

# *O Come Let Us Adore Him*

*Devotions for ADVENT through EPIPHANY*

This Advent season is unlike any other in recent memory. As we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ child this year, we are well-acquainted with the longing of waiting. We have been waiting for 9 months. We want to be with our loved ones, we want to travel, we want to eat at restaurants, we want to greet others with handshakes and hugs. We continue to wait for a vaccine and a return to some semblance of normalcy.

Advent 2020 is full of promise as it gives us a unique opportunity to feel more intimately the hopeful expectation of Christmas. Many of us are entering this season with fatigue and disappointment, and yet as Christians, we know that the incarnate God we worship and celebrate this December is no less life-altering or death-defying. Though our reality has been adjusted and re-adjusted over the past year, the truth of the Word made flesh and His salvation has never been more true. Jesus has never been more eager to be born again into our hearts.

So as we make this journey through Advent towards Christmas and then trace the traditional 12 days of Christmas leading up to Epiphany, we will intentionally spend time in Scripture each day. The readings for this series come from the lectionary (a set of daily readings Christians have followed for centuries). We'll dip into the prophets, the Psalms, the Gospels, the epistles, and everything in between as we lean into this time of expectation and hope. May your Advent be filled with rich insights from the Word that draws you closer to the Master.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN  
Church of Nashville

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## Sunday, November 29

FIRST SUNDAY *of* ADVENT

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### Read

Isaiah 64:1-9

### Reflect

Chapter 64 of Isaiah is thought to be written *after* the Babylonian exile. The Persian king, Cyrus, defeated Babylon and allowed the Israelites to return to their homeland. This was a joyful occasion, and yet today's reading sounds an awful lot like lament. Why is that?

When the Israelites returned to their beloved city of Jerusalem, they found a toppled temple and ruins all around. They encountered animosity from those who had settled in the land and those Jews who had been left behind. It was not a clean return to what once was, but a difficult and tumultuous re-entry that left the people dismayed and hopeless.

These words from Isaiah give voice to the pain of returning home to find it no longer feels like home. In verse 4 we find a familiar call to wait on the Lord, "Since before time began no one has ever imagined, no ear heard, no eye seen, a God like you who works for those who wait for him." (64:4, *The Message*). "Wait for the Lord" is a phrase that appears often in Scripture. It basically means to trust God, to remain faithful even in times of doubt, to live with the assurance and expectation that God is compassionate and merciful and present even in the darkest times.

### Respond

Perhaps you find yourself in a season similar to the Israelites returning from exile. The way COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down has felt a bit like exile. As we expectantly hope for a vaccine and a bit of normalcy, can you imagine how the Israelites must have felt? Things are not the same and likely never will be as we come away from this difficult year; however, God is the same – faithful, gracious and ever-present. As verse 8 reminds us, God is our Father, the Potter, and we are the clay in His hands. He is the one to mold us. He is the artist who is devoted to his art (each one of us). He will not leave us; though we are unclean and even our best efforts are like "filthy rags" (v.6), He remains steadfast. As we begin our journey to Bethlehem, the stable, and the baby in a manger, we are reminded that there is no limit to His love, and we are free.

### Pray

*Holy God, you are faithful even when we are not. You are good even when we fail over and over again. You call us out of exile, and though you never promise it will be easy, you always promise to be present. Thank you for the way this season reminds us of your intimate presence in the incarnation. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*

THE REV. SARAH BIRD KNEFF

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## Monday, November 30

DAY 2 of ADVENT

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### Read

Micah 4:1-5

### Reflect

Micah paints a picture full of hope. One where people of different nations (maybe even opposed political perspectives) are no longer oriented around what they are for or who they are against. Micah invites us to imagine the tectonic transformation that takes place when the mountain of the Lord is raised up and the hills are made low. The hills we would die on are no longer that high. Our weapons are transformed from tools of war into tools for farming: fostering life rather than dealing death, working side by side rather than making the other lose.

Advent is the season when we wait expectantly - filled with hope - for the transformation that Christ's coming creates. This pandemic has taught us what it's like for our lives to be reoriented. However, the paradigm shift the pandemic has provided did not bring unity. No, we have doubled down on orienting ourselves around what we are for or who we are against. Micah paints a different picture. Micah invites us to hear God's call to a different orientation. A call to discipleship. In this season of Advent, we prepare our hearts to be oriented around the one who is for us. Jesus Christ. Emmanuel. The *with us* God. This reorientation only takes place as we walk in the name of the Lord as disciples of Jesus Christ, the one who is coming into the world.

### Respond

Look back over the past months, what have you oriented your life around? In what ways have you oriented your life around what you are for or who you are against? What would it look like if you oriented your life around the one who has decided to be with and for you? What are the hills you're ready to die on that could be dwarfed by the mountain of the Lord? What are the weapons you are using on those who are different from you that the coming of Christ could transform into tools of fellowship and common good? Micah invites us into a life of discipleship, where we walk in the way of the Lord every single day. What would this Advent look like if decided to be with the God who has decided to be with you every single day?

