



## guide to prayer and study | week of November 29, 2020

### “Hope Can’t Wait” | First week of Advent

**Advent Wreath:** The Advent wreath was originally a German and Scandinavian home devotional practice used to mark the four weeks of Advent. Families would light a candle for each past week and the current week at their dinner or evening time of prayer. The configuration of candles, whether in a line or a circle, did not matter. Neither did the color of the candles. This private home practice eventually found its way into public worship and is now one of the ways we mark time in Advent while increasing light as Christmas approaches. This year, we are returning to more of a private home practice as we take our worship rituals and celebrate them in our homes.

**You are invited to gather together 4 candles for each week of advent (any size or color), as well as a "Christ Candle" (typically white).** You can incorporate the advent wreath rituals into a daily home worship practice, as well as to use in lighting the advent candles during online worship each Sunday. We hope this will be a meaningful way for you to mark the time as you worship at home and online.

*We would love to see a photo of your home advent wreath! We're also collecting videos of individuals & families reading the liturgy and lighting the candles so we can share them in online worship! You can sign up and find instructions here:*

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/179pXrvd1HkcoHKc80TrdHmDOY8rLrbQPI4R1bmGus-Q/edit?usp=sharing>

**Read:** Today we begin the season of Advent, a time of waiting and longing for the coming of Christ, God’s promise to change our world. But this time of waiting is also a time for us to be working – for peace among the nations, and peace with each other. It is a time for us to change our priorities and perspective as we join God’s transforming work. As part of our Advent waiting, we will celebrate Christ’s coming by lighting the candles of the Advent wreath each week to remind us that even when our whole world seems dark, the Light of Christ grows brighter week by week and day by day.

God of justice and peace, healing and comfort, we see all that is wrong in our world and wonder where you are. We are a broken people, and we are unable to work together for our common good. We cannot see or hear each other even within our own families and communities. We are a suffering world, and our nations are filled with conflict and violence. The fragile earth cries out with longing for redemption. The prophet Isaiah speaks our longings: We, God’s people, long for God’s presence, saying with the prophet: “If only you would tear open the heavens and come down!” (*Isaiah 64:1, CEB*)

We may be willing to wait for many things, but we can no longer wait for hope. We cannot wait for hope, because we need to live with hope—today and every day. So today we light the candle of hope as a reminder and as a prayer that we might stop waiting and start living, stop watching and start moving. May the light of this candle burn inside us this week—inspiring hope and action for God’s promised day.

**Light:** Light one candle for “hope”

**Pray:** Loving God, as we enter this Advent season, we open all the dark places of our hearts for your love and light to enter in. Thank you for the words of the Prophet Isaiah that remind us that you are the source of our hope. Help us to live each day, allowing you to form us in a way that brings about your kingdom here on earth. Amen.

## MONDAY 11.30.2020

**Read:** Isaiah 64:1-9

**Reflect:** The prophet calls for God to appear decisively, to “tear open the heavens” so the nations would tremble. He also confesses the need for such decisive intervention -- the utter sinfulness of humanity, even of those who are part of God’s covenant. Finally, he changes metaphors -- from earthly catastrophe to remaking pots, begging God to be merciful when God comes.

- The season of preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ is a time for taking stock of our present lives, straightening our crooked paths, and bringing our mission and purpose into sharp focus as we prepare not only for the celebration of Jesus’ birth, but for the God’s inbreaking into our world and our lives again and again.
- We begin the season of Advent acknowledging our estrangement from our Creator. We acknowledge God’s anger and absence, and we confess our complicity in the situation: \*God has a right to be angry, because we, God’s people, have sinned against God and one another. We have not loved God with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done God’s will. We have broken God’s law. We have rebelled against God’s love. We have not loved our neighbors. We have not heard the cry of the needy.
- As we begin the holiday season during the year 2020, what are the current realities that we as Christians need to acknowledge are not in alignment with God’s intentions for God’s good world? How have we participated or complied (whether by what we’ve done or what we’ve left undone) in systems or actions that prevent God’s kingdom from being realized? How can our Advent practices and rituals help us return to God, right our ship, and realign our lives to God’s mission?

**Pray:** O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Amen. (*Isaiah 64:8-9*)

\*Prayer of Confession (adapted by D. Chesser), “A Service of Word and Table I.” The United Methodist Hymnal. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. Pg. 8.

## TUESDAY 12.01.2020

**Read:** Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

**Reflect:** The people cry out for restoration from the midst of exile. “Restore us, Lord God of hosts. Shine the light of your countenance upon us, that we may be saved!”

- This psalm is a community lament. The request for God’s face to shine is simultaneously a prayer for blessing and a plea for a new revelation of divine power. Unlike the words of Isaiah, which sought to move the people to repentance, the psalmist ends by seeking to move God to “give us life” (v. 18), which indicates a prayer for literal new life and existence for God’s people.

- \*Psalms of lament, such as Psalm 80, give us permission to add our voice to the choruses of faithful outcries throughout the ages. They give us permission to be fully honest—with ourselves and with God. They give us permission to proclaim that God is powerful enough to take it—and to respond to our pleas. Lamenting, therefore, is an act of robust faith. When we cry out to God, we name the disruption, disorientation, and disorder of our lives. We dismantle the myth that we have everything under control. We awaken to our own pain and the suffering of others. We ask God to wake up God's power.
- How does the extended period of social distancing we are experiencing during the Covid-19 pandemic feel like living in exile? What other losses due to this pandemic give you cause for lament? How could you give voice to these losses in your own form of lament (journaling, drawing, prayer, etc.)?

