

*Ad*VENT *and*
CHRISTMAS
WISDOM
—— *from* ——
St. Augustine

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WISDOM
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St. Augustine

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First Edition

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Introduction

Who is St. Augustine? Why do we look to him as a guide in our search for wisdom through the season of Advent?

This saint, recognized among the Church doctors as the Doctor of Grace and the Doctor of Doctors, was born on November 13, 354, in Tagaste, Numidia, to a devout Christian woman, Monica, and a pagan father, Patricius, who became a Christian shortly before his death. Augustine was one of three children, along with a brother, Navigius, and a sister whose name we do not know, the abbess of a monastery in Hippo.

Augustine has been called the “theologian’s theologian.”

However, it is not because of his outstanding works in theology and philosophy that we look to him as a wisdom figure. In his search for truth, Augustine’s keen intellect first led him away from Christianity until he saw the errors of the heretical sects he had followed. The wisdom to which Augustine introduces us, founded on and nourished by his gifts of nature and grace, has its roots in the story of his conversion through the abundant redemption that transformed his life into a confession of praise.

Under the guidance and instructions of St. Ambrose, Augustine was baptized with his friend, Alypius, and his son, Adeodatus, at the age of 33. He retired with a group of friends to live a monastic life until he was called to the priesthood. He continued to live an ascetical life, a life of prayer and contemplation.

As he continued his studies in theology, Augustine discovered and probed the richness of the Catholic faith in Christ, the wisdom of God. Through Christ, he discovered, he was captivated by and embraced God, who is “beauty, ever ancient, ever new.” Consecrated a bishop in the year 395 or 396, he cared for his diocese as well as the Church in Africa and, indeed, the universal Catholic Church. As a dedicated pastor of souls, he learned to draw from the deep riches of his own spiritual life to become a sure guide for his people. His legacy has been an inspiration throughout the ages, and we know we can trust him as we begin our journey along the way of wisdom into the mystery of the Incarnation.

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How to Use This Book

Advent—that period of great anticipatory joy—is a time of preparation for the celebration of Christ’s arrival in Bethlehem as a helpless infant. In the Western liturgy, Advent begins four Sundays before December 25—the Sunday closest to November 30, which is the feast of St. Andrew, one of Jesus’ first disciples.

The annual commemoration of Christ’s birth begins the Christmas cycle of the liturgical year—a cycle that runs from Christmas Day to the baptism of the Lord. In keeping with the unfolding of the message of the liturgical year, this book is designed to be used from the first Sunday of Advent through twelve days of the Christmas cycle, or until January 6.

The four weeks of Advent are often thought of as symbolizing the four ways Christ comes into the world: (1) his birth as a helpless infant; (2) his arrival in the hearts of believers; (3) his death; and (4) his arrival on Judgment Day.

Because Christmas falls on a different day of the week each year, the fourth week of Advent seldom lasts a full week—it is abruptly, joyously, and solemnly abrogated by the annual coming of Christ at Christmas. Christ’s Second Coming will also one day abruptly interrupt our sojourn here on earth.

In this book, each day’s passages begin with the words of St. Augustine. Next is a related excerpt from Scripture that is followed by a prayer built on the ideas from the two preceding passages.

Finally, an Advent or Christmas action suggests ways to apply the messages to daily life.

Because the length of Advent varies, this book includes material for twenty-eight days. These daily readings make up **Part I**. You can skip the “extra” entries, or you can fit them all in by doubling up.

Part II begins with Christmas Day and contains materials for twelve days of the Christmas season.

Part III proposes two optional formats for using each day as part of a longer liturgical observance similar to Night Prayer, combined with a version of the Office of Readings. The purpose of these readings is to enrich the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season of the liturgical year and set up a means by which individuals, families, or groups can observe the true meaning of the season.



PART I



READINGS *for*
ADVENT

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DAY 1

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WISDOM

You, Lord my God, are the giver of life and a body to a baby. As we see, you have endowed it with senses. You have coordinated the limbs. You have adorned it with a beautiful form, and for the coherence and preservation of the whole you have implanted all the instincts of a living being. You therefore command me to praise you...“and to sing to your name, Most High” Psalm 91:2. No one else could do that except you, the one from whom every kind of being is derived. The supreme beauty, you give distinct form to all things and by your law impose order on everything.

CONFESSIONS, I, VII

SCRIPTURE

LORD, you have probed me, you know me; you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar. My travels and my rest you mark; with all my ways you are familiar. Even before a word is on my tongue, LORD, you know it all. Behind and before you encircle me and rest your hand upon me. You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know. My bones are not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth.

PSALM 139:1–5, 13–15

PRAYER

Loving Creator, in the Incarnation of your eternal word you

have revealed the mystery of your divine fatherhood and your adoption of us as your daughters and sons. Through Christ and with Christ, in the power of your Spirit, may we be faithful to your call and give glory to your name during the days of this blessed season. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Take time today, in gratitude for the gift of life and the grace of life in Christ, to pray for your parents and for the priest who baptized you.





