, "Go ahead and do whatever you have in mind, for the Lord is with you."

But that same night the Lord said to Nathan,

"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord has declared: Are you the one to build a house for me to live in? I have never lived in a house, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until this very day. I have always moved from one place to another with a tent and a Tabernacle as my dwelling. Yet no matter where I have gone with the Israelites, I have never once complained to Israel's tribal leaders, the shepherds of my people Israel. I have never asked them, "Why haven't you built me a beautiful cedar house?"'

"Now go and say to my servant David, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies has declared: I took you from tending sheep in the pasture and selected you to be the leader of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before your eyes. Now I will make your name as famous as anyone who has ever lived on the earth! And I will provide a homeland for my people Israel, planting them in a secure place where they will never be disturbed. Evil nations won't oppress them as they've done in the past, starting from the time I appointed judges to rule my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.

"Furthermore, the Lord declares that he will make a house for you— a dynasty of kings!

Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever."

*The Holy Spirit breaths where he pleases and when he pleases.*  
- Gregory the Great

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 1 - Psalm Reading

### Psalm 80

Please listen, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph's descendants like a flock.

O God, enthroned above the cherubim,

**display your radiant glory**

to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh.

Show us your mighty power.

**Come to rescue us!**

Turn us again to yourself, O God.

Make your face shine down upon us.

**Only then will we be saved.**

O Lord God of Heaven's Armies,

how long will you be angry with our prayers?

You have fed us with sorrow

and made us drink tears by the bucketful.

You have made us the scorn of neighboring nations.

Our enemies treat us as a joke.

Turn us again to yourself, O God of Heaven's Armies.

Make your face shine down upon us.

**Only then will we be saved.**

Strengthen the man you love,

the son of your choice.

Then we will never abandon you again.

Revive us so we can call on your name once more.

Turn us again to yourself, O Lord God of Heaven's Armies.

Make your face shine down upon us.

**Only then will we be saved.**

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 1 - Epistle Reading

### 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus. Through him, God has enriched your church in every way— with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Everyone who has been planted in the house of the Lord, who has put down roots there, brings forth flowers - Jerome*

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 4 - Peace. “Nothing is Impossible for God”

(Beginning Sun., Dec. 17)



O God of Elizabeth and Mary,  
you visited your servants with news  
of the world's redemption  
in the coming of the Savior.  
Make our hearts leap with joy,  
and fill our mouths with songs of praise,  
that we may announce glad tidings of peace,  
and welcome the Christ in our midst. Amen.

## Week 3 - Gospel Reading

### John 1:6-8, 19-28

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.

This was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" He came right out and said, "I am not the Messiah."

"Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet we are expecting?"

"No."

"Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?"

John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "I am a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Clear the way for the Lord's coming!'"

Then the Pharisees who had been sent asked him, "If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?"

John told them, "I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal."

This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

*For Christ alone walks in the souls and takes his part in the minds of his saints. in which, as on bases of gold and foundations of precious stone the heavenly Word has left his footprints permanently impressed.*  
- Ambrose

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 1 - Gospel Reading

### Mark 13:24-27

"At that time, after the anguish of those days,  
the sun will be darkened,  
the moon will give no light,  
the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory. And he will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the world— from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.

"Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that his return is very near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene before all these things take place. Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

"However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. And since you don't know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert

"The coming of the Son of Man can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his slaves instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. You, too, must keep watch! For you don't know when the master of the household will return— in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at day-break. Don't let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!"

*He (Jesus) will bring both joy and sorrow. The Son of man is coming in the midst of both calamities and promises, both the grief of the nations and the longing of the saints.*  
- Tertullian

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 2 - Love. "Eternal Word"

(Beginning Sun., Dec. 3)



God of timeless grace,  
you fill us with joyful expectation.  
Make us ready for the message that prepares the way,  
that with uprightness of heart and holy joy  
we may eagerly await the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

## Week 3 - Epistle Reading

### 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil.

Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.

*Ministering to the Lord with happiness of mind constitutes the perfect devotion of a just person. - Cassiodorus*

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!



## Week 3 - Psalm Reading

### Psalm 126

When the Lord brought back his exiles to Jerusalem,  
it was like a dream!

We were filled with laughter,  
**and we sang for joy.**

**And the other nations said,**

**“What amazing things the Lord has done for them.”**

Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us!

**What joy!**

Restore our fortunes, Lord,  
as streams renew the desert.

