

YEARS A, B, & C

Joyful

Meditations

for

*Every Day
of Advent*

and the

*12 Days
of Christmas*

Rev. Warren J. Savage



Mary Ann McSweeney



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Contents

Introduction • 5

ADVENT

First Week of Advent • 9

Second Week of Advent • 27

Third Week of Advent • 45

Fourth Sunday of Advent • 61

December 17—December 24 • 69

CHRISTMAS

Christmas Day

Vigil Mass • 87

Mass at Midnight • 89

Mass at Dawn • 91

Mass During the Day • 93

December 26—January 5 • 95

Epiphany of the Lord • 117

FEAST DAYS

Immaculate Conception

of the Blessed Virgin Mary • 121

Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph • 123

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Introduction

The universal church begins a new liturgical year on the first Sunday of Advent. We are called to be God's holy people, waiting in hope and joy for the coming of Christ our Savior. During Advent we proclaim in our lives that hope and joy are gifts from God that make all things new.

Christian joy is the constant awareness of the loving presence of Jesus, the Son of God, in our hearts. Advent is a time when we open our minds and hearts to search for the light of love, compassion, and peace in the Word of God. It is a time set aside for a more intentional reading of the Word of God that leads to personal reflection, prayer, contemplation, and humble service to others. The Advent season challenges us to remove the barriers of arrogance, sadness, selfishness, and greed that hinder us from welcoming Christ with joy and living in communion with him and our brothers and sisters.

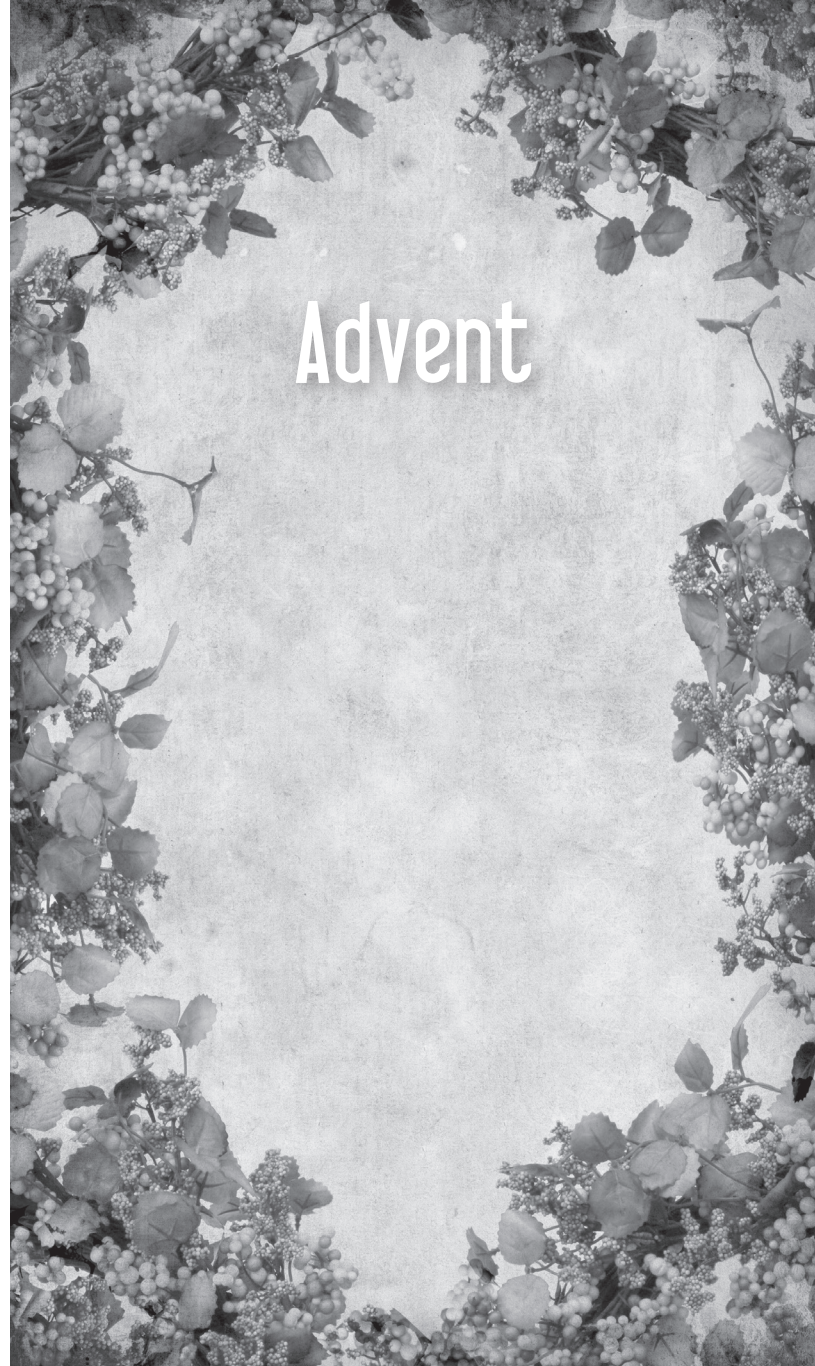
There are many people and places in the world waiting to experience joy and good news of better days to come. Joy comes when the darkness of violence and war has been taken away. Joy comes when there is some relief from the pain and suf-

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fering that drains the life out of people. Advent makes us aware of our need to participate in God's universal plan for unity. Christians can find great joy in serving others from a place of gratitude for all that is given to us in Jesus Christ, the face of God's joy among us.

