

Advent Week 1
Sunday, November 29 - Saturday, December 5

Sunday, November 29

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down. . . (Isaiah 64:1a)

So begins the season of Advent. We often think of Advent as a time of waiting passively for the Lord; biding our time until we can celebrate the birth of Jesus our Messiah. But there is nothing passive about these words from the prophet Isaiah. When I read these words, I not only visualize God tearing open the heavens, I can also feel the urgency and intense emotion of the prophet deeply longing for the Lord. It reminds me of a parent trying desperately to reach his or her child who is crying out in pain. I picture God tearing open the heavens to come to His children who so desperately need Him.

Question to ponder: What is happening in your life today that you need God to tear open the heavens and come down?

During Advent, it is tradition to light candles on an Advent wreath. If you don't have one, you can simply find 4 candles (optional). One candle is lit each week.

As you light the first candle, you are invited to pray this prayer:

Almighty God, who came to us long ago in the birth of Jesus Christ, be born in us anew today by the power of your Holy Spirit. We offer our lives as home to you and ask for grace and strength to live as your faithful, joyful children always. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Isaiah 64: 1-8

Mark 13: 24-37

Monday, November 30

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. . . and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Messiah. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations. (Matthew 1: 1-2, 16-17)

I love the PBS show, *Finding Your Roots* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. I find it fascinating to see the lineages of his guests and their reaction to where those lineages lead. Some lead to places the guests wish they hadn't. But lineages are important. Our roots may not define who we are, but they help us know some of the struggles and successes our ancestors experienced.

The gospel of Matthew begins with the lineage of Jesus our Savior. How many of you have read the first seventeen verses of chapter one? It's not very exciting to read, but important to know. We often begin our reading of Matthew's gospel with verse 18, where the angel appears to Joseph telling him that Mary was pregnant from the Holy Spirit and was going to give birth to the Savior of the world.

An article in my *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* reads, "Ancient Jewish genealogies had several purposes. One was often to highlight the purity of one's Israelite ancestry. It is thus striking that Matthew includes in his genealogy four women who had clear associations with Gentiles (Mt. 1: 3,5,6). These women include three ancestors of King David, and the mother of King Solomon; Matthew thus highlights God's welcome for God-fearing Gentiles already in his opening paragraph, based on Israel's history.

"Another purpose of Biblical genealogies was to provide a connection between significant generations. Genesis does not narrate the activities of every generation between Adam and Noah or between Noah and Abraham. Rather, Genesis focuses on those major figures and summarizes the line between them by

listing others. In the same way, Matthew lists many generations, here in schematic groups of roughly 14 each, connecting the most momentous occasions in Israel's history: Abraham, David, the exile, and now the Messiah."

Question to ponder: How has your lineage shaped you through the years?

As you light the first candle of Advent, you are invited to pray this prayer:

Holy God, we are connected in more ways than we can ever imagine with those who sit beside us as well as those who live across the continents. Let our lives reflect your love for all people and help us all to work for peace in our world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Psalm 80

2 Timothy 1: 1-7

Tuesday, December 1

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. _Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. (2 Peter 3: 8-15a)

Wednesday, December 2

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness." (Jeremiah 33: 14-16)

The days are surely coming. . . During this time of Covid-19, I've said that often, "Surely this is almost over. Surely the days are coming when life will return to normal." So, how very fitting that, during Advent, we continue to wait. Yet I feel a sense of expectancy as doctors and scientists near the completion of a vaccine. I feel a sense of relief and hope, which has long been missing since the middle of March.

During Advent, we wait with expectation and hope for He who was, is, and is yet to come. We wait and watch and pray, knowing that God will save us and we will live in safety—because the Lord is righteous and is our righteousness.

Question to ponder: What days are you hoping and praying are surely coming?

As you light the first candle of Advent, you are invited to pray this prayer:

Gracious God, deliver us from anxiety and help us to put our hope in the days that are surely coming, days where the righteous Branch of David will bring justice and righteousness to this land. In His name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Psalm 37



Thursday, December 3

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Revelation 3:20)

Ole Hallesby was a Norwegian Lutheran theologian who wrote the classic book on prayer simply titled, *Prayer*. He writes, "I doubt that I know of a passage in the whole Bible which throws greater light upon prayer than this one does. It is, it seems to me, the key which opens the door into the holy and blessed realm of prayer. To pray is to let Jesus come into our hearts. This teaches us that it is not our prayer which moves the Lord Jesus. It is Jesus who moves us to pray. He knocks. Thereby He makes known His desire to come in to us. Our prayers are always a result of Jesus knocking at our hearts' doors.

"It is not our prayer which draws Jesus into our hearts. Nor is it our prayer which moves Jesus to come in to us. All Jesus needs is access. He enters in of His own accord because He desires to come in. And He enters in wherever He is not denied admittance. As air enters in quietly when we breathe, and does its normal work in our lungs, so Jesus enters quietly into our hearts and does His blessed work there."

Question to ponder: Is Jesus knocking and does Jesus have access to your heart?

As you light the first candle of Advent, you are invited to pray this prayer:

Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. During this Advent season, help me to respond to your knock so you come into my life in an ever deepening way. Clear away all the noise and distractions of the holidays that keep me from responding to your invitation to join you in this life of faith. In your name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture readings

Revelation 3: 14-22

Philippians 4: 4-7

Friday, December 4

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13:32-33)

The Coming of God by Ann Weems

Our God is the One who comes to us
in a burning bush,
in an angel's song,
in a newborn child.

Our God is the One who cannot be found
locked in the church,
not even in the sanctuary,

Our God will be where God will be
with no constraints,
no predictability.

Our God lives where our God lives,
and destruction has no power
and even death cannot stop
the living.

Our God will be born where God will be born,
but there is no place to look for the One who comes to us.

When God is ready
God will come
even to a godforsaken place
like a stable in Bethlehem.

Watch. . .
for you know not when
God comes.

Watch, that you might be found
whenever
wherever
God comes.

Question to ponder: What does it look like for you to watch for the coming of God?

As you light the first candle of Advent, you are invited to pray this prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want so deeply to keep watch, for I know that you are coming. But, I get so distracted by my own agenda and I can be so arrogant that I feel no need to keep watch. I say to myself, "I know what I am waiting for!" Help me to keep watch and to recognize You not only in a stable in Bethlehem, but in my next door neighbor, in the person I dislike, in the ones I am afraid of, and in everyone who walks this earth. In your holy name I pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Mark 13: 32-37

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11



Saturday, December 5

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths. (Micah 4:1-2a)

Advent is a time that can prompt us to rethink the path we are on, especially when the days grow dark and the nights are long. We have a lot of time to think—sometimes too much time (which is not a good thing for over-thinkers). Have you ever wondered if the path in life you are on is the path you are supposed to be on? I think that's why the prophet Micah urged people to go up to the mountain. You can get a really great view of what's around you from on top of a mountain. I don't think this is a literal mountain—which is good for us mountain-less people in Wisconsin. I think this mountain can be any place where you stop and take stock of your life. "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord. . . that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths."

Look at the prominent figures in the story of Jesus' birth: Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, Anna and Simeon. They were on a path that led them to the mountain of the Lord. They became part of God's salvation story for all people because they opened themselves up to God that God may teach them His ways, so they could walk in His paths.

Question to ponder: How can you open yourself up to God that God may teach you His ways, so you can walk in His paths?

As you light the first candle of Advent, you are invited to pray this prayer:

Holy God of mountains and valleys, of hills and prairies: lead us to places where we can speak to you in profound ways, where we can pour out our heart and bare our soul. We want only to be on the path you have set for us. Lead us and guide us so we may walk in your name forever and ever. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Micah 4: 1-5

Proverbs 3: 1-10

John 15: 9-11