### Pray

*God of Jacob, reorient my life around the complete revelation of your love in Jesus Christ. Transform my fighting into farming and teach me to walk with you every single day. In the name of the Word made flesh, Amen.*

THE REV. ADAM DEVRIES

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## Tuesday, December 1

DAY 3 of ADVENT

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### Read

Micah 4:6-13

### Reflect

Have you witnessed the delivery of a child? I've witnessed the type of delivery described by Micah only in movies – heavy pants, profuse sweat, muscle-wrenched pangs. I'm sure that such deliveries still occur! I also trust that modern medicines make them more bearable. In Micah's day, there were no epidurals. There were only labor pains. Micah apparently knew the sounds of a mother-in-the-making struggling through labor, the cries of pain on the way to joyful life.

It seems likely that just as we are less familiar with that kind of childbirth pain, so we find it hard to fathom that a current experience of pain actually is a birth-pang of new life. Micah preached it to Jerusalem long ago, and the message persists. Paul declared it to the Romans in 8:23: "we ourselves...groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

I wonder if it wasn't just as hard for Micah's and Paul's hearers as it is for us. We've long imagined that belonging to God should mean smooth progress, success, and prosperity. But the biblical history includes exile, disestablishment, displacement, and loss. Micah says, "Those pains? They are pangs of new birth."

God is faithful. He will accomplish his purposes for his people. Through every season and every ordeal, he is bringing forth life. The world will not see his purpose completed until that day described by John's Revelation, when the kingdoms of this world are overthrown and Christ becomes all in all. But we have his vision; we know how this ends; we can be sure that along the way, we will witness the signs of its fulfillment.

### Pray

*Eternal God, 2020 has been one long Advent. We wait and wait and wait; many cry out in the pain of what feels like nothing but loss. Give us eyes of faith, which see in the pains of this life birth pangs of new life. Finish what you have begun in Jesus Christ, sanctifying each of us, renewing the whole creation. We ask in the power of your Holy Spirit, Amen.*

DR. STUART R. GORDON

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## Wednesday, December 2

DAY 4 of ADVENT

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### Read

Micah 5:1-6

### Reflect

Micah prophesied in Judah during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (about 750-700 BC), at about the same time as Isaiah. It was a time of prosperity, and Micah denounced the wealthy, who were oppressing the poor, and warned of impending judgment. The northern kingdom actually fell during Micah's ministry, in 722 BC, and Judah almost fell in 701 (2 Kings 18-20). The book contains three sections, which alternate between words of warning and messages of hope. Micah told of a day when there would be peace among all nations, who would then be able to "beat their swords into plowshares" (4:3), and of a royal deliverer who would save God's people from all her enemies. This deliverer would be born in Bethlehem (5:2).

Verse 1 begins with the capitol city Jerusalem under distress. The King of Judah has been humiliated in defeat. Help is on the way, but from the least expected place: the little and insignificant town of Bethlehem. There is something about God's plans that confound the wisdom of every age. This citizen of Bethlehem God will raise up to govern Israel and will care for his subjects as a shepherd for his flock.

Jesus is the child from Bethlehem that inaugurates this new age of the kingdom of God. And Jesus has come as the desire of every nation ready, willing, and able to break the power of canceled sin and set the prisoners free.

### Respond

Verse 3 speaks of "she who is in labor" as the one responsible for birthing God's new kingdom in the person and work of Jesus. Micah is suggesting that this woman in labor is God's covenant community. That is to say, God will use the believing community as the agent through which the Messiah will come into the world. The community and the family that gave birth to Jesus Christ were characterized by faith, prayer, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. God uses this believing community to birth the Son into the world not by necessity but by grace. The question for us is how can we, as the continuing covenant community of God, be birthing Jesus into our world? What does it look like to present the risen and ascended Lord Jesus to the world? How might we do that in our lives, our families, and this body of believers called First Presbyterian Nashville?

### Pray

*Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*  
(Book of Common Prayer)

DR. RYAN V. MOORE

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## Thursday, December 3

DAY 5 of ADVENT

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### Read

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Hosea 6:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

### Reflect

Christ has come; Christ is coming; Christ will come again. Advent is the celebration of Christ's coming into our world and into our lives. Remembering how Christ came in that infant cradled in a manger, we look forward to Christ coming again in glory while we experience the presence of Christ in our daily lives. How does the advent of Christ in this world affect our lives? The three lessons for today's readings anticipate the coming of the Lord. Psalm 85 remembers how God has forgiven us in the past, but looks forward to the Lord bringing a salvation "that love and faithfulness may meet, and righteousness and peace may kiss each other." The coming of Christ brings love, faith, and righteousness. The prophet Hosea calls us to return to the Lord. When things are torn and broken, the Lord will come "as sure as the dawn" to heal us. Hosea asks us to repent and turn to the Lord who redeems us. The coming of Christ brings repentance, healing, and restoration. In the Thessalonian passage, Paul is expressing thanksgiving for the Thessalonians whose lives have been radically changed by the coming of the Holy Spirit into their hearts. Yet as they imitate Christ, they are awaiting the return of Christ. The coming of Christ brings changed lives and hope.

