

Anticipation

A devotional preparation for Christmas





Anticipation

An Advent devotional resource from your friends at

*Redemption Lutheran Church
Watertown, NY*

www.nnyredemption.com

ADVENT RESOURCES

Visit www.nnyredemption.com/advent for more Advent resources.

ADVENT MUSIC

*Visit our Spotify account ([nnyredemption](#)) to listen to the songs in this devotion. The playlist is called *Advent 2017*.*

Advent

By the time December rolls around many of us are ready for a fresh start. Sure, in the midst of the grittiness of life, Christmas acts as a nice diversion from normal day to day activities. Yet by the time we hit the twelfth month in the year many of us are ready to turn the page on the current year and start fresh. Some years may be tougher than others. Some might be more of a slog than others. But each year we are confronted with frustration and disappointment; pain and heartbreak.

And then enters Advent. Advent literally means “coming.” Advent is the season for the for four Sundays preceding Christmas. Advent is more than just a nice diversion of day to day activities, because it prepares us for the arrival of Jesus Christ. Advent extends us a promise that hope in the flesh is coming. Advent assures us that there is an answer for our frustration, disappointment, pain, and heartbreak even if we have to wait.

Advent is a time to stop and breathe. It's a time to read the Scriptures and evaluate ourselves and our past 11 months against its message. Sound scary? Maybe it is because maybe we will discover things about ourselves that we would rather not discover. At the same time it is beautiful because it points us towards the one who is coming to restore not only our broken hearts but our very souls. It points us towards the one who will come and put our waiting to an end.

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 3 - December 9

PREPARE FOR A SAVIOR

ADVENT WREATH

Light the first candle then continue with the reading and devotion.

READING

Genesis 3:8-15

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

DEVOTION

If I were Adam my heart would have been pounding so much I could have felt it in my throat. When God came into the garden for a visit Adam was forced to come to as full realization of what he had done. So much so that he was confronted with his own fear. Fear was a new sensation. It was something he had never experienced before this moment and because he was afraid he ran to hide from his creator.

Though he used his nakedness as an excuse for hiding from his God, his nakedness, shame, and fear were only symptoms of his now deeper problem. They were afraid because Adam and Eve now understood sin and evil by experience. As they grasped that fruit they took God's perfect creation and ruined it.

Yet in the midst of chaos, evil, fear, sorrow, and pain God gave Adam and Eve hope. There would be hostility between Adam and Eve and Satan instead of between them and God. The same was true of their offspring. There would be hostility between them and Satan instead of between them and God. God would make them his friends once again. Instead of a curse, God offered Adam and Eve a promise.

Advent must begin in that garden before we can make our way to a manger in Bethlehem. By beginning in that garden we begin to understand our need for that baby in the manger. Most of all by beginning in that garden we come to know that the baby in the manger is the serpent crusher that God had promised.

That baby would leave his manger and travel toward a cross to cover over your sin and make you God's friend. When Jesus was on the cross and sighed, "It is finished," it may have looked like that the wily serpent had actually won. After all, Satan had struck Jesus' heel. But suddenly on Easter morning "It is finished" took on a whole new meaning. Because Jesus came bursting back to life. Death could not hold him. Satan could not hold him. And if anything was finished it was death and Satan. Jesus won and because he won you too have a promise from God that Satan has no power over you.

SONG

Read through the lyrics below, consider the words of the hymn and what they teach you about Jesus, then sing or listen to “Come, O Long Expected Jesus.”

Come, O long-expected Jesus,
Born to set your people free;
From our sins and fears release us
By your death on Calvary.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope to all the earth impart,
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.

Born your people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now your gracious kingdom bring.
By your own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By your all-sufficient merit
Raise us to your glorious throne.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, without the Savior you promised to send we would be owned by Satan, trapped in our sin, and doomed to death. We praise you for forgiving us and making us your own children. Amen.

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 10 - December 16

PREPARE FOR A JUDGE

ADVENT WREATH

Light the second candle then the first candle. Continue with the reading and devotion.

READING

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

DEVOTION

The people of Israel at the time of Isaiah understood what it was like to have bad judges. Their leaders were corrupt and had turned away from God. Even though the kings were a part of David's dynasty they hardly ruled and judged like King David, of whom God had said, was a man after his own heart. Jesse's (David's dad) family tree was looking sickly and decayed so God said that he would cut the dynasty down.

But that did not mean the end of Jesse's lineage. Out of that remaining stump God promised a little shoot would grow. That shoot would grow up to be the kind of King Israel had always needed. Isaiah promised them a fair judge and King would come, yet he wasn't going to judge in a way they would expect.

A judge and King is coming. He will come once again this Christmas and will come again at the end of the world. It's Judge Jesus and he is going to judge us in all fairness, with all wisdom, and counsel, and knowledge.

Does that scare you a little bit? Does it scare you that in wisdom and counsel and power and knowledge Jesus is going to judge you? Does it scare you that it's just going to be you and him? Does it scare you because you will be left without any excuse?

