

**Advent Week 2**  
**Sunday, December 6 - Saturday, December 12**

**Sunday, December 6**

*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. (Isaiah 40: 1-2)*

I long for God's comfort. I long to hear God speak tender words to me. How about you? I think we've all had a lot of discomfort and heard harsh words spoken in the noise of our current world. We're all just trying to hang on to whatever hope we can muster. We're tired, frustrated, sick, grieving, angry and a whole host of other emotions. This year has taken a toll on us and we long for the comfort and tenderness of God. Advent is the perfect season for all those emotions. As we wait and watch for the coming of the Savior, we are reminded again and again that God does not leave us and will always make a way in the wilderness of our lives. A poem by Ted Loder tells us how to prepare ourselves to experience God's presence.

How silently,  
how silently  
the wondrous gift is given.

I would be silent now,  
Lord,  
and expectant. . .  
that I may receive  
    the gift I need,  
        so I may become  
            the gift others need.

**Question to ponder:** What do you need to do in order to be silent and receive the gift you need so you can become the gift others need?

*As you light the first and second candles of Advent, I invite you to pray:*

Holy God, comfort us, speak tenderly to us and help us to prepare our hearts and souls to be silent so we may hear all you want to say to us. Help us to own all our emotions of this turbulent year and to allow you to hold them with us. Take what is hurtful and devastating and give us your peace, which surpasses all our understanding. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Psalm 85

John 11: 17-27



## Monday, December 7

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-17)*

It is good to go back to the basics of our faith from time to time. “Rejoice. Pray. Give thanks.” These seem so rudimentary to those who have been faithful Christians for many years. But, I think that is exactly why we need to be reminded. It’s easy to forget the basics when we are so caught up in the stresses and strains of life.

Have you ever experienced a time in your faith journey when it felt that God was far away from you? When you seemed to be surrounded by the darkness of doubt and longed for the light of the world. If you are experiencing that now, remember the three basic tenets that St. Paul encouraged the Christians in Thessalonica to do: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances—for that is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

**Question to ponder:** What circumstances do you find yourself in today for which God wants you to “rejoice, pray, and give thanks?”

*As you light the first and second candles of Advent, I invite you to pray:*

Holy Spirit, we pray that you will calm our hearts and quiet our minds so that we can listen to all you want to say to us. Help us to look honestly at our circumstances and to come to you rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

### Suggested Scripture Readings

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24

Psalm 136

John 8:12

## **Tuesday, December 8**

*Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps. (Psalm 85: 10-13)*

Talitha Arnold writes, “Both Bethlehem’s manger and Calvary’s cross are signs of salvation for us. But so is the life lived in between, in all the ways Jesus made flesh those words of love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace. Moreover, for Christians, salvation is not just believing in Jesus Christ, but embodying what He embodied in this world. When steadfast love and faithfulness meet in our lives, when righteousness and peace embrace in our business practices, our family relations, or our nation’s policies, God’s salvation is near at hand. When we work for justice, we make way for God in our world.”

**Question to ponder:** In what ways are you embodying what Jesus embodied?

*As you light the first and second candles of Advent, I invite you to pray:*

Holy God, help me to live between the manger and the cross, so the Word made flesh may dwell within my spirit. Show me the path of love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace and give me the courage to walk in it. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

### **Suggested Scripture Readings**

Psalm 72

Romans 15: 4-13

## Wednesday, December 9

*In the 15th year of the ring of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Luke 3: 1-3*

St. Luke gives us an exact time in history when God spoke to John the Baptist, calling him to be the prophet who would prepare the way for the coming Messiah. Historians differ on the date, but many believe it was around 28-29 AD. John the Baptist was only a few months older than Jesus, so John did not prepare the way for Jesus to be born, but John prepared the way for Jesus to begin His earthly ministry by being baptized in the River Jordan. We always look at John's ministry, though, during Advent as a way for us to focus on how we can prepare the way in our own lives to receive the gift of the newborn Savior.

St. Luke wrote that John was in the wilderness when God spoke to him. The "wilderness" is commonly used as an image for a time of spiritual struggle, which often leads to an even closer relationship with God. It is often a time when our faith is tested and a time when our faith is strengthened so we can do what God has called us to do. We see in the ministry of John the Baptist how God prepared John so John could prepare the way for Jesus.

**Question to ponder:** Have you experienced a wilderness time and how did that time change you?

*As you light the first and second candles of Advent, I invite you to pray:*

Holy and life-giving God, we thank you for John the Baptist, whom you met in the wilderness and called him to prepare the way for Jesus. When we are experiencing the "wilderness," be with us, strengthen us, give us patience, and help us to know that, whenever we struggle, you are with us through it all. For this we give you thanks and praise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Suggested Scripture Readings

Mark 1: 1-8

Isaiah 35: 1-10

### Thursday, December 10

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. (John 1: 6-7)*

I love the gospel of John. Every word has a deeper meaning and the stories in his gospel convey profound truths. In the first chapter of John we read the beautiful words of Jesus' incarnation—John's version of the birth of Jesus. John's theme of light and dark is used to help us understand that the darkness of sin and death will not have the final word. The light of Jesus is unquenchable and will shine for everyone.

The one who is called to proclaim this truth was John the Baptist. He is the one God needed to "testify to the light, so that all might believe through him." John knew what he was called to do and did exactly that. He didn't try to divert people's attention to himself; he didn't inflate his importance or deny the truth of his mission.

When John was asked in chapter 1, verse 22, "Who are you? What do you say about yourself?" John answered, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. When John was further pressed by the Pharisees, he responded, "Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." John knew who he was and who he was not; what God called him to do and what God called him not to do. Sometimes it's even harder to "not do" something than it is to do it.

**Question to ponder:** What are some things that God has **not** called you to do? Have there been times when you have struggled with not being called to do something that you really wanted to do?

*As you light the first and second candles of Advent, I invite you to pray:*

Loving God, allow us to hear clearly what you have called us to do. Give us courage each day to do what you need us to do and to allow others to do what you have called them to do. Thank you also for the ministry of John the Baptist and for all who have made straight the way to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### Suggested Scripture Readings

John 1: 19-28

Romans 12: 9-21

### **Friday, December 11**

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

(Isaiah 11: 1-2)

The words of Isaiah 11:2 probably sound familiar. They are part of a prayer spoken during the service of Holy Baptism, just after the child is baptized. Isaiah is speaking about the long-awaited Savior, an offspring of Jesse, the father of King David. We know those words to be about Jesus, the one we embrace as our Savior, the One we worship and the One whose life we try to emulate. In baptism, we are claimed as a child of God and filled with His Holy Spirit. Because the spirit of the Lord rests on us, we are given the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear (awe) of the Lord.

I wonder if we take those words seriously when we pray that over the child or person just baptized? When you read those words, do you realize that you were given all that and more when you were baptized? Yes, the spirit of the Lord rests upon you.

**Question to ponder:** In what ways do you embrace the gifts given to you by God at your baptism?

*As you light the first and second candles of Advent, I invite you to pray:*

Gracious God, thank you for welcoming me into your family through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. You have washed away my sins and made me your child. Help me to live my life trusting in your promises and to remember that your spirit rests upon me, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear (awe) of the Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Isaiah 11: 1-9

Mark 1: 9-11





## Saturday, December 12

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. Psalm 126*

The people remembered when God did great things for them. In fact, it was so wonderful that it felt as though they were dreaming (vs. 1). The people could never have hoped for such a thing even during their waking hours. Sometimes we don't as much remember what we dreamt about as much as we remember the feeling the dream left us with. Benjamin Howard writes, "The important thing is the feeling of the dream, the unexpected and unimagined coming into existence. The people were so shocked that things could get better that it was no longer a hope, it was a dream. But then God made that dream a reality."

This Psalm is a "now, and not yet" kind of psalm. The people are rejoicing, but they also need God to help those who are still hurting. The Lord restored the fortunes of many people, but they need God to restore the fortunes of all people. Their salvation has come in part, but not in full. They celebrate the justice they have received and hope for justice to come.

Advent reminds us that the salvation we have received is only a glimpse of God's love and mercy. We experience the "now and not yet" of celebrating the coming of Jesus our Savior as a newborn babe and we look forward to when He comes again to take us all home.

**Question to ponder:** What dream would you like God to make into a reality?

*As you light the first and second candles of Advent, I invite you to pray:*

Holy God, continue to work within us, to help us remember the great things you have done for us—and help us to rejoice in all that has been. Then strengthen our faith to work for all that can be. Be with those who sow in tears and who go out weeping. May they feel your love and grace calling them home with shouts of joy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Joel 2: 18-32

Luke 17: 11-19