### Respond

In three weeks, it is Christmas Eve. Christ is coming! How different this Advent and Christmas: no large parties, no full candlelight services, no multi-family gatherings. Life is so different. What can we anticipate with excitement? In this upturned world we need Christ to come bringing love, faith, and righteousness, healing us with hope for the future. The preparation for the coming starts with repentance. Repentance is examining our lives for brokenness and then, with God's help, going in a new direction. This year Advent and Christmas celebrations must go in a new direction. Discover new ways the family can gather around the Christmas story. Find new opportunities to reach out and help those in need. Anticipate Christ to come bringing love, faith, and hope.

### Pray

*Come Lord Jesus, so steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. Come Lord Jesus, heal us and fill us with your spirit so that we might be imitators of you. In your name we pray. Amen.*

DR. JOHN L. MUSGRAVE

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## Friday, December 4

DAY 6 of ADVENT

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### Read

Acts 11:19-26

### Reflect

God has an amazing perspective and ability to use, for His good, circumstances that appear to us to be unfortunate and even disastrous. The persecution of Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem led the early disciples to scatter to faraway places. But as they traveled, the disciples shared the news of Jesus Christ to both Jews and Greeks. We are told that the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

As the number of new believers grew in Antioch, Barnabus partnered with Saul (Paul) and the disciples were for the first time called Christians. Antioch was a city known for its "luxurious immorality" and yet, through the work of the Holy Spirit, Christianity took great strides forward in this seemingly unlikely place. So the promise of Jesus Christ was fulfilled as He said: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

### Respond

Where is God calling you to be His witness? What circumstances is God asking you to surrender to Him, with trust and faith, that He will, somehow and in some way, guide you to use the circumstances and your gifts and efforts for His good? In the words of a familiar hymn, "This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet." (M. Babcock) Thanks be to God.

### Prayer

*Dear Lord,*

*Help us never to forget that You are a God of new beginnings, and a God who can take and use circumstances that appear, to our human eyes, to be unfortunate and even hopeless. Help us to trust in Your perspective, Your goodness and Your transforming power. May we hold up to You our lives, our concerns, our fears, our hopes and dreams and seek Your will to be done in all. May we be used, through the work of Your Holy Spirit, to share Your love and presence in our words and deeds. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

DR. SANDRA L. RANDLEMAN

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## Saturday, December 5

DAY 7 of ADVENT

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### Read

Ezekiel 36:24-28

### Reflect

This text from Ezekiel is one of the first pieces of scripture I ever preached from. I was a senior at my undergraduate university, studying homiletics, and distinctly remember the sermon because of my illustration. I focused on the words in verse 26, “a new heart I will give you...a heart of flesh.” I bought a package of honey baked ham, cut it into a heart shape, covered it, and at the climatic point in my sermon, unveiled my creation. I can’t remember anything about the sermon, except for the fact that when I revealed the “heart of flesh” the room was overpowered by the smell of honey baked ham! It made for a wonderfully embarrassing moment for a young preacher.

For everything that didn’t quite work about the sermon, the illustration that I was actually left with was the impact that God’s sanctifying work has upon an individual and community. When God shows up, and does the sort of thing God does; “take you, gather you, bring you, sprinkle clean, cleanse you, put within you, remove from you, my Spirit within you, make you follow, be your God.” The scripture is liberally littered with robust verbs that capture God’s presence. It is impossible for the redemption to go unnoticed.

### Respond

As you have followed Jesus, how have you been redeemed? If you could be today, what God is forming you to be in time? Where might you ask God’s sanctifying Spirit to spend a little extra time this season? Consider the prayer from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French idealist philosopher and Jesuit Catholic priest, and pray it several times throughout this Advent season, and trust that God’s Spirit is in fact doing a great work in you this day.

### Pray

Prayer from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin on following page.

THE REV. JOSH RODRIGUEZ

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.  
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.  
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.  
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.*

*And yet it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—  
and that it may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you;  
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,  
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.  
Don't try to force them on,  
as though you could be today what time  
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)  
will make of you tomorrow.*

*Only God could say what this new spirit  
gradually forming within you will be.  
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing  
that his hand is leading you,  
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
in suspense and incomplete.*

— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, excerpted from *Hearts on Fire*