These short passages from Scripture, reflections, prayers, and practices for Advent and Christmas offer an opportunity for us to enter more deeply into the mystery of the triune God and increase our longing for the coming of Christ, who is our hope, joy, and peace.



Advent

First Sunday of Advent

YEAR A

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalms 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.

ISAIAH 2:4B

Reflection: There is no joy when we are fighting against one another. There is no joy when we are unwilling to forgive those who have hurt us. There is no joy when our family members and friends have betrayed us. There is no joy when we reject others because of their race, color, culture, ethnic origin, socioeconomic background, gender, sexual orientation, religious tradition, and way of life. Joy comes when we seek the way of peace and love together, when we are intentional in serving the needs of the poor and rebuilding broken lives and families. Joy comes when we can trust and care

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First Week of Advent 9

for each other out of the belief that every person is created in the image of God. Joy comes when we accept all people with a deep sense of respect. Joy comes when the fear of being overpowered and mistreated by others is replaced with true peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Ponder: Who or what is robbing me of deep joy and peace in life?

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to disarm my heart from the feelings of anger, resentment, and revenge that foster so much pain and division in my life. Instill within me a spirit of gratitude and joy that I may become your instrument of peace and reconciliation wherever and whenever conflicts arise.

Practice: Today I will strive to be a person of joy and peace.

YEAR B

Isaiah 63:16–17, 19; 64:2–7

Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Mark 13:33–37

Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you our potter: we are all the work of your hand.

ISAIAH 64:7

Reflection: It is so easy to forget who made us and continues to love us throughout all the moments of our existence on this earth. We become estranged from God, our Creator, when we place our lives in the hands of the marketplace where life is defined by the restaurants we eat at, the places we buy things, the type of car we drive, the neighborhood we live in, the college we attend, the career and company we work for, the stocks we possess, the elite clubs and organizations to which we belong, and the exotic places where we spend our vacations. We can get lost in the material world and forfeit our relationship with God.

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First Week of Advent 11

So much of life is caught up in creating a certain image so that others will notice us and accept us. We find it much easier to place our lives in the hands of those who can make our outward appearance look good. It is far more challenging to surrender our lives to our Creator, opening the inner world of our hearts to be transformed by the joy, love, compassion, and peace of God. Yet joy is rekindled when we focus our time and energy on becoming more and more like the image of God in the world.

Ponder: What excuses do I give for not spending more time with God?

Prayer: Lord, I have become distracted by the things of this world. Guide my steps and lead me safely back home to you. Help me to respond to the needs of others.

Practice: Today I will find time to pray and reflect and make God the focus of my attention.

YEAR C

Jeremiah 33:14–16

Psalms 25:4–5, 8–9, 10, 14

1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2

Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant...and pray [for] the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

LUKE 21:34–36

Reflection: The heart is the center of our lives. It is where God chooses to dwell in us and speak to us. It is hard to feel God’s presence within us when we are preoccupied with such concerns as paying bills, shopping for food and clothing, keeping social commitments and personal obligations, watching our favorite television shows, and taking care of the family, the home, and the car.

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First Week of Advent 13

Finding time to be alone with God is not easy because our inner world is weighed down with overwhelming anxiety and sadness. In the midst of our running around taking care of so many things, we lose focus of what is really important in life: our relationship with God. Our lives can become addicted to being busy, but “busy” doesn’t equal a healthy, holy life.

God is calling us to slow down, to pay attention and listen to the sounds of joy, love, compassion, and peace deep within us that set us free from the material world’s traps. Life is more meaningful and joyful when we live each moment with an attentive heart.

Ponder: What am I allowing to overwhelm me, filling my heart with stress and anxiety?

Prayer: Lord, help me to slow down and become more aware of my rushing aimlessly from place to place. Quiet my mind and steady my heart that I may live in your presence throughout the day.

Practice: Today I will work on doing less in order to be more present to others.

First Week of Advent

MONDAY

Isaiah 4:2–6 (A) or Isaiah 2:1–5 (B or C)

Psalms 122:1–2, 3–9

Matthew 8:5–11

When [Jesus] entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.” He said to him, “I will come and cure him.”

