

*Flopped*



R e l e c t i o n   &   S t u d y   J o u r n a l

A d v e n t   2 0 2 1

a p r a y e r f o r

# Advent

Dear God,

I walk down paths of pessimism.  
I drive down streets of despair.  
But I know Hope is on His way.

I receive criticism from others and others  
don't listen to me.  
I respond with indifference and apathy.  
But I know Love is on His way.

I practice comparison and feel insecure.  
I have been injured by hurtful words and  
actions.  
But I know Joy is on His way.

I hang out with companions named stress  
and anxiety.  
I long for balance and harmony.  
But I know Peace is on His way.

I invite You more and more into my life.  
Give me patience as I wait and expect.  
Let me listen to what You believe about me  
and how You believe in me.  
Fill me with hope, love, joy, and peace.

Amen.

*Prayer by Pastor Craig Finneestad*

## What Is Advent?

Simply put, Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. Waiting and preparing our hearts for the birth of Christ.

As WE wait, WE...

### Remember...

- We remember how God's children longed for a Messiah long before His birth
- We remember what it means to wait in wonder for something your heart longs for so much
- We remember that Christ has already come to save us but the work of redemption will not be fulfilled until He returns.

### Realize...

- We realize there is work to be done. Work of inviting the Holy Spirit into our lives.
- We realize we need to make room for Jesus to work within us.
- We realize that we are still all works in progress.
- That so often, God flips what we deem as plain, ugly, and ordinary; and creates something magnificent, beautiful, and extraordinary...

*...shame into salvation...*  
*...rulers into relationship...*  
*...dead ends into detours...*  
*...wandering into wonderment...*

Advent increases our  
hope, a hope which does  
not disappoint. The Lord  
never lets us down.

*Pope Francis*



Week  
One

s h a m e   i n t o   s a l v a t i o n

*Read* -

read and reflect on how God speaks to you through each of the week's readings

---

Day 1

Matthew 1:1 - 17 (NLT)

Day 2

Genesis 2:25 (NLT)

Reflections:

Reflections:

Day 3

Psalms 103 (NLT)

Day 4

1 Corinthians 1:26 - 31  
(NLT)

Reflections:

Reflections:



# *Reflections* - answer the questions below to dive deeper into this week's message

---

Read Genesis 2:25. Paradise was a world without shame. What would it look like to live without shame?

Have you ever had trouble forgiving yourself for a mistake you made? How did you eventually deal with the guilt and accept forgiveness?

Shame says we are defined by our mistakes and weaknesses. God says we are defined by Jesus. How does Jesus define us?

How has God used someone unexpected to teach you something or show you Jesus?

How can you help bring Christ into the world this Advent season?

We often leave God's gifts of forgiveness and acceptance unopened. Which gift do you need to open and receive this Advent?

# *Draw Closer -*

---

use the applications below  
to draw closer to God  
this week

If you need to receive the gift of forgiveness this Advent, pray through Psalm 103 this week.

If you need to receive the gift of acceptance this Advent, pray through Psalm 139 this week.

# *Notes -*



a p r a y e r f o r

# Hope

Dear God,

Faith is waiting. Waiting is faith.  
Sometimes I wait impatiently.  
Sometimes I wait patiently.

I think of a pregnant woman waiting for new birth.  
I think of a captive waiting for freedom.  
I hope. My hope is You. My hope is in You.

I have faith my present struggles are not permanent.  
I have faith Your vision for my future is better than  
my present reality.  
I have faith my struggles today will make me  
stronger tomorrow.

Like a person lost at night unable to see a faint  
flicker of light  
I stumble through the night because I believe  
Somewhere and sometime the morning will come.

Help me be joyful in hope, patient in affliction,  
faithful in prayer.  
Help me trust in You that I will find new strength.  
I will soar high like an eagle.  
I will run and not grow weary.

Make it so clear and comforting to me that You are  
with me as I faithfully wait  
with hope.

Amen.

*Prayer by Pastor Craig Finnestad*

In the silence of a  
midwinter dusk, there is a  
sound so faint that for all you  
can tell it may be only the  
sound of the silence itself.  
You hold your breath to listen.  
You are aware of the beating  
of your heart. The  
extraordinary thing that is  
about to happen is matched  
only by the extraordinary  
moment just before it  
happens. Advent is the name  
of that moment.

*Frederick Buechner*



*Read* -

read and reflect on how God speaks to you through each of the week's readings

---

Day 1

Matthew 1:23 (NIV)

Day 2

Galatians 4:4-7 (NLT)

Reflections:

Reflections:

Day 3

1 John 4:8-9 (NIV)

Day 4

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Reflections:

Reflections:

# *Reflections* - answer the questions below to dive deeper into this week's message

---

How did the birth of Jesus, the physical presence of God in the world—"with us"—demonstrate his desire for a relationship?

