

2020

Advent Devotional



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2020 Advent Devotion

Introduction

You may have noticed that 2020 is not a normal year. So many things have changed as we have adapted to the requirements of our living through a pandemic. Yet, the calendar just keeps rolling through the days, weeks and months. Halloween and Thanksgiving required different ways of thinking. Advent and Christmas will be here soon and while the way we celebrate will be different, the thing we celebrate is still the same: God is with us. You may share in the belief that this is a message we need to hear again this year, especially this year.

Advent begins with the realization that we are in need of God's presence. The classic text for the beginning of Advent is Isaiah's plaintive cry, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined." (Isaiah 9:2)

Certainly, these have been dark times. We have lived in a land of deep darkness. So, we begin by acknowledging the darkness, even as we know the light is coming. The study encourages us to name this season, live in this season, and faithfully progress each week toward the light, the hope, the promised coming of Jesus Christ.

This Advent Study is a four-week devotion designed to be used on Sundays. It also includes the culminating event of Christmas. There are two variations for each week: a version for families with young children, and a version for solo adults and/or adults with youth. Each week's main idea will be essentially the same.

Place and Time

You may find it helpful to set up a regular place to hold your devotions. This can be a dinner table, a breakfast nook, a vacant corner, a sofa and coffee table, you decide. It will be helpful if this is a space that can be decorated a bit so that it feels special, different from everyday use. Perhaps a special tablecloth, a candle or an Advent wreath, or even a decoration to make each week special. Setting the worship area will make it seem special and gathering in that space makes it holy.

Meeting at a regular time each week will also make it seem special. It's not just something we get around to when it is easy to do. It is something so special that we will adjust our regular routines and come together to make it happen. It might be Sunday morning, or in the afternoon just before dinner or after dinner. Pick a time that will work for you and try to hold to it.

The final devotion for Christmas might be used on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day, as you see fit.

Additionally, you may want to keep a simple journal during this Advent season. Journaling prompts for the season, corresponding with each week, are available at the end of each week's document or can be found online at <https://revstevep.com/?cat=11>.



Online Resources

This devotional can be used in several ways. One is to print each week and read/participate with the material provided. Also, you may choose to access the devotional plus stories told by each author and music online. All of the online resources are available at <https://revstevep.com/?cat=11> or via Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/The-Advent-Page-104669654810761>

Candles

Since the earliest times light has been used to make an event or a space more special. The ancient Passover Feast begins when the mother of the household “Kindles Holy Daylight” and lights the candelabra. Lighting candles in this season makes each event seem very special, as additional candles are lighted each week, we have a visual reminder that Christmas is closer, anticipation and excitement build.

For many years’ Christians have acknowledged the four Sundays of Advent by creating Advent Wreaths. These are usually a circular frame with greenery like a wreath, laid flat on the table with four candles marking the quadrants. Greenery can be artificial or real. If you use real evergreen boughs, holly and pine or fir are most common, be especially conscious of the fire hazard this will present as it dries out. You may want to refresh it after awhile.

The candles of the wreath can be any color. Purple is the most traditional color. More recently some churches have moved to using blue candles. Some traditions evolved a pink candle for the third week – Joy. For Christmas Eve the tradition is to light a white candle, some people place this candle in the middle of the Advent wreath, others remove the wreath – Advent ends with Christmas – and place only the Christ Candle on the worship center. There is no wrong way.

Singing

Perhaps no single action is as important as singing. Feelings that fill our hearts with emotions, take expression when our lungs exhale. Whether the heavy sighs of a lament, or the inexpressible jubilation of an Alleluia, our core physical being is involved. More than any other season, Advent/Christmas is built around song. Even the most popular songs in the secular world take on a holiday motif as December begins. Singing is important. It may seem silly to sing at the table, but give it a try. Sing like it’s your solo. Sing like you’re auditioning for the Metropolitan Opera. To help you, we’ve included the words to several hymns in the appendix and links to YouTube videos of the music – relief, you don’t have to sing alone, we invite you to join your voice with the music.



For the children’s worship events we have selected simpler songs. But we encourage the adults to sing with the kids showing how important it is for all of us to sing together.

HOPE

Week 1 - November 29, 2020

“Down in the Darkness!”

Celebrating with Children

Bring the family together and offer a simple prayer. You may read the one here or offer your own. Feel free to do each section in any order.

