

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 29, 2020
Advent 1B

The readings this week:

- Isaiah 64:1-9 ◦ Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
- 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 ◦ Mark 13:24-37

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Over the next four weeks, this first article will be an Advent devotional to help prepare our hearts to celebrate Christmas! Advent is a tradition in the church of taking time in the weeks before Christmas to set our hearts on Jesus and anticipate His coming. We find that celebrating Advent is a powerful opportunity in the midst of a busy season to worship Jesus and stir our hearts for Him. This year, as our world seems overcome with weariness, more than every we need the thrill of hope. Each of these short devotionals will guide us as we reconnect with that hope and take a few moments of respite from weariness. Let us pause and rest in hope.

The Weary World

For children, the season of Christmas is magical: twinkling lights, special songs, and gifts under the tree. Even at a young age, children can feel the power of expectation in the season. Regardless of Christmas lists and the promise of a visit from Saint Nick, children can feel that something is coming – something special, something to be celebrated.

While the season is full of magic for the kiddos, for adults, the season can easily become about making the magic. The lights need to be hung, the gifts need to be bought and wrapped, and the special treats need to be made. For some of us, the “magic” of the Christmas season gets lost in the shuffle of expectation. But despite all the hustle and bustle, even adults can feel something around Christmas: Something is coming. There’s an inexplicable warmth that comes from this expectation – of time with family and friends, of seeing your people open their gifts, of eating your favorite Christmas treats.

When the early church was creating the calendar of holy days, this idea of expectation was not lost on them. They landed on calling this season (the four weeks leading up to Christmas) Advent. The word advent means “coming.” For the people involved in the story of the First Christmas, advent literally meant the coming of a baby, but it also meant something much deeper to the people called “Israel.”

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ~ John 1:14 (niv)

A thrill of hope

My favorite Christmas Carol is O Holy Night. There’s a depth to it – a reverence that you just can’t finagle out of Jingle Bells. Take a look:

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn*

The state of the world before Jesus was born was one of weariness. The people of God were weary. In the Old Testament, God had given word after word, prophecy after prophecy, about this messiah who would come to their rescue. Someone who would see their plight, take up their cause, and give them the one thing their hearts desired more than anything: a thrill of hope.

So what is hope?

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ~ Hebrews 11:1 (niv)

To have hope means that you trust and believe that the current state of things is not the final state of things. For followers of Jesus, we know the end of the story. We know that God comes out on top. We can trust in the fact that, eventually, we win. We have the promise of victory. And yet, the day-to-day grind, the weariness of this world, can bog down this message of hope. Even in knowing the outcome, it’s hard to see how the weariness of this world can become something victorious.

*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. ~ Isaiah 9:6 (niv)*

You see, the story is not over. The culmination of God’s kingdom did not occur with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Christ’s death on the cross changed our story forever, and yet God’s story is still happening, and we are a part of it. We each have a role – a part in the story that is still being written.

This season is not just about the coming of Jesus. It’s also about the process of becoming. Each person in the Christmas story had a journey to take – they started the story as one thing, and became something else through the transformative powers of faith, hope, and love. As we look back at the original Christmas story, we can also look forward. In this season of becoming:

We feel the groaning of this world as it is becoming darker.
We feel the weight of people’s hearts as they are becoming weary.
And yet: We see the light of the Church as it is becoming brighter.

Our story is not done. Just like the people in the story of Christ’s birth, we are becoming something else as we dive into the scripture, live in community with other believers, and continually surrender to Jesus.

So, who are you becoming?

~ Maggie Cannon, [Vineyard Community Church](#)

This week, gather your family together and think of neighbors in your community. How might they be **weary** right now? Write and mail them a few words of peace and encouragement as they enter into the Christmas season,

Reflecting on the Word



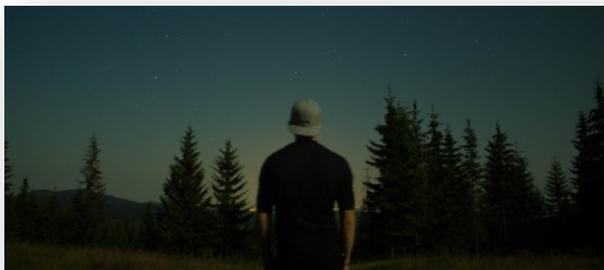
1st Reading: [Isaiah 64:1-9](#)

This passage reminds us of four ways to live in hope; Pray with fierceness; Watch with openness; Wait with faithfulness; and Repent in humbleness. When you pray do you find that you are timid in your requests, or do you drive right to the heart of what you, others, and this world really need? Are your eyes open to see what God is doing around you? When has God done something awesome that took awhile for you to see because you weren't looking for it, didn't expect it, or didn't recognize it was for your good, and ultimately HIS glory? God uses waiting to change us. Has there been a time in your life where you experienced waiting for God to speak or move in your life? During this time of waiting, what did God reveal to you about himself? What can we do individually, and as a community, to be pliable clay for God the potter? How can you live out these four ways of hope this Advent season? [Reality Ventura](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19](#)

Do you think it is wrong to bargain with God to get God to do something? Should God's faithfulness to us impact our faithfulness to God? How would you respond if you were God and people only called out to you when they were in trouble? How were the people suffering in this Psalm? What did they believe God had done to them? Do you believe that God takes God's protection away from us? Why or why not? What kind of bargaining did they do in order to get God's protection? Do you think God hears and responds to this type of prayer? Why is it easier to seek God when we are in trouble? How can we learn to seek God even when we are not in trouble? Where do you find God when you are going through times of trouble?

[Faith Element](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

Holy God of Peace,
We seek your peace in these darkening days.
We seek a calm within, yes.
And an absence of conflict between people and nations.
But more deeply, we seek your shalom –
the deep and abiding peace
that will come only through the justice of your kingdom. Amen.

~ Joanna Harader, [Spacious Faith](#)

At the turn of the new year the church offers scenes of chaos: portents and signs in the heavens, broiling clouds, floods, hail, fire. *The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light...*

The Church gives these apocalyptic warnings as a gift, to shake away complacency, to shock into second sight, to awake to the immediacy of salvation wrapped in breathtaking clouds of doom. *Watch therefore – for you do not know...*

The soul's journey begins in apocalypse. Cataclysm dims the safe filters of ordinary sight to heighten the view of Reality. Shock, fear, grief, courage, and then, perhaps, curiosity, opens the door to the mystical life. Once you pass through the threshold of doom, ultimately, you'll awake to the beauty of holiness.

What a beautiful and mysterious time! Have a blessed Advent – of simplicity, of depth, of darkness waiting for light.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

3rd Reading: [1 Corinthians 1:3-9](#)

What does it mean to be “of the flesh” and how does it manifest itself? What does it mean to be an “infant in Christ”? How is that different from being “spiritual”? What is the difference between “milk” and “solid food” (or “meat”)? What are examples of “milk” teaching and “solid food” teaching? Based on your answers from questions 2 & 3, what is spiritual maturity for Paul? Are you an “infant” believer? Or are you a “spiritual” (mature) believer? How do you know? What behaviors influence your decision? Are you stuck in your spiritual growth? Have you stopped growing as a believer? Or do you continue to grow in maturity? In what ways has God been growing or changing you recently? Some day you will stand before Christ and give an account of how you managed your time and abilities. How would that meeting turn out? Are you using or neglecting your gifts? [Small Group Study](#)

4th Reading: [Mark 13:24-37](#)

What does Advent mean to you? What comes to mind when you think about the season of Advent? Why do we even have this season? Why would we start this season with this sort of passage? How do you interpret this command to watch and be ready? Is it a threat, challenge, command or invitation? Do you like how this is presented or would you rather soften it? What are your thoughts on the return of Jesus? Good thing, bad thing, indifferent? Are you ready for it? Is the second coming a natural connection to Advent or does it seem forced to you? Watching is a strong theme in this passage and one that comes up time and time again. Why is this commanded? Are we watching or are we distracted? [Epiphany Lutheran Church](#)