Through Jesus, God adopts us as his children and makes us heirs. How does this contrast to humanity's previous experience with God?

In what way does the Christmas story, demonstrate how God "flipped" the script from rules to relationship?

Our relationship with God is possible because he showed us love. How is a relationship based on love different than one based on rules? What example can this set for our personal relationships as well?

How does God's gift of grace through faith demonstrate his love and desire for relationship? Do you think your relationship with God is more "rules" or "relationship" focused? Explain why.

If all people are given the same gift by God, how does this impact our lives and the way we see each other?

# *Draw Closer* - use the applications below to draw closer to God this week

---

Something to ponder: Rules vs Relationship isn't as hard of a concept to understand as it is to actually live out. Even at Christmas, a time when we celebrate the gift of relationship that comes from Jesus, we still often insinuate that following the rules is the way to reward (making lists and checking twice, gotta find out who's naughty and nice). In this way, we often miss the point. How can we use God's flipped script to direct our attitude towards love and relationships this Christmas?

# *Notes* -

a p r a y e r f o r

Love

Dear God,

You are love.  
I am created in Your image.  
Restore me to Your likeness.

I am grateful You are love and You love me.  
Remove any obstacles in the way of me accepting Your love.  
Let me live as one who is loved by You.

Fill my life with patience.  
Patience with others.  
Patience with myself.

Fill my life with kindness.  
Kindness to others.  
Kindness to myself.

Remove jealousy and envy from my life.  
Replace arrogance with learning.  
Replace pride with humility.

May I love You first.  
May I love myself for who I am and not who others want me to be.  
May I love others for who they are and not who I want them to be.

Help me to forgive and not carry hurts from my past.  
Help me to seek justice for those who can't help themselves.  
Help me never give up and always keep loving.

May I be more loving day by day.  
May I love people like You love people.  
May I continually move people closer to You.

Bless me with joy as I embrace the duty of loving others.  
Let me make no exceptions as I love. Let my love be blind.  
And may I love like Jesus - sacrificing and giving my life for others.

Amen.

*Prayer by Pastor Craig Finnestad*



Advent, this powerful liturgical season that we are beginning, invites us to pause in silence to understand a presence. It is an invitation to understand that the individual events of the day are hints that God is giving us, signs of the attention he has for each one of us.

*Pope Benedict XVI*



*Week  
Three*

d e a d e n d s i n t o d e t o u r s

*Read* -

read and reflect on how God speaks to you through each of the week's readings

---

This Week  
Luke 2:1-7 (NLT)

Reflections:

# Reflections

- answer the questions below to dive deeper into this week's message

---

Talk about a detour you had to take in life. What was it like for you?

Would others describe you as flexible or inflexible? Why?

How do you typically respond to a dead end? Are you more likely to quit or to continue by looking for a detour?

What do you think it was like for Mary being pregnant while traveling about 120 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem? What does this teach you about Plan B?

Something beautiful and something blessed happened on the detour for Mary and Joseph. How have you experienced beauty and blessing on a detour?

What do you think God is trying to teach you with the story of Joseph and Mary's detour? How are you going to respond?

# Draw Closer

---

use the applications below to draw closer to God this week

Think about a detour in your life you are currently taking. What are three specific ways you can respond to this detour in a better way?

Notes -

a p r a y e r f o r

# Peace

Dear God,

In places like Somalia and Sudan - Connecticut and Florida.  
Bullets fly. Children die. Parents cry.  
Give me Your peace.

Broken hearts. Lives too short. Fear of life and fear of death.  
Give me Your peace.

Tears fall down my cheeks like rain from the sky.  
Knots in my stomach and sleepless nights.  
Worries about tomorrow compete for space in my mind with regrets  
from the past.  
Give me Your peace.

Restlessness, impatience, annoyances, intolerance, frustration, and  
anger-  
They fill my life like melted snow floods a fragile river.  
Give me Your peace.

Prince of Peace - Take my burdens and give me rest.  
Wonderful Counselor - Show me the way to peace.

Through the deepest valleys. In the darkest places. During the times I  
am alone.  
Show me the way to peace.

Peace with You  
Peace with others  
Peace with the world  
And peace with myself  
Give me Your peace.

Dysfunction, dismay, and despair - They exist in the world.  
But You have overcome the world.  
Help me to be an overcomer who embraces Your peace.