Prayer and Candle Lighting:

Dear God, we gather this day because we need to know you are near. At times when things seem sad or bad or confusing, we can forget that you love us. We begin in the darkness, hoping for the light of Jesus to fill our world. As we light this candle - (pause while the first purple/blue candle is lit) we are given hope that God is coming to us. God's light, Jesus Christ, will bring us hope. As we worship today give us renewed hope, that we might know you are near, and you will come to us and make things better. Amen.

Read the scripture

Read Psalm 80:3, "Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved."

Activity

Go to a room that can be darkened by closing windows, curtains, or blinds. Take everyone into the room. With the lights on, out loud say all the things that you can see. Turn the lights off and list all the things you can see. Light the candle and then see how much you can see with just one candle lit. When we add just one light to the world, it allows us to see so much more.

Sing: “This Little Light of Mine”

<https://youtu.be/sPhhHjBz3OI>

Closing prayer:

Dear God, thank you for showing us the light of Jesus. Sometimes we get a bit lost in the events of everyday, sometimes we can feel lost and alone. But then we remember that Jesus loves us and he will never leave us alone. His light is always there for us. Amen.

Story Time:

Our story today is by Rev. Steve Petty. Click [HERE](https://youtube/GDWiZHxUH50) (<https://youtube/GDWiZHxUH50>) to watch him read it, or read the following.

When I was a very young child, probably about five years old, my parents decided it would be a good time to look for a new house. We had added my sister to the family and we needed more room. We drove all over town looking at new neighborhoods where houses were being built. They had invited my aunts and uncles along so there were about ten people along for the ride. It took several cars to move us from one place to the next. Late in the day we stopped to look at several new houses that were only partly finished. The frames of the houses were in place, so for a little boy with lots of energy it was fun to run through the houses going through the walls and empty doorways. There were also piles of lumber in the back yards which were fun to climb on and jump off. I was having lots of fun, when I realized I couldn't hear any voices.

The sun had now slipped below the horizon and the light was fading. I ran to the front of the house where all the cars had been parked and discovered that everyone had left. I was alone. There were no streetlights, no house lights, and it was getting dark. I sat down on the dirty curb and started to cry. I worried that my parents wouldn't miss me. The evening got darker and the time dragged on, I remember distinctly how terribly sad it made me feel, sitting in the growing darkness alone. With all the cars in our little caravan, no one had missed me until they arrived back home and realized I wasn't there. I have no idea how long it took them to retrace their steps, but I remember the feeling of excitement when I saw the headlights of our car turn down the street and head toward the cul-de-sac where I was sitting. My parents did everything they could to reassure me that they were sorry, and they would never leave me alone again. It was a comfort to know that if I was ever lost, they would come and find me.”

This is like the story of Christmas. Before Jesus came, the people had gotten lost and they were feeling alone. So, God promised to come. That is the message of Advent, the reminder that God will come for us and find us wherever we may be. Of course, we know that God came to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to us as one of us, and he was born as a simple baby, just like all of us. This is the hope that we hold on to as we begin our Advent journey to Bethlehem. We remember that when we were lost in the past, Jesus came to save us. So, we know now that when we are feeling lost and alone today – Jesus will come to us, comfort us, and promise us that we will never be alone.

Discussion Questions

- How do you think the boy felt when he discovered he had been left behind?
- Have you ever felt that alone? How and when?
- Do you know that there are adults who love you and will come for you if you are ever lost?
- How do you think the boy felt when he saw his family return for him?

Week 1 - November 29, 2020

HOPE

“Down in the Darkness!”

Celebrating alone, with youth and/or adults

Set aside time alone, or together, online, or on a phone call, and offer a simple prayer. You may read the one here, or offer your own. Feel free to do each section in any order.

Prayer and Candle Lighting:

Dear God, we come to this time of worship in the midst of a dark time in the world. Winter is almost here, the days are getting shorter and the darkness grows a bit each day. This has been a very hard year in many ways. We begin in the darkness, hoping for the light of Jesus to fill our world. As we light this candle - (pause while the first purple/blue candle is lit) we are given hope that God is coming to us. But, by your grace we are still here and we have this hope, that You will hear our prayers and come to our rescue. Be with us now, O Lord, that in this present darkness we may see your light, and hold to new hope. Amen.

Read the scripture: Isaiah 64: 1

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence...”