Those who plant in tears  
**will harvest with shouts of joy.**

**They weep as they go to plant their seed,  
but they sing as they return with the harvest.**

READ - THINK - PRAY - *LIVE!*

## Week 2 - Old Testament Reading

### Isaiah 40:1-11

“Comfort, comfort my people,”  
says your God.

“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.

Tell her that her sad days are gone  
and her sins are pardoned.

Yes, the Lord has punished her twice over  
for all her sins.”

Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting,

“Clear the way through the wilderness  
for the Lord!

Make a straight highway through the wasteland  
for our God

Fill in the valleys,  
and level the mountains and hills.

Straighten the curves,  
and smooth out the rough places.

Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,  
and all people will see it together.

The Lord has spoken!”

A voice said, “Shout!”

I asked, “What should I shout?”

“Shout that people are like the grass.

Their beauty fades as quickly  
as the flowers in a field.

The grass withers and the flowers fade  
beneath the breath of the Lord.

And so it is with people.

The grass withers and the flowers fade,  
but the word of our God stands forever.”

O Zion, messenger of good news,  
shout from the mountaintops!

Shout it louder, O Jerusalem.

Shout, and do not be afraid.

Tell the towns of Judah,

“Your God is coming!”

Yes, the Sovereign Lord is coming in power.

He will rule with a powerful arm.

See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd.

He will carry the lambs in his arms,  
holding them close to his heart.  
He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

*The Lord wants to find in you a path by which he can enter into  
your soul and make his journey. Prepare for him the path.*  
- Origen

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

### Week 3 - Old Testament Reading

#### Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me,  
for the Lord has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted  
and to proclaim that captives will be released  
and prisoners will be freed.  
He has sent me to tell those who mourn  
that the time of the Lord's favor has come,  
and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.  
To all who mourn in Israel,  
he will give a crown of beauty for ashes,  
a joyous blessing instead of mourning,  
festive praise instead of despair.  
In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks  
that the Lord has planted for his own glory.  
They will rebuild the ancient ruins,  
repairing cities destroyed long ago.  
They will revive them,  
though they have been deserted for many generations.  
"For I, the Lord, love justice.  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.  
I will faithfully reward my people for their suffering  
and make an everlasting covenant with them.  
Their descendants will be recognized  
and honored among the nations.  
Everyone will realize that they are a people  
the Lord has blessed."  
I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God!  
For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation  
and draped me in a robe of righteousness.  
I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding  
or a bride with her jewels.  
The Sovereign Lord will show his justice to the nations of the  
world.  
Everyone will praise him!  
His righteousness will be like a garden in early spring,  
with plants springing up everywhere.

*Jesus came on behalf of sinners to heal the broken hearted and  
to bandage their wounds.* - Isaac of Nineveh

## Week 3 - Joy! "Hold Fast to Good"

(Beginning Sun., Dec. 10)



God of hope,  
you call us home from the exile of selfish oppression  
to the freedom of justice,  
the balm of healing,  
and the joy of sharing.  
Make us strong to join you in your holy work,  
as friends of strangers and victims,  
companions of those whom others shun,  
and as the happiness of those whose hearts are broken.  
We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Week 2 - Psalm Reading

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

**Lord, you poured out blessings on your land!**

You restored the fortunes of Israel.

**You forgave the guilt of your people—**

yes, you covered all their sins.

**I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying,**

for he speaks peace to his faithful people.

**But let them not return to their foolish ways.**

Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,

**so our land will be filled with his glory.**

Unfailing love and truth have met together.

**Righteousness and peace have kissed!**

Truth springs up from the earth,

**and righteousness smiles down from heaven.**

Yes, the Lord pours down his blessings.

**Our land will yield its bountiful harvest.**

Righteousness goes as a herald before him,

**preparing the way for his steps.**

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 2 - Epistle Reading

### 2 Peter 3:8-15

But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.

And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight.

And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him.

*The Lord does not delay the promise. A little while and we shall see him, where we shall no more ask anything. - Augustine*

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!

## Week 2 - New Testament Reading

### Mark 1:1-8

This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written:

"Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
and he will prepare your way.  
He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the LORD's coming!  
Clear the road for him!'"

This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

John announced: "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am— so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

*Prepare in your hearts, the way of the Lord, by a worthy manner of life. Keep straight the path of your life, so that the words of the Lord may enter in with out hindrance. - Origen*

READ - THINK - PRAY - LIVE!