Jesus is not a judge that you might expect because he does not judge arbitrarily by only what he sees and he does not judge by only what he hears. He judges in righteousness. He judges in justice. When you stand before Judge Jesus he will only see righteousness because of what he accomplished for you in his life here one earth. He knew you were going to be judged and so for you he lived and for you he died. He did this so that he could judge you, "Not guilty!"

Here's how he did it: Where we failed, he was perfect. Where we slipped, he was steady. Where we doubted, he was certain. He honored his Father so that you could be judged in righteousness. He showed love to the people around him so that you could be judged in justice.

With his verdict he will bring you to his holy mountain where there will be peace and harmony. And most of all there will be peace between you and your God. All because of that righteous branch that came out of Jesse's stump.

SONG

Read through the lyrics below, consider the words of the hymn and what they teach you about Jesus, then listen to “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel.”

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming, as men of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind;
Mary we behold it, the Virgin Mother kind.
To show God's love aright, she bore to us a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

The shepherds heard the story proclaimed by angels bright,
How Christ, the Lord of glory was born on earth this night.
To Bethlehem they sped and in the manger they found Him,
As angel heralds said.

This Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere;
True man, yet very God, from sin and death He saves us,
And lightens every load.

PRAYER

Jesus our Savior, we fall before your righteousness and faithfulness. We have no righteousness or faithfulness of our own and we must ask you for mercy. We know that you are always faithful and that you will give us your forgiveness. Assure us then of hope of heaven. Amen.

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 17 - December 23

PREPARE FOR LIGHT

ADVENT WREATH

Light the third then the second and first candles. Continue with the reading and devotion.

READING

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.

⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

DEVOTION

This time of year you can probably relate to living in a land of darkness. Some of you wake up in the morning and it's dark... and by the time you head home from work... it's dark. There is a certain lethargy and heaviness that comes with this time of year and lack of light. Could you imagine trying to live without the sun forever? We would nearly wither. There would be no warm sun to kiss your cheeks. Plants would end up dying. We would have no sustenance. Living without light leads to death.

It doesn't necessarily take the sun going out to force us to realize that there is a certain darkness to life. It doesn't even take struggling to be hopeful in a time of year that is supposed to be festive to realize the darkness that afflicts us.

Why do you struggle with hope? Why do you struggle to be joy filled? Is it not because we struggle with spiritual blindness, with our own dark hearts, with our heaviness of our own guilt? The darkness that Isaiah is talking about extends not only from our physical lives but into our very hearts. Being forced to reckon with our own inward darkness and sin makes it hard to be hope filled and joyful when we are. All it takes is looking at ourselves to realize that we will not live forever. Struggling with hope? Yes. Struggling with joy? That's me.

If you are struggling with hope then know this: a light has crested on the horizon. That light is like the warm sun after a long cold night. When your own dark heart becomes too much for you to bear, Jesus gives you his light to see and where there is light there is life.

Your Savior has defeated your deepest darkest enemies. He carried your sin and guilt for you so that you can never be accused by Satan again. He lived a guilt free and blameless life for you so that he could give you his sinlessness. And he even went straight to a cross and faced down death itself so that you would never have to live in the shadow of death again.

Jesus himself said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He came to open your eyes, illuminate your heart, and eradicate the darkness of death. So, take heart and see! Light has dawned. And that Light will dawn again before our very eyes as our Savior comes in Bethlehem and at the end of time.

SONG

Read through the lyrics below, consider the words of the hymn and what they teach you about Jesus, then listen to “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel.”

Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, O Root of Jesse, free Your own from Satan’s tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save, And bring them vict’ry o’er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, O Dayspring from on high, And cheer us by your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death’s dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, O Key of David, come, And open wide our heav’nly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

PRAYER

Light of the World, thank you for bringing us the light of life and lifting from our shoulders the burden of our guilt. In the coming days, help us to stay focused on your first coming and assure us that you continue to rule all things for our good until you bring us to be with you forever. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 24

PREPARE FOR A GIFT

ADVENT WREATH

*Light the fourth then the third, second, and first candles.
Continue with the reading and devotion.*

READING

Isaiah 7:10-14

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

DEVOTION

Ever feel like he's the family member who signs up for the gift exchange and then never quite delivers on getting you your gift? You know what God is capable of because you can read accounts from Scripture and you can see how he blesses people. You can even look at other people's lives and see how he provides blessing. But sometimes it seems like we pray, pray, pray and he never quite delivers the gift we're asking for.

If only we could be in the position of King Ahaz. Ahaz was fighting a battle on three fronts and God wants to show Ahaz that he could save him. God was willing to prove it to Ahaz and he could have even asked God for any kind of sign he wanted. But Ahaz refused.

God certainly wants us to come to him with our worries, concerns, and pain. He certainly wants us to ask him for anything and everything. But do we sometimes hesitate because we aren't sure that God will give us the thing we're asking for? Do we sometimes hesitate because we think that it's up to us to get the gift we're asking for?

Maybe the things we are asking for are just too small. That's not to say that God doesn't care about the thing for which we ask him but maybe his ability to give is so much greater. He looks at the things for which we ask and he says, "I can give so much more."