I give You my fears.  
I offer You my failures.  
My heart is no longer troubled because of Your peace.

You are God and Your peace surpasses all understanding.  
Guard my heart and my mind .  
Teach me once again Your presence is greater than my struggles.  
Give me Your peace.

Amen.

*Prayer by Pastor Craig Finnestad*



The season of Advent means there is something on the horizon the likes of which we have never seen before ... What is possible is to not see it, to miss it, to turn just as it brushes past you. And you begin to grasp what it was you missed, like Moses in the cleft of the rock, watching God's back fade in the distance. So stay. Sit. Linger. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder. There will be time enough for running. For rushing. For worrying. For pushing. For now, stay. Wait. Something is on the horizon.

*Jan L. Richardson*





*Read* -

read and reflect on how God speaks to you through each of the week's readings

---

Day 1

L u k e 1 : 3 9 - 4 5 ( N L T )

Day 2

L u k e 1 : 4 6 - 5 6 ( N L T )

Reflections:

Reflections:

# *Reflections* - answer the questions below to dive deeper into this week's message

---

Mary felt alone until Elizabeth encouraged her. Describe a time you felt like you were wandering alone and a friend encouraged and supported you.

Elizabeth recognized Jesus right away and celebrated. How have you been distracted and missing Jesus this Advent?

Reread Mary's Song in Luke 1:46-55. What verse sticks out to you and why? How have you experienced these things to be true in your life?

Reread Luke 1:48-49. What great things has God done in your life this year?

What part of the Christmas story causes you to experience awe and wonder? Why?

Focusing on the true gift of Christmas moves us to wonderment. How can we stay focused on Jesus this Christmas?

## *Draw Closer -*

---

use the applications below to draw closer to God this week.

Focus on the true gift of Christmas this season by doing one or more of the following:

- Rereading the Christmas story in Luke 1-2 together with others.
- An act of generosity for someone in need.
- Reach out to a friend that needs encouragement or support. Ask how you can pray for them this Christmas.

## *Notes -*

a p r a y e r f o r

*Joy*

Dear God,

Help me seek You in all circumstances.  
During days of health and happiness.  
During nights of uncertainty and pain.

Keep drawing me closer to You.  
Being grateful for blessedness.  
Being hopeful for healing.

During times of trials and trouble:  
Let me more fully embrace Your grace.  
Let me more fully experience Your love.

In all times, because of Your goodness.  
Bless me with Your gift of joy.  
Let me live out that joy each day.

I have experienced loss in my life. I am experiencing loss in my life.  
I have been hurt by people I love.  
I have hurt people I love.  
I have hurt myself.  
People I love have been hurt or are hurting.  
I know what it is like to have a loved one die.  
The pain of the world is evident to me.

Yet in the midst of despair Your voice still speaks.  
It is a voice of hope.  
It is a voice of peace.  
It is a voice that promises joy.  
Fill my life with joy.

When my life seems boring—fill me with joy.  
When my life is full of fear—fill me with joy.  
When I am sad—fill me with joy.  
When I am overwhelmed—fill me with joy.

May my joy not depend on others, but on You.  
May my joy not depend on me, but on You.  
May I be as faithful in asking for joy as You are in giving joy.  
May I accept and share Your gift of joy.

Amen.

*Prayer by Pastor Craig Finnestad*

a p r a y e r f o r

# Christmas

Dear God,

You have given us your Son. You have given us Yourself.  
Emmanuel. God is with us.

When we are angry, afraid, alone, and anxious:  
You are with us.

When we celebrate, are courageous, live in community, and are  
calm:  
You are with us.

Let this Christmas be our yearly reminder of Your grace.

You give us the Hope of the World.  
Bring hope to the world.  
You brought joy into the world on this day so many years ago.  
Help us accept this gift and share it with others.  
You give us love in the person of Jesus.  
Help us to experience Your love and be more loving to others  
and to ourselves.  
You give us the Prince of Peace.  
Bring peace to the world and to our world.  
You give us the Resurrection and the Life.  
Raise us to new levels of life.

Through the piles of presents – remind us of Your presence.  
You are with us.  
In our brokenness and busyness – remind us who You are and  
Whose we are.  
You are with us.

Jesus is the Light of the World!  
Thank you for lighting our path.  
Help us to be a reflection of his light to the world.

You have given us your Son. You have given us Yourself.  
Emmanuel. God is with us.  
Encourage us to accept and embrace this most wonderful gift.  
Teach us that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Christmas. This day and because of this day.  
You are with us.

Amen.

*Prayer by Pastor Craig Finnestad*