MATTHEW 8:5–7

Reflection: Suffering is not always optional. Life’s circumstances can at times paralyze us despite our best efforts. In this numb spiritual state, we suffer and experience distress. The source of our distress may be easily identifiable: we might experience suffering from the effects of divorce or separation, from a loved one’s addiction, from pain or illness, from being out of work, or from the death of someone dear to us.

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First Week of Advent 15

Sometimes the source of our distress eludes us because we are in denial and our suffering may increase because we are unable to accept it.

Turning to God in our distress is the remedy for our suffering. Our need for God, expressed in our plea for relief from the suffering we endure, reconnects us to the source of all life and love and eases our spiritual paralysis. As we open our minds and hearts to God, we learn to trust in God's abiding presence and desire to heal us. We surrender our pride, our feeling that we must bear our burden alone, and we admit our dependence on God.

Ponder: What is the source of my pain or suffering that needs God's healing touch?

Prayer: Lord, I am in distress and need your loving presence. I ask for your gentle touch that I may be healed and live life with a joy-filled and whole heart.

Practice: Today I will make the effort to visit someone who is sick, lonely, or dejected and bring them comfort.

First Week of Advent

TUESDAY

Isaiah 11:1–10

Psalm 72:1–2, 7–8, 12–13, 17

Luke 10:21–24

[Jesus] rejoiced in the holy Spirit.

LUKE 10:21

Reflection: Our baptism has joined us in an intimate bond with the community of God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit teach us the meaning of interdependence rooted in unconditional love. God's outpouring of love gives us Jesus. Jesus' outpouring of love confirms our true nature as beloved children of God. The Spirit's outpouring of love guides us each day as we struggle to live and love according to Jesus' example.

Although faith assures us that the Spirit is always with us, it may take time for us to be aware of and trust the Spirit's presence and movement in our lives. Whatever rouses our enthusiasm and interest comes from the Spirit. Whenever we

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First Week of Advent 17

speak out in defense of the poor, abused, neglected, or abandoned, we know the Spirit is providing us with the right words. Whenever we share our gifts, talents, and possessions with those in need, we are responding to the prompting of the Spirit. Whenever we forgive those who have hurt us and make amends to those we have hurt, we can trust the Spirit is guiding us.

Recognizing the Spirit's constant movement in our lives deepens our experience of intimacy with the triune God. As we rejoice in the unconditional love of the Father, Son, and Spirit, we are able in our turn to pour out love and compassion into our families, communities, and world.

Ponder: Where in my life do I need the help and strength of the Spirit?

Prayer: Lord, teach me to open my eyes, ears, and heart that I may rejoice in your Holy Spirit. May your unconditional love strengthen me to live in peace with all people.

Practice: Today I will pray for a Spirit of discernment before making important decisions.

First Week of Advent

WEDNESDAY

Isaiah 25:6–10a

Psalms 23:1–3a, 3b–4, 5, 6

Matthew 15:29–37

Jesus summoned his disciples and said, “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way.”

MATTHEW 15:32

Reflection: God knows our whole self—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. God knows we need attention. God knows we need food, clothing, water, and shelter. God knows we need money to pay our bills. God knows we need to relax and enjoy life. God knows we need to find healthy ways to release our anger, sadness, fear, and shame. God knows we need to feel loved and to express the deep love inside us.

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First Week of Advent 19

We can trust that God will feed us when our human and spiritual needs are unfulfilled. We may have developed the habit of being self-sufficient, thinking we can meet our own needs. We may have been taught that if we want something we must earn it or do it ourselves. Yet the compassion of God anticipates our needs and longs to fulfill them. Often it is through the kindness of people—friends or strangers—that God’s compassion comes to us.

Ponder: When have I experienced the compassion of God?

Prayer: Lord, I am hungry for so much. Teach me to trust that you are meeting my every need. Bless me with the compassion to reach out to others who are physically and spiritually hungry.

Practice: Today I will bring canned goods to a local food pantry.

First Week of Advent

THURSDAY

Isaiah 26:1–6

Psalms 118:1, 8–9, 19–21, 25–27a

Matthew 7:21, 24–27

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.”

MATTHEW 7:24–25

Reflection: The human experience holds no guarantees for physical, mental, or emotional safety. Oftentimes we think a healthy savings account or a good retirement portfolio will give us a feeling of security. Yet unhappiness, disappointment, and anxiety rain on us throughout our lives. Floods of fear, greed, and betrayal can overtake us at any time. Pain, rejection, and death come unexpectedly and blow us off course.

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First Week of Advent 21

When we surrender our lives and will to the care of our loving Creator, we strengthen our spiritual foundation. Deepening our trust in God's care and compassion for all humanity brings us to the knowledge that all will be well, no matter what challenges our human experience is bringing.

Ponder: What do I need to surrender to God today?

Prayer: Lord, I long to feel secure and at peace. Let your love be my refuge. Show me how to build my life on the everlasting rock of your compassion.

Practice: Today I will make a donation to an organization that helps the poor.