

# *Week 2*

*Devotions for ADVENT through EPIPHANY*



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN  
Church of Nashville

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## Sunday, December 6

SECOND SUNDAY *of* ADVENT

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### Read

Mark 1:1-8

### Reflect

The character John the Baptist has captivated Bible readers for centuries. Who is this strange man proclaiming an even stranger message? He was just as baffling to his contemporaries, and not just because of his choice of clothing and diet. The Israelites knew the ancient prophecies that told of a coming Messiah to rescue them from their oppressors. They knew the promises and expected a warrior king to swoop in and defeat the Roman Empire.

However, John the Baptist was heralding a completely different kingdom reign. He was calling for repentance as a way to prepare for the coming Christ. The Greek word for “repentance” is *metanoia* which means literally “to turn around.” The Jewish people were going one way, the way of rebellion and sin, and John was calling them to change course and turn around.

### Respond

This summer I went kayaking on the Harpeth River and we hit a few low rapids in our trip. As we approached the rapids, my kayak was turning to the side and I knew that if I were to go over the rough water sideways, I was sure to flip. Thankfully, I worked and worked to straighten out, and at the last minute was able to safely navigate the rapids. However, we don’t have to struggle to correct our course as we approach the white waters of life, but rather we allow God’s grace to steer us in repentance.

John is warning that there are rapids ahead, there is change coming and we must prepare, repent, turn around, or else we’ll flip over. It is interesting to me that John didn’t seem to know exactly what he was prophesying. The message was almost just as confusing to the messenger as it was to the recipients. Though he preached and baptized, there was still some doubt (Matthew 11:2-10).

In the life of faith, it is easy to feel tired, overwhelmed or impatient. It might be difficult to believe the Good News in moments marred by grief or disappointment or viruses. However, John continued to prophesy, and later Jesus himself commended John for his faithfulness (Matthew 11: 11-15). As we enter this 2nd week of Advent, let us renew our commitment to faithful pursuit of the One who has already pursued us, as He came to dwell among us a Light in the darkness.

### Pray

*Jesus, even as we prepare for your coming this Advent, we admit that we aren’t exactly sure just what we’re preparing for. We admit that the uncertainty makes us nervous, and we aren’t always as bold as your servant John the Baptist. Send your Holy Spirit to correct our course, empower us, and remind us of your extravagant love. Amen.*

THE REV. SARAH BIRD KNEFF

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## Monday, December 7

DAY 9 of ADVENT

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### Read

Acts 2:37-42

### Reflect

“Save yourselves...” is a strange way for Peter to put it. Wouldn't it have been better to say “be saved...”? If the story of scripture along with Christ's birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection teaches us anything, it's that we cannot save ourselves. But, we can say “yes” to our salvation. That's what Peter is talking about here. That's what takes place when 3,000 people say “yes” to Christ as their Lord and Savior. They were convicted, cut to the heart by the words they heard from Peter. Conviction invites us toward God. The coming of Christ is for us, not against us. “The promise is for you.” When it comes to God's love for us in Jesus Christ, conviction and grace go hand in hand. When we are cut to the heart, we remember we need Christ to be born in our hearts again.

Saying yes to our salvation in Jesus Christ is not a one and done thing. The point is not to say “yes” to God's grace and continue with the way we lived before the gift of the Holy Spirit. “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!” The converts in this passage devoted themselves to a life of faith oriented around God's promise to them in Jesus Christ. During Advent we wait expectantly for Christ's coming. We orient our lives around the hope of Christ's return. We prepare a little more room in our hearts for Christ to be born there.

### Respond:

You may have several nativity scenes around your house in this season. If there were a scene of the first time Christ was born in your life what would it look like?

What's the story? When was the first time the Holy Spirit invited you by way of conviction to say “yes”? Share that story with someone in our faith community.

When was the last time you said “yes”? Looking over this past year when it's been difficult to gather in fellowship and breaking of the bread, what have you been devoted to?

How is the Holy Spirit inviting you to prepare room in your heart for Christ's coming in a year like never before?

### Pray

*Convict me with your compassion, O God. Teach me to repent and return. Teach me to remember my baptism and be glad. Fill my heart once again with the fullness of your Holy Spirit, that I might be devoted to you in new, creative, and courageous ways. In the name of the Word made flesh, Amen.*

THE REV. ADAM DEVRIES

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## Tuesday, December 8

DAY 10 of ADVENT

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### Read

Psalm 27

### Reflect

*The Psalm is a refusal to let  
falsehood become the language-world  
of existence.*

-James Luther Mays

Who among us cannot sympathize with this psalmist? Who does not feel the strong mixture of emotions that arise in an environment of falsehood and deception?

Psalm 27 invites us to pay attention to the fear that wells up in us, in the face of falsehood. In this case, the falsehood is personal, writ small: someone is unjustly accusing the person who prays. What should one do? Pray.

1. Seek the Lord in the community of faith, in the sanctuary, in the midst of the scriptures and liturgy that orient us to the sovereign God.
2. Remember that the Lord is more reliable than any human, oneself included.
3. Acknowledge that danger from falsehood is real.
4. Accept that sometimes, the system is inadequate to prevent falsehood. Prayer to God is all one has.

Pray through the vulnerability. A person learns trust only there: “trust is possible only for those who know the Lord as Savior” (Mays).

### Respond

Think of a time when someone falsely accused you or misrepresented you. How did it feel? How did you respond? What would you do differently were it to happen again tomorrow?

### Pray

*Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies, because of those who falsely accuse me or misrepresent me. Their falsehood is real and its danger is real. Cast out of me any fear that would incite me to respond in defensiveness or anger or vengeance. Build in me that powerful trust shown by all the saints who have gone before us, chiefly that shown by our Lord Jesus, who remained silent in the face of false accusation, trusting you to vindicate him. Increase my faith that I will see your goodness on the other side of this, in the land of the living. Amen.*

DR. STUART R. GORDON

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## Wednesday, December 9

DAY 11 of ADVENT

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### Read

Malachi 2:10-3:1

### Reflect

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. It ends with the great line, “And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” Roll the credits! What a great cliffhanger to the sequel: The New Testament.

In 516 B.C. the rebuilt temple was completed. To the nation’s disappointment, this did not produce the messianic age many expected. The warm response to the prophet Zechariah’s call to repentance had grown cold, because God apparently had not restored the covenant blessing. Malachi, writing a short time later, called the people to repentance with respect to a corrupt priesthood, routine and dispassionate worship, the widespread breakdown of the nuclear family, social justice was being ignored, and tithing was neglected. In short, Israel had neglected its relationship with God and it was showing painfully in the way they related to each other.

Still, the Lord will send his messenger (John the Baptist), and he will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord to give life and set all things right.

### Respond

Verse 13 Malachi acknowledges that the people grieve their spiritual barrenness; “You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.” What’s the rub? The people’s sorrow was for the wrong reason; they should have been upset over their sin rather than their lack of divine acceptance and blessing.

We often lament God not being the God we want him to be. Malachi encourages us to turn the mirror around, to take a look at our own sinful lives, and return to the Lord repentant.

### Pray

*Lord God, prepare the way in us. Don’t leave us as we are. Give us the courage to look deeply inside and see our need for the Savior that was, and is, and is to come. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

DR. RYAN V. MOORE

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## Thursday, December 10

DAY 12 of ADVENT

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### Read

Read Habakkuk 2:1-5; Philippians 3:7-11

### Reflect

Advent is a time of waiting for the coming of the Lord to make all things right. This season we are waiting for life to be made right. Waiting for a vaccination, waiting to gather with extended family and friends, waiting to carefreely leave our homes, waiting to travel, waiting for the divisions in our country to be healed, waiting to trust what we hear and read, waiting for life to be made right. In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Habakkuk is waiting to hear a message from God. His world is totally destroyed. The Chaldeans have invaded, devouring everything. Habakkuk cries out for God to respond. God answers Habakkuk's complaint by describing the invaders as proud and arrogant. Their greed will destroy them. They will self-destruct. The people of God "live by their faith." Trust in the Lord for the wicked will be destroyed, and God will come. In Philippians, Paul describes his new life in Christ. In his former life, Paul was an arrogant "Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless." Paul's arrogance leads him to persecute Christians. The coming of Christ into his life brings a humility acknowledging that righteousness comes from faith in Christ. All that he was arrogant about is rubbish compared to knowing Christ.

