Come, hou ong-Expected Jesus

An Alvent Devotional for 2025

Welcome to Advent.

As we come to the end of a challenging year in the United States, the promise of a Savior feels more needed than ever. In Charles Wesley's Advent hymn, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus", the author acknowledges the longing of creation for redemption. Advent is the season when we prepare for Jesus' birth, as well as the time when we focus on God's promises of wholeness and hope for the whole cosmos through God's reign coming to fruition.

As we walk with the Holy Family toward Bethlehem, we notice signs of God's reign come near in the gifts of hope, freedom, and joy. May this weekly devotional offer you and yours moments of rest and reflection along the way. We invite you to engage these writings with candles, a Bible, and a comfortable space. The appointed scripture readings are not included in the text; please read them in your Bible before reading the reflections. Thank you for walking with us this Advent.

God be with you, Reverends Allison, Delaney, Eli, and Juniper

"Born to Set Thy People Free" Sunday, November 30 Isaiah 2:1-5

Can you imagine a world without weapons? Can you imagine a world where we have zero tools and ways to harm one another and be harmed by someone else? Can you imagine a world where no nation is at war with another, where differing peoples do not quarrel, where the only thing lifted toward another is a helping hand? This is a difficult thing to imagine. It seems almost impossible given the world in which we live. We are aware of the strife, war, and violence present in our own lives, in our communities, and in the world. These words from Isaiah seem ridiculous. And yet, these are the words God wants God's people to hear and receive. These words from the prophet cast a vision – God's vision – of what this world can be, could be. The violence we see and experience is not what God intended in the past, nor is it what God intends for the future of God's world (the world God so loves). Isaiah's words remind us that we are a people created in the image of a God of peace, of a God who transforms weapons into tools for harvest and plenty. When we read "come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!" it is an invitation to drop our weapons and work for the reign God hopes for all of us. So, people of God, come, for God is inviting us.

Reflection Questions

How can you advocate and work for peace in your community? Where is peace possible?

Where is God's reconciling love currently at work in your life or in the world?

"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" Wednesday, December 3 Matthew 24:36-44

I was assigned a book in school, where, after well over 100 pages, it was revealed that nothing I was reading about may have happened to the characters at all—it might have been only a dream. I was furious! I felt like my time had been wasted! But I wonder how often we find ourselves living our lives like that. We can spend our days going through the motions, until we start forgetting about things. Did I send my friend a card after her surgery, or only think about doing so? What (and with whom) did I eat dinner last Friday? The details become fuzzy because we aren't paying attention. And we have good reason not to be. Every day the news is filled with things that we do not want to remember, and they are all things that we feel helpless to do anything about. Poverty, environmental destruction, war, violence, and cruelty are so common we tune them out. Jesus reminds us that the people in Noah's day were doing the same thing—sleepwalking through their lives to ignore what they did not want to face—and were taken by surprise when God finally did something about it. Jesus exhorts us to wake up! We can face even the hard parts of life when we are fully awake and on the look-out for where God is at work. When we are awake, we see God in places we didn't expect, and find hope and joy in God's presence with us and in the world.

Reflection Questions

Let's practice wakefulness this Advent. Try to remember at least one place, person, or situation where you saw God each day. Where was God and what was God doing?

How might God be calling you to respond?

"Dear Desire of Every Nation" Sunday, December 7 Isaiah 11:1-19

Throughout the season of Advent, the Revised Common Lectionary offers us glimpses of the world as God intends through the words of the prophet Isaiah. The people to whom Isaiah is sent have been taken far from all that they once knew and now find themselves in the disorienting spaces of exile. They know the pain of deportation; they are well acquainted with the violence of an aggressor. So, when Isaiah begins to dream aloud of a time when relationships between predator and prey will be renegotiated and all will live side by side, I wonder how the people felt.

Although we may not have been carried away to Babylon, chances are most people can relate to the feelings of exile at one time or another. Many of us know how it feels to be pursued by an aggressor, made to feel afraid. For many people, this experience comes to life in violent and abusive relationships within which the pursuit is real and the aggressor is powerful. For others, feelings of exile come in more metaphorical ways, when we are rejected or cast out from the places we have known. Wherever you may find yourself this season, these words from Isaiah remind us that God's dream for creation is one of peace, where no one will "hurt or destroy on all God's holy mountain."

