

REJOICE!

The Third Sunday of Advent: December 17

READ:

A man named John was sent from God.
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,
so that all might believe through him.
He was not the light,
but came to testify to the light.

And this is the testimony of John.
When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests
and Levites to him
to ask him, "Who are you?"
He admitted and did not deny it,
but admitted, "I am not the Christ."
So they asked him,
"What are you then? Are you Elijah?"
And he said, "I am not."
"Are you the Prophet?"
He answered, "No."
So they said to him,
"Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?
What do you have to say for yourself?"
He said:

"I am *the voice of one crying out in the desert,*
'make straight the way of the Lord,'"
as Isaiah the prophet said."

Some Pharisees were also sent.

They asked him,
"Why then do you baptize
if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?"

John answered them,
"I baptize with water;
but there is one among you whom you do not recognize,
the one who is coming after me,
whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."
This happened in Bethany across the Jordan,
where John was baptizing.

-John 1:6-8, 19-28

REFLECT:

John was a prophet, who proclaimed the kingdom of God. Who are the prophets in your life—those that point to God in our world? Who are the prophets in our world? How can you boldly proclaim God's kingdom in your everyday life? How can you share your joy that Christ comes into the darkness of our lives with others?

PRAY:

Spend some time this week thinking about those in your life who have shared the Gospel with you. What traits did they have? Thank God for these people and ask him to continue to bless them. Ask God to make you bold in how you proclaim the Gospel and how you share your joy with others.

FEAR NOT!

The Fourth Sunday of Advent: December 24

READ:

The angel Gabriel was sent from God
to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,
to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph,
of the house of David,
and the virgin's name was Mary.
And coming to her, he said,
"Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."
But she was greatly troubled at what was said
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.
Then the angel said to her,
"Do not be afraid, Mary,
for you have found favor with God.

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall name him Jesus.
He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,
and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,
and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever,
and of his kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel,
"How can this be,
since I have no relations with a man?"
And the angel said to her in reply,
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.
Therefore the child to be born
will be called holy, the Son of God.

And behold, Elizabeth, your relative,
has also conceived a son in her old age,
and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;
for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word."
Then the angel departed from her.

-Luke 1:26-38

REFLECT:

Take time this week to acknowledge that Jesus, who came to free us from sin and bring us to everlasting life, is already here, with us. He is present in you, in others, in our world, and in the Eucharist. We are called to joyfully anticipate celebrating the moment our savior came into the world on Christmas Day, but also the moment when we will welcome him back again in glory to judge the living and the dead. How does knowing God is faithful to his promises help you to not be afraid?

PRAY:

Take a moment to think about how your entire life can be a prayer acknowledging Jesus' gift of love, forgiveness, and redemption in your life. Thank God for the great wonders that are sent to us in the Christmas story: a shining star, the angels' song, a young girl's "yes", and an infant's cry in a lowly manger. We praise God for the Word made flesh in a tiny child and thank him for his nearness to us!

We Celebrate

Advent

Our church season of Advent (from, "ad-venire" in Latin or "to come to"), begins on Sunday, December 3rd. Marked by four consecutive Sundays, Advent encompasses the weeks leading up to the celebration of Christmas.



Advent is a time for looking both backward and forward. We look backward as we prepare to celebrate the historical birth of Jesus. At the same time, we look forward to his Second Coming, as we prepare ourselves to welcome him into all areas of our lives during the Advent season.

We see the traditional signs of Advent in our Church: violet vestments and hangings, dried flowers on the altar, and the Advent wreath. We light a candle on this wreath each Sunday until all four are lit. These signs remind us that we are waiting for the rebirth of Jesus in our hearts and lives in love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

Over the four weeks of Advent, as a Church we will reflect on how we can WATCH for Jesus' presence in our world today, how we can PREPARE for Jesus' coming into our world and hearts, how we can REJOICE that God is with us, and how we should FEAR NOT because God is faithful to his promises.

We pray that God blesses you and your loved ones in this Advent Season!



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The Advent Wreath

Traditionally, Advent wreaths are constructed of a circle of evergreen branches into which four candles are inserted, representing the four weeks of Advent. Ideally, three candles are purple and one is rose, but white candles can also be used.

The purple candles in particular symbolize the prayer, penance, and preparatory sacrifices and good works undertaken at this time. The rose candle is lit on the third week, Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday of rejoicing and the midpoint of Advent.

Bless Your Advent Wreath

All make the sign of the cross.

Leader: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

Leader:

A reading from the book of the prophet, Isaiah.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: Upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing; They rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest, as they exult when dividing the spoils. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, Upon David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains By judgment and justice, both now and forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Leader:

Lord our God, we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ:

he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples,

he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us,

he is the Savior of every nation.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us

as we light the candles of this wreath.

May the wreath and its light

be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

May he come quickly and not delay.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The blessing may conclude with a verse from

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel".

A Prayer for Lighting Your Wreath

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe. You sent your Son to be the Light of the world and to spread his light of love to all. As we light the candles of this wreath, may its growing brightness remind us of the approaching nearness of your Son so that the day of His coming may find us prepared and filled with joy.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WATCH

The First Sunday of Advent: December 3

READ:

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Be watchful! Be alert!

You do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man traveling abroad.

He leaves home and places his servants in charge,

each with his own work,

and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch.

Watch, therefore;

you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming,

whether in the evening, or at midnight,

or at cockcrow, or in the morning.

May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all: "Watch!"

-Mark 13:33-37

REFLECT:

Evergreens and pinecones are a staple of Christmas decorations. Have you ever looked closely at a pinecone? On the outside it is brittle, dry, and prickly. While it is not so nice to look at, on the inside it holds seeds and has the potential to grow into a beautiful, towering tree. What a surprise!

Where do we see God in our world today? Do we look for him in obvious places—in the church sanctuary or in holy images? Or do we keep watch for God in places we wouldn't normally see him? Do we see God only in the people we love or the people who look like us and believe what we do? Where do we need to look more closely and be more watchful for the Lord's coming?

PRAY:

This week, set aside time to hold a pinecone. Reflect on the unexpected places where you might be able to have a "God sighting" during the week. Focus on watching for God especially when facing adversity or when it feels "prickly", like a pinecone.

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who ord'rest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.

O come, Thou 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.

O come, desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of humankind;
bid ev'ry sad division cease
and be thyself our Prince of peace.

PREPARE

The Second Sunday of Advent: December 10

READ:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;

he will prepare your way.

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,

make straight his paths."

John the Baptist appeared in the desert

proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

People of the whole Judean countryside

and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem

were going out to him

and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River

as they acknowledged their sins.

John was clothed in camel's hair,

with a leather belt around his waist.

He fed on locusts and wild honey.

And this is what he proclaimed:

"One mightier than I is coming after me.

I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.

I have baptized you with water;

he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

-Mark 1:1-8

REFLECT:

John the Baptist preached about the forgiveness and mercy of God. Accepting God's mercy and offering that to others is a wonderful way to prepare our hearts for Christmas.

Take some time this week to reflect on the people in your life that may need your forgiveness. Who are they? Ponder those whom you have hurt by your words or actions (or inaction). Whom do you need to ask for forgiveness? Where does our world need forgiveness and healing? How can you help heal others?

PRAY:

Set aside time this week to pray for all the areas of the world where there is a need for reconciliation, healing, and peace. Pray for those that you have hurt by name. Thank God for his gift of mercy. You can pray an intention or a name aloud and then respond with the famous words of St. Francis' Peace Prayer, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."