Ahaz could have asked for anything but the sign God gives is something that is naturally impossible, not even feasible, it is beyond what Ahaz could have thought up or even asked for. He was promising to send Immanuel—God with us. The Lord Almighty was promising that he himself would come and dwell with humans.

You might just wonder what kind of promise this is when Ahaz refused. It was a promise made to a sinner, who tested his patience, and who sometimes ran from him.

It was a promise made to me that God would come and dwell in this place. Impossible, not even feasible, beyond what we could ever ask for. And God became like us to live for us and to die for us so that we will live with him forever.

So what's on your list for God this year? There is nothing beyond his ability to give, no thought higher than he has conceived, no place deeper than he has reached. Uncertain of your future? Look ahead to Bethlehem and see the Christ child who is both Son of God and son of man. Not sure what to ask for? Keep your eyes on the greatest sign that God has given and it will prompt you to go to God with all your concerns. Our God has blessed us with Immanuel – the biggest gift we could ever receive.

SONG

Read through the lyrics below, consider the words of the hymn and what they teach you about Jesus, then listen to “Savior of the Nations Come”

Savior of the nations, come; Virgin’s Son, make here your home.
Marvel now, O heav’n and earth, That the Lord chose such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood, By the Spirit of our God
Was the Word of God made flesh, Woman’s offspring, pure and fresh.

Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child Of the virgin undefiled,
Though by all the world disowned, Yet to be in heav’n enthroned!

From the Father’s throne he came And ascended to the same,
Captive leading death and hell—High the song of triumph swell!

Praise to God the Father sing, Praise to God the Son, our King,
Praise to God the Spirit be Ever and eternally.

PRAYER

Dearest Savior, thank you for giving us a gift we could have never conceived on our own. Thank you for giving us yourself. You are our Savior. Help us to keep focused on you and the greatest gift you have given us. Amen.

CHRISTMAS

December 25

PREPARE FOR PEACE

ADVENT WREATH

*Light the four candles. And then light the candle in the middle.
Continue with the reading and devotion.*

READING

Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

DEVOTION

If we had been bystanders watching that first Christmas I wonder if we would have known what was going on behind the scenes. The beginning portion of Luke's Christmas account just seems so ordinary. A man named Joseph and a pregnant girl named Mary had to make the trip from the town in which they lived to their family's home town. So they went from Nazareth to Bethlehem all because the Roman Emperor declared a census in order to tax his people.

Mary was on the verge of giving birth but they seemed so unnoticeable that no one opened up a place for them to stay. And the time came for the baby to be born and she had to give birth somewhere so she did it with animals as midwives and wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger. If anything was out of the ordinary it was that this baby was not born in a clean room and wasn't laid in a crib.

The birth of this baby would have been almost unnoticeable. But people had to know what came for them in this baby. So an angel appeared to some shepherds to announce this baby's birth. That angel says to you, "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy which is for all people." That baby is the good news. That baby gave up all up. His power. His glory. All so that he could take your sin and fear and hostility and take it to a cross and die with it.

Though he was born in a forgettable way our God wasn't too proud to meet you with your guilt and sin and declare peace with you. He did exactly what it took to end hostility between you and him, even if it meant meeting you where you are.

At face value what happens might be a little unnoticeable but not if we listen to the angel. Our God didn't care about honor, he was born in a manger. He didn't care about his glory he was born in a small city. He cared more about you. He didn't want you to have to stand before him in fear. He wanted the conflict between you and him ended. And he was going to do something about.

See it for yourself the angel said, "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And then suddenly an army of angels appeared and they began praising God saying, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men on whom his favor rests."

Peace means the war between you and God is over. Peace. Earned for you by a baby in a manger. Peace. Sung to you by angels. Peace. Which drives out all fear. This is no longer just a heavenly promise but the peace which God had promised is now an earthly reality in this baby. Because of this ordinary baby you can have a extraordinary and fearless relationship with your God.

SONG

Read through the lyrics below, consider the words of the hymn and what they teach you about Jesus, then listen to “Comfort, Comfort All My People.”

“Comfort, comfort all my people; Speak of peace,” so says our God.
“Comfort those who sit in darkness, Groaning from their sorrows’ load.
Speak to all Jerusalem Of the peace that waits for them;
Tell them that their sins I cover, That their warfare now is over.”

All their sins our God will pardon, Blotting out each dark misdeed;
All that well deserve his anger He no more will see or heed.
They have suffered many a day; Now their griefs have passed away.
God will change their aching sadness Into ever-springing gladness.

John the Baptist’s voice is crying In the desert far and near,
Calling people to repentance For the kingdom now is here.
Oh, that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;
Let the valleys rise to meet him And the hills bow down to greet him.

Straighten out the crooked highway; Make the rougher places plain.
Let your hearts be true and humble, Ready for his holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord Now o’er earth is spread abroad,
And all flesh shall see the token That his word is never broken.

PRAYER

Lord God, we were once your enemies. We were once hostile to you. BUt becasue of the birth of your Son you have given us peace with you. Help us to live in the joy that this peace brings and enable us to prepare our hearts for your coming. Amen.