**Pray:** God, wake up your power. Restore us. Let your face shine, so that we might be saved. Amen.

*\*Lisle Gwynn Garrity, Sanctified Art Devotional "Those Who Dream"*

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### **WEDNESDAY 12.02.2020**

#### **"Dream, Don't Sleep" | Mark 13:24-37 & 2 Peter 3:8-15**

They say you will come like a "thief in the night,"

The hour unclear, the day easily feared.

But I toss these words over the edge of my tongue,

And they don't taste right.

A thief is one that I lock out.

A thief is the one that I fear.

So I ask myself—

Did I downgrade you to no more than a thief, Great Builder?

Did you form me from the dust,

Breathe life into my bones,

And paint the horizon into the sky, all for me?

And was all of that fine,

Until you asked me to love my neighbor as myself?

Was all of that fine,

Until you said, "Dream, don't sleep"?

Was all of that fine,

Until you asked me to wake up to the suffering in the streets?

Did I imprison you to the role of the thief

To keep you from getting too close?

Forgive me, Great Builder.

Tear down the door to my house.

Crawl through the window.  
Slip through the attic fan.  
Dance in the security light.  
Scream through the letterbox until I hear you again.  
For this house is your house.  
You built it.  
You belong here.  
I am begging you,  
Break back in.

*Poem by Sarah Are*

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#### **THURSDAY 12.03.2020**

##### **Read: I Corinthians 1:3-9**

**Reflect:** In the midst of offering a greeting to the Christians in Corinth, Paul points to the end -- the coming Day of the Lord -- to call them to continue to grow and be faithful in using their spiritual gifts.

- \*Paul mentions the name Jesus eight times in the first nine verses of this letter. He knew that without Jesus nothing else he said or did made any sense. And what he wanted the Corinthians to get hold of most of all is what it means to have Jesus at the middle of your story, your life, your thoughts, your imagination. In particular, he wanted them to have Jesus at the center of their understanding of the world and of history.
- Paul also makes sure that they understand how they have become part of a large and growing worldwide family, brothers and sisters of everyone who 'calls on the name of our Lord King Jesus'. And the idea of 'calling on his name' links this worldwide family back to the earlier story of Israel, the people who 'called on the name of the Lord' in the sense of the Lord YHWH, Israel's God. This connection shows that in Jesus, Israel's true king, the world's true Lord, Israel's one God has become personally present in the world, summoning all people into his family. Finally, Paul helps them to see how they have been enriched by the riches of God's grace to become a community of learners, growing eagerly in knowledge about God and his new life, able to teach one another, and so strengthening and confirming the original royal proclamation, 'the messianic message', that has been made to them.
- How do you see yourself as part of this "large and growing worldwide family" of God? Is Jesus currently at the center of your understanding of the world, of history, or even of the present realities of life today? How can these understanding change the way we relate to others?

**Pray:** God you are faithful. You have freely given us the gift of your grace through your Son, Jesus Christ. As I call upon your name, fill me with the grace I need to you as the center of my story and my life, and to see my life as part of your bigger story to grow the worldwide family through your love. Amen.

\* Wright, N.T.. [Advent for Everyone: A Journey with the Apostles](#) (p. 3). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

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**FRIDAY 12.04.2020****Read: Mark 13:24-37**

**Reflect:** The text charges us to “keep awake” because we do not know the day or the hour when the fullness of “God with us” will be realized. We must live, always, as those who are ready, who are fully prepared for God’s kingdom to come, and for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

- \*Advent is a time to wake up. To awaken is to live in a constant state of awareness and attentiveness so that we do not miss Jesus, who is ever-present and ever-active. It means living in the expectancy that we may be surprised by grace and mercy breaking into our lives at any moment. The ordinary things are not to be taken for granted; rather, they are the places, as Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury, has pointed out, where we always can expect something new from our Master and Teacher that will touch our lives in some way. If we are sleeping, we may miss these Advent gifts!
- How might you be “sleepwalking” through life in 2020, or tempted to ignore the current realities, in the midst of a pandemic, racial unrest and political divisions? How can you become more fully present not only to the pain, fear, and injustice that exist, but also more fully expectant for Jesus to show up and provide bring hope, healing and justice?

**Journal:** Take some time today to write down a dream of hope. What’s something you hope for yourself, your family, your world, or someone you love?

**Pray:** As we come into this season of advent waiting and longing, help us, O God, to practice hope. Keep us awake by helping us to dream, to envision how we will live in the reality of your promise to be with us. Keep us watching and expecting the inbreaking of your divine inbreaking, wherever and whenever it comes. Amen.

\*Hudson, Trevor. Pauses for Advent: Words of Wonder. Upper Room.

**SATURDAY 12.05.2020****Take Sabbath (in order to dream)**

Advent can be a time of realigning our visions for the world in order to bring God’s kingdom into reality. In order to do that, we need time and space to dream. There’s a reason dreams come to us in our sleep—rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and opens us to receive God’s messages. It takes action to bring our dreams to life; it takes rest and time to sustain them. To nourish and sustain yourself as a dreamer, commit to a Sabbath activity today, perhaps one of those listed below:

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Cook or bake something using a favorite or new recipe.
- Do yoga or exercise in a way that feels good for your body.
- Write and mail a letter to someone you haven’t talked to in a while.
- Organize or redesign an area in your home.
- Draw or create something.

- Dance or play music.
  - Write a poem or a song.
  - Watch a movie.
  - Take a nap.
  - Read a book.
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**Prayers for our Community:**

- Brooke Jetmund requests prayers for her dad, Curt. He is in the hospital with Covid, and pneumonia. He is on the mend but needs prayers for strength and healing.
- Diane Hammond requests prayers for Erin and Max who were diagnosed with Covid; for Steve's brother in law, Jerry who has MS and lives in a long term care facility and just tested positive for COVID; for Dorothy, the last of her parents' living friends, who is failing fast with heart failure; and for her dear friend Margaret who has cancer and is a lot of pain.