Reflection Questions

Where is God's dream coming to life in our midst?
In what ways are predator and prey resting side by side?
How does this miraculous reimagination of relationships come to life among us?

"Now Thy Gracious Kingdom Bring" Wednesday, December 10 Matthew 3:1-12

Location. Location. Notice where John the Baptist shows up to announce the closeness of God's kingdom. Not in the city. Not in a royal palace. Not in the places occupied by leadership. Not even in the temple. It is in the wilderness where John goes to announce this good news, but this wilderness isn't the pretty State or National Parks to which many of us are accustomed. This wilderness isn't marked by beautiful hiking trails, waterfalls, scenic views, and birding. The wilderness to which John the Baptist goes is one of desolation, barrenness, uncertainty. This wilderness is untamed, unkept. And yet, this is the place God sends God's messenger with the news of the coming kingdom. God sends John (a somewhat 'unkept' person himself) into a place one might least expect God's love to show up. John and his message invite us into the surprising ways God moves around us, for God can show up places that seem unworthy. God shows up in unlikely places. God shows up in and through unlikely people and things. John's proclamation helps to reorient us this Advent season, too, as we wait for Jesus to come again. Might John's call shift our gaze toward the people and places we least expect God to be.

Reflection Questions

Where do you normally anticipate God's presence to show up?

Where might you least expect God's love to be?

Who might be an unlikely or unexpected beacon of God's love in your life, community?

"Born Thy People to Deliver" Sunday, December 14 Isaiah 35:1-10

This idyllic scene in Isaiah is somewhat unexpected, coming directly on the heels of a much bleaker passage detailing God's wrath and subsequent destruction on earth. This interruption abruptly shifts the audience's focus from despairing over what is wrong in the world, to a more hopeful focus on God's promises to God's people.

This unexpected message reminds the hearers (both us and the original audience) that while they may be facing challenges right now, God's mercy is bigger than anything we face on this earth. God's love is stronger than anything we can imagine. God has the creative power to turn dry deserts into lush springs, to open the eyes of the blind and strengthen those who have grown weak. Just as God can create a path in the wilderness, God can revitalize lands that have been depleted, repurpose buildings that have been abandoned, and can lead us back into community when we have been lost. God does not abandon God's people, and in fact God promises to walk with us through every challenge we face, never leaving us until we reach the promised land of peace and restoration.

Reflection Questions

Where do you see hope and healing coming in the aftermath of destruction?

How might God be inviting you to proclaim hope in your own life and community?

"Joy of Every Longing Heart" Wednesday, December 17 Matthew 11:2-11

John the Baptist is in prison, likely quite worried about what will happen next for him. Maybe John is wondering if all the preparation he has done for the Messiah – for Jesus – had been worth it. John sends word to Jesus asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" John is wondering if Jesus is the one to bring about the change John and the people so desperately wanted, needed. Jesus could have been put off, annoyed, or offended by John's question, but that is not what we read in Scripture. Jesus responds by inviting John – and his followers – to look around. Pay attention. Notice. What is happening in their midst? What has Jesus actually been up to? It can be easy to get sucked into the yucky, terrible, scary, and hard things happening in our midst and in the world. It can be easy for the evil and sin of the world to cloud our vision, making it difficult to see any hope. Jesus' words to John (and us) invite us to notice. Even in the midst of war, depression, loneliness, and death, God's love finds a way. The sin of the world does not drown out God's grace, healing, and mercy from making their way. God's love is stubborn, like a weed poking through the concrete; it will find a way even in the midst of trouble.

Reflection Questions

What has given you hope this Advent season?
Where have you noticed healing and/or restored relationships?
Where can God's grace work through you in the world of which we are a part?

"Born a Child and Yet a King" Sunday, December 21 Isaiah 7:10-16

I wonder if King Ahaz himself even knew how to refuse evil and choose what is good. The problem for Ahaz, and for most of us, is that if we were asked to name what is "good" we would find that our idea of "good" and God's idea of "good" are not really the same. What was "good" for Ahaz was his kingdom, which he was desperate to protect from enemies, and he was looking for assurance that it would not be destroyed. We all deliberately choose what is evil if we think we are defending what is good—and all too often our "good" is simply a collection of tangible things we think we have earned. The name of the baby to be born in Isaiah is "Immanuel" which means "God with us." Years after Ahaz, Jesus, "God with us," did choose what was good —and the world's kings and leaders put him to death because his "good" was not the preservation of their kingdoms and power. King Ahaz, and we, are called to a deeper "good" than anything we can get for ourselves in our earthly lives—and we are given this good freely because God already chose what is good for us and for all creation. "Immanuel," "God with us" is true, because Jesus refused evil once and for all by rising from the dead. God chooses for us what is goodwe are called to look beyond the world's definition of what is good and experience what is truly good in our lives.

Reflection Questions

What, for you, is truly good?

How do you discern the difference between good and evil in your life? How does God help you know and choose what is good?

"From Our Fears and Sins Release Us" Wednesday, December 24 Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph was a righteous man-at least that's what Matthew says. A "righteous" person in the scheme of the Gospel of Matthew likely refers to an observant Jewish person, someone who strives to follow the law and live in accordance with scripture and tradition. So, when he finds out his intended is pregnant, Joseph knows the baby isn't his. After all, pregnancy before marriage is certainly not righteous. So, the author tells us, Joseph decides to dismiss Mary quietly. He doesn't want to harm her, but he certainly can't marry her...right? There are so many ways that we too strive for righteousness, trying our best to do everything right and secure our identity as "good people." But what happens when doing what our culture expects moves us further away from God's hopes and calling in our lives? I sincerely hope and trust that is when God intervenes. In the story of Joseph, God sends a messenger, who encourages Joseph to go against the grain of societal expectations and participate in God's story of salvation. God helps Joseph to take a risk and bring the savior to birth.

Reflection Questions

Where might you be experiencing the pressure to conform?
What are some rules and expectations that society places on your life, and when might God be interrupting those patterns to help you take risks and follow faithfully?

"Hope of all the Earth Thou Art" Christmas Day

Isaiah 9:2-7

For us this is literally the darkest time of year, with more hours of darkness than daylight. The cold and the dark can feel never-ending. When we add to these short days and long nights the stress of family preparations for the holidays, times of ill-health, strained bank accounts, and stories of violence, political division, and war that seem to continue with no hope of peace, the darkness can truly feel like a weight. And then, Christmas comes. Christmas comes right into the midst of all that darkness, overwhelming us with surprising light, joy, love, and peace. The opening verses in this Isaiah reading remind me of the shepherds in Luke, hired hands keeping watch over the flocks in the chill of night, not knowing if they will have enough to eat for the next day or where their next job will be. And right in the midst of that darkness, the bright light of the angels appears, so amazingly joyful and brilliant it momentarily blinds and terrifies them before they can hear the good news. This Isaiah reading shows us how Jesus' birth changes everything—how his presence with us is like a warm light being burst upon a cold, pitch black room. In the midst of the cold, the dark, and all our sources of stress, struggle, and sorrow, Jesus is born. The light has been turned on! Look around, know the peace and joy his presence brings us, hear and share this good news! Merry Christmas!

Reflection Questions

How does Jesus' presence with you help you to "see" through times of darkness in your life?

What has brought you the most joy this holiday season? How can you hang on to that joy throughout the year?

What part of your life feels the most filled with light? How could you share that light with others?

"Born to Reign in us Forever" Christmas Day John 1:1-4

I love the opening lines to John's gospel. "In the beginning" naturally recalls the creation story in Genesis 1, and reminds us that what we are about to hear is a continuation of the story that has been going on since the beginning of time. In the beginning, God created...everything. And as God created, the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word we are about to receive in this Gospel is not some human creation, but is God's own self. As we proclaim the birth of Jesus Christ in the world, we also recognize that Jesus the Word has been present all along, since the beginning. If we continue reading to verse 14, we read that the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. God has demonstrated God's faithfulness to the people throughout the Old Testament, leading them through the wilderness and delivering them to the promised land, providing signs and miracles to demonstrate God's unwavering love for a wandering nation. But now, the Creator takes it one step further by living with and among the people as one of them, being born into the world and taking on a human body with all its flaws and imperfections. We worship a God who is infinitely powerful, yet who chooses to live on earth, as one of us, taking on our sorrows and joys, our challenges and our pain.

Reflection Questions

How is your story connected to those who have come before? What might God be creating in your life that proclaims a good Word?

All-powerful and unseen God, the coming of your light into our world has brightened weary hearts with peace. Call us out of darkness, and empower us to proclaim the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

God bless you in this joyful season!