DAY 2

WISDOM

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By nature we are not God; by nature we are men; by sin we are not just. So God became a just man to intercede with God for sinful man. The sinner did not match the just, but man did match man. So he applied to us the similarity of his humanity to take away the dissimilarity of our iniquity, and becoming a partaker of our mortality he made us partakers of his divinity. It was surely right that the death of the sinner issuing from the stern necessity of condemnation should be undone by the death of the just man issuing from the voluntary freedom of mercy....

THE TRINITY, IV, 4

SCRIPTURE

Who would believe what we have heard?...He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye, no beauty to draw us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, knowing pain....Yet it was our pain that he bore, our sufferings he endured....[H]e was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, all following our own way; but the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all....Because of his anguish...my servant shall justify the many, their iniquity he shall bear....[H]e surrendered himself to death, was counted among the transgressors, bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

ISAIAH 53:1–6, 11–12

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PRAYER

Merciful God, love for your eternal Son did not prevent you from asking him to carry the weight of our sins and restore the plan you had for our happiness. Your Son's love for you led him to accept your will completely. We have been blessed with graces beyond anything we could have imagined. Freed from guilt and shame, we rejoice in the life to which we are now called to share as your faithful daughters and sons with and in Christ. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Accept the most difficult thing you encounter today as a prayer of intercession for someone you know who has rejected God from his or her life.





DAY 3

WISDOM

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Before I existed you were, and I had no being to which you could grant existence. Nevertheless here I am as a result of your goodness, which goes before all that you made me to be and all out of which you made me. You had no need of me. I do not possess such goodness as to give you help....It is not as if I could so serve you as to prevent you becoming weary in your work, or that your power is diminished if it lacks my homage....To you I owe my being and the goodness of my being.

CONFESSIONS, XIII, I



SCRIPTURE

Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, my soul; and do not forget all his gifts, Who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills, Who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with mercy and compassion, Who fills your days with good things, so your youth is renewed like the eagle's....For as the heavens tower over the earth, so his mercy towers over those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed, remembers that we are dust.

PSALM 103:1–5, 11–14

PRAYER

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Wonderful God, how can I ever thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on me? I count the blessings that have marked my life from its beginnings. Even the challenges and sorrows of the past have led me to understand more clearly your goodness and the purpose for which you created me. Guide me through your Holy Spirit along the pathway that still lies ahead until I reach the end to which you continually call me. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Live this day in the joy of the knowledge that God carries you in his love and wills only what is best for you, no matter what difficulties you have to bear at this time in your life.





DAY 4

WISDOM

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In this Beginning, God, you made heaven and earth, in your Word, in your Son, in your power, in your wisdom, in your truth speaking in a wonderful way and making in a wonderful way. Who can comprehend it? Who will give an account of it in words? What is the light which shines right through me and strikes my heart without hurting? It fills me with terror and burning loveWisdom, wisdom it is which shines right through me, cutting a path through the cloudiness which returns to cover me as I fall away under the darkness and the load of my punishments.

CONFESSIONS, XI, IX

SCRIPTURE

The Lord created human beings from the earth, and makes them return to earth again. A limited number of days he gave them, but granted them authority over everything on earth. He endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his image. He put fear of them in all flesh, and gave them dominion over beasts and birds. Discernment, tongues, and eyes, ears, and a mind for thinking he gave them. With knowledge and understanding he filled them; good and evil he showed them. He put fear of him into their hearts to show them the grandeur of his works, that they might describe the wonders of his deeds and praise his holy name....All their works are clear as the sun to him, and his eyes are ever upon their ways....Later he will rise up and repay them....

SIRACH 17:1–10, 19, 23

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PRAYER

Creating God, you never cease to sustain me with the breath of life. You have given me a mind to seek and know you, a heart to love and cherish you. You are ever mindful of who I am and what I need. Let me not be overwhelmed by the burdens of life that threaten to make me doubt your love. Do not let me forget your greatest gift, Jesus, your Son, in whom the fullness of your presence is ever mine. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Today share with someone you know the way in which God is working in your life at this time, the assurance you have of his love for you, and the ways you seek to be grateful to him.



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WISDOM

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there....You were with me, and I was not with you.... You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.

CONFESSIONS, X, VII

SCRIPTURE

I love you, LORD, my strength, LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my rock of refuge, my shield, my saving horn, my stronghold! Praised be the LORD, I exclaim! I have been delivered from my enemies....He reached down from on high and seized me; drew me out of the deep waters. He rescued me from my mighty enemy, from foes too powerful for me.... He set me free in the open; he rescued me because he loves me.

PSALM 18:2–4, 17–18, 20

PRAYER

Dear God, if there is anything I know about you, it is that you are love. You never cease to surround us with love—love that is eternal, gentle, faithful, and true. You ask only that we love you in return. Because this is beyond the limits of our human hearts, you have given us your beloved Son to love you for us. With Christ, I can say that I love you. Let me sing it with my whole being! Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Ask God today to let you see how you fail to love someone with whom you are in daily contact. Ask for the grace to learn to love that person.