### Respond

This season of COVID-19 has given us time to reexamine our priorities and lives. Our lives have been changed. Hopefully, some of our arrogance has been removed. The Advent and Christmas season is a fantastic celebration of Christ's humbling himself and coming into our world bringing the joy of resurrected life. Yet our culture in many ways has changed this season into a time of greed. What will I get instead of what will I give? Ads tempt us to buy for ourselves. Pride, arrogance, and greed will destroy us. Paul calls us to humbly have faith in Christ. Knowing Christ surpasses all. May this be a time to draw closer to Christ and to each other.

### Pray

*Come Lord Jesus, fill us with faith that all will be well. Come Lord Jesus, remove false pride, arrogance, and greed. Come Lord Jesus, fill us with the joy of knowing you and your love. Come Lord Jesus and make all things right. In your holy name we pray, Amen.*

DR. JOHN L. MUSGRAVE

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## Friday, December 11

DAY 13 of ADVENT

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### Read

Philippians 3:12-16

### Reflect

Paul acknowledges that he is not a perfect Christian, but he is pressing on toward the goal. The life of dedicated discipleship requires focus and discipline. Paul's imagery reminds us of an athlete running a race. Paul says he is forever pressing on, seeking to understand and fulfill the purpose to which he has been called by Jesus Christ. Paul strives to focus on the race he is running and the goal that awaits him. He seeks to forget the things that are behind, including all the mistakes and regrets of the past. Paul's only focus is on what Jesus Christ is calling him to do now, the purpose of his life.

Verse 16 is an interesting one, variously translated and interpreted. The New Revised Standard Version reads, "Only let us hold fast to what we have attained." Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, writes, "Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it." The Philippians interpretation reads, "It is important that we go forward in the light of such truth as we have already learned."

### Reflect

What do you understand Jesus Christ is calling you to do with your life? Are you seeking to discern your purpose? If you are still seeking to discern your purpose and how God may be seeking to use you, prayerfully invite God to show you. Ask God to reveal to you your gifts and abilities and opportunities to use them to fulfill a need in the world.

Do you find it difficult to forget the failures and mistakes of your past? Consider them as learning opportunities. What did you learn about yourself and others? Having harvested the fruit of the past, ask God to help you use these experiences, with God's guidance and wisdom, for good in the future. Then set the past aside and strive to run the race set before you.

### Pray

*Thank you, dear Lord, that you created us each with gifts and abilities and that you grant us opportunities to use these gifts for your good purposes. Open our eyes to see the path that you have set before us and help us to faithfully and joyfully run the race as disciples of Jesus Christ. Redeem the mistakes of our past and do not let them keep us from living fully and abundantly all the days that you give us. Grant us the focus and strength and perseverance we need to faithfully run the race, sharing your love and presence that others may come to know and love and serve you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

DR. SANDRA L. RANDLEMAN

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## Saturday, December 12

DAY 14 of ADVENT

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### Read

Habakkuk 3:13-19

### Reflect

In three short chapters the prophet Habakkuk runs the gamut of the human experience of faith. He asks questions like, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?” (1:2) He makes proclamations such as, “Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.” (2:4) He calls God Rock. (1:12) In the verses above he paints God as savior, one who crushes enemies and makes one’s feet like that of a deer; God makes our steps to be graceful and confident. If we only had the book of Habakkuk, we would be in good hands. Habakkuk invites us to ask honest questions and challenges us to a bold faith. If we are going to faithfully follow Jesus in this world, we will need everything Habakkuk has to offer.

### Respond

What questions do you have for God this Advent season?

At this time, if you were to paint a picture of God, what colors would you use and what image might you settle on?

Where do you need God to help direct your footing in this season of life?

### Pray

*Almighty God, you are our Rock and our Salvation. In you we can trust. In you we can doubt. Accept what we have to offer this season, and, as only your Spirit can, redeem and renew everything we lay at the foot of the cross. Move us in this life to faithfully follow Jesus, no matter the situation we find ourselves in. May our faith grow bigger than our doubts. May our love for you and neighbor exceed all else. Amen.*

THE REV. JOSH RODRIGUEZ