(Expanded Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-9,

Link: <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=469789684>)

Sing: “This Little Light of Mine”

Link: <https://youtu.be/sPhhHjBz3OI>

Story Time:

Select someone to read the story, or if you are able you may want to connect to the video of Rev. Steve Petty reading this story. Link: <https://youtu.be/McOYo7uNNX4>

We begin Advent in the darkness. It is a curious thing that we count the beginning of each day at mid-night, for most of the world we begin our day in the darkness. People of Jewish faith, however, consider each day ends and a new one begins at sunset, the light disappears and the long dark night begins. But in either understanding, we are eagerly waiting for the light of dawn and the promise of the sun's return to brighten our days.

This has been a particularly difficult year for the whole world. Pick a subject and you can find discouraging news in terrible abundance. Weather – terrible hurricanes more than ever recorded made landfall. Unimaginable flooding in Sudan. Melting ice caps. Terrible fires in Siberia as the tundra melts and releases more methane. There is a worldwide pandemic wrecking havoc across the planet, millions have become ill and died. Political Polarization has gripped the world as well, the U.S. is not alone in this division and the violence it has caused. Racial tensions are at new highs. We could go on, but I think you get the point. We are the people living in the darkness of these difficult times.

As dark as these times are, the world has seen worse. After the Great War of 1915-1917, where millions of soldiers died, the world was hit by the Flu Pandemic in 1918 and millions of people died. Then followed the Roaring Twenties and the market crash of 1929 sending the world into a prolonged depression. Each nation dealt with the depression in different ways. But in Germany, dealing with the defeat, economic collapse and then depression, the result was Nazi's oppression and subjugation of Europe.

Viktor Frankl was a young psychotherapist in Germany, his practice was just taking off when the oppression began. He had an opportunity to flee to the U.S. but chose to stay and care for his parents. Eventually arrested and sent to the concentration camps, Frankl lost everything, his parents, his wife, his practice and standing. Now he was just another prisoner, forced into working long hours with little food. He came to a low point as he watched countless other prisoners choose to end their misery themselves rather than keep living under their terrible conditions. But Frankl held on to his sense of self, hoping for some sign that he had a future beyond the camps. In his amazing book, “Man’s Search for Meaning” he writes about one morning when the smallest glimmer gave him hope.

“Another time we were at work in a trench. The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above; grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad, and grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the *reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious “Yes” in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. “Et lux in tenebris lucet”—and the light shineth in the darkness* (pp. 51-52; Frankl’s italics).

As we light one candle this evening, let it be the sign of hope for our future. God has not abandoned us. Like the cry of Isaiah, “Oh that the Lord our God, might knock down the gates of heaven and come down to be with us.”

On this first Sunday of Advent we only light one candle. The candle of Hope. This candle reminds us to hope for more light, more candles to come, as the day of Christ’s coming draws near.

Discussion Questions/Questions to ponder:

- How well do you think people are handling these difficult times in 2020?
- How well are you doing?
- Can you see signs of hope?
- Are there blessings that we have overlooked in our discouragement?
- How can we accentuate those blessings?

Closing prayer:

Dear God, thank you for showing us the light of Jesus. Sometimes we get a bit lost in the events of everyday, sometimes we can feel lost and alone. But then we remember that Jesus loves us and he will never leave us alone. His light is always there for us. Amen.



Additional Resources

You may want to keep a simple journal during this Advent season. Below are some suggested prompts that coincide with each week's theme and stories. Read ahead a day or two as some days require a bit of homework.

Week 1 Journal Questions:

- Day 1: Was there ever a time when lighting a candle gave you great hope? Or when you felt the presence of God in a profound way?
- Day 2: When you think of God's presence, is God more angry or is God more happy?
- Day 3: Who do you know that is really filled with the presence of God?
- Day 4: Remember a time in the past when you felt the most despair, what happened to raise your spirits and save the day?
- Day 5: Can you remember a time when you were the spark that lifted someone else's spirit when they were feeling really down? What did you do or say?
- Day 6: Do you have a friend who needs your words of affirmation today? What is the best way to reach out to them: note card, phone call, email? Try to do the most effective and personal thing. You may not know how critical your contact might be. Make the effort to reach out and journal about your response.
- Day 7: Reflect over your writings this week. What did you learn that surprised you? What did you relearn that you had forgotten? What is the most important thing to remember as we move toward Christmas?

This Little Light of Mine

This little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine
Oh, this little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine
This little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine