

2026 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Greendale Ecumenical Group
Worcester & Auburn, Massachusetts

Thursday, November 26, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson

"Turn Us Toward the Light" *Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Zechariah 13:1-9; Revelation 14:6-13;*

We are a people of waiting, not for a distant king, but for the turning of hearts toward justice, mercy, and love.

When the world grows harsh and hope feels worn thin, we remember the ancient cry: *Restore us again. Let your face shine upon us.*

Beneath the winter soil a living spring still flows, washing away fear, calling forth what is most true.

The fire comes, not to destroy, but to refine: to burn away what separates and reveal what belongs to love alone.

And across the ages still comes a song, good news for every people, every language, every living being beneath the sky:

Hold fast. Do not grow weary. Plant peace where you stand. Trust the light you cannot yet see.

For Advent is not only waiting. It is becoming. It is turning again toward one another, toward the holy within and among us, until the world itself begins to shine.

Friday, November 27, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson

"Advent Prayer for a Waiting World" *Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Zechariah 14:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18;*

Turn us again toward the light, O Love that dwells within all things.

When the world is torn by fear and the mountains of certainty tremble, let living waters rise among us, flowing through the dry places of sorrow and division.

Teach us to walk more deeply in the ways of compassion, growing in wisdom, growing in courage, growing in care for one another.

And when we grieve what has been lost, remind us that no life is forgotten, that every act of love endures, and every soul belongs to the great mystery of being.

So in this season we watch, not for rescue from the world, but for the dawning of a deeper truth: that the light we seek is already coming, already here, waiting to be kindled in every heart, until all shall live beneath one sky, beside one river, in the peace that has no end.

Saturday, November 28, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"Advent in Troubled Times" *Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Micah 2:1-13; Matthew 24:15-31;*

When the night is full of warnings, and the news of the world arrives heavy with sorrow, we remember an ancient prayer: *Turn us again toward the light.*

For there are those who build their comfort upon another's loss, and there are powers that mistake fear for strength. Yet still the prophets whisper: the way of injustice cannot endure.

The stars may seem to falter. The familiar landmarks may disappear. What we trusted may be shaken.

But Advent teaches us to watch without despair.

Beyond the noise and ruin, beyond the trembling of nations, love gathers the scattered, hope calls the exiled home, and a deeper truth waits to be revealed.

So let us keep awake, not for catastrophe, but for compassion. Not for judgment, but for courage.

And let us become the light we are longing for, until the face of love shines again upon the world.

Sunday, November 29, 2026 Pastor Andrew Borden
"God Is Near Now" *Matthew 24:23,32-33; Mary 4:4-10*

Matthew 24:23,32-33 from The Scholar's Edition

[Jesus said,] "If someone says to you, 'Look, here is the Anointed' or 'over here,' don't count on it!" "Take a cue from the fig tree. When its branch is already in bud and leaves come out, you know that summer is near. So when you see all these things, you ought to realize that [God] is near."

Mary 4:4-10 from Karen L. King Translation

[Jesus said,] "Be on your guard so that no one deceives you by saying, 'Look over here!' or 'Look over there!' For the child of True Humanity exists within you. Follow it! Those who search for it will find it.

There is a warning from our Lord to be alert and not mistake what people say for when God actually reveals God-self and makes known what is needful!

To be ready means preparation on our part in emptying ourselves (kenosis) of thoughts and concerns cluttering up our thinking and reasoning so to receive, ponder and benefit from Wisdom looking to download our way.

God is actually present now! We aren't literally waiting some further time out for what is termed as the "coming". Instead, the kingdom of God is present in our midst as we who practice faith and live out the command to love one another is in-play and active!

Might we get increasingly better at realizing God is near now and let the Spirit work in us trust and hope!

Monday November 30, 2026 Pastor Dennis O'Malley
"The Lord will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths." *Micah 4:2*

God is always teaching us His ways, through the Holy Spirit and the example of others. When we hear and see the truth (knowledge of God and what God wants us to be) something inside us knows God is speaking to us, to inform us and to guide us. Advent is a time to be alert to God's presence in the world, and to let the light of Christ guide us in our daily lives as we walk with the love of God in our hearts.

Tuesday, December 1, 2026 Rev. Mark Nilson
"Lament in Action" *Psalm 79*

Advent is a beginning. And with all beginnings come remembrances and hopes for the future. This year, while celebrating the end of the Festival of Booths with Rabbi Aviva and the congregation of Beth Israel, I learned that sometimes, even 15 minutes after the Booths celebration, a new season begins: the reading of the creation stories of the Hebrew Bible. It struck me that following seven days in an outside hut, reviewing one's life, the freshness of starting again in creation was promised.

Psalm 79 is a lament, a full review of everything that went wrong for Israel and its people, which led to the exile and the shattering of the Jerusalem Temple. The verses describing unburied bodies left for birds and wild animals (vv. 2–3), widespread bloodshed around the city, mockery from neighboring peoples (v. 4), and prisoners awaiting execution (v. 11) reflect the devastation and trauma of the Babylonian siege and exile.

The act of lament offers healing through authentic reflection on who we are and what we have done. It is how we should respond to this broken world we have created and sometimes forgotten. Advent is the beginning we all need to refresh our souls. Will you take part in an ancient practice that offers you a new life?

Wednesday, December 2, 2026 Pastor Dennis O'Malley
"Led by Christ" *Micah 5:6*

"And He will stand to lead his flock with the Lord's strength, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God."

Christ is the one that leads us. His words and deeds show us the way to be one with God and His people. Following Christ's way we come to know God is with us and we are with him. It is a glorious understanding of how intimate God wants to be with us.

This Advent let us believe with the strength of Christ, so that when we celebrate Christmas we'll be celebrating a very intimate relationship with God.

Thursday, December 3, 2026 Marie Sturdevant
"When God's Love Takes Root" *Psalm 85:10-13*

Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

In a world that often feels fractured by polarization, fear, violence, and instability, it is easy to become discouraged, wondering what we can do to make a difference. And yet, we are called to plant seeds of love, tend to them with faithfulness, and trust God to bring forth a harvest of righteousness and peace. Perhaps the psalmist's words can be understood through the familiar imagery of a garden. Just as a garden begins with seeds that must be planted and nurtured before a harvest can come, so the seeds of God's love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace need room to take root and grow. We may prepare the soil, plant the seeds, and tend to their care, but the miracle of new life and the fullness of the harvest belong to God.

Planting the seeds, however, is only the beginning. Growth requires patience, nourishment, and care. We plant seeds of love, hope, and peace whenever we choose compassion over indifference, understanding over judgement, forgiveness over resentment, and generosity over self-interest. We tend those seeds as we nurture our relationships and communities, and as we keep listening, reaching out to those in need, and working for what is good, even when progress seems slow and the world around us feels unset-tled. The psalmist offers us this beautiful promise: "Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven." God is at work in ways we cannot always see, nourishing what has been planted, and bringing forth new life in ways we may not yet understand.

The psalmist reminds us, "The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest." We may not live to see the fullness of the peace and reconciliation for which we pray, but we can trust that our acts of love are not wasted. So let us keep planting, tending and trusting in God's steadfast love and faithfulness to bring forth a harvest in its season. For even in a fractured world, God's grace continues to take root, new life continues to emerge, and there is always hope for the harvest yet to come.

Friday, December 4, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"Called by Hope" *Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Acts 11:19-26;*

Before we had words for ourselves, before we knew the shape of our journey, a quiet voice was already speaking through the marrow of the world:

You belong to this work.

The earth remembers mercy. Truth leans down to meet us. Justice rises from the ground like green shoots after winter rain.

And when fear scatters us across uncertain roads, still we gather. Still we build beloved community from conversation and courage, from welcome and shared bread.

Advent invites us to listen again for the call beneath all calls: not to wait for light to arrive, but to become its bearers.

For peace is growing among us, and hope is taking flesh whenever strangers become neighbors, and whenever love finds a voice willing to speak.

Saturday, December 5, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"A New Heart for the Journey" *Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Mark 11:27-33;*

Peace speaks softly beneath the clamor of certainty, beneath the questions that seek to guard old boundaries.

The Holy comes not as an answer we can possess, but as a river renewing the places within us we had forgotten could bloom.

Stone-hearted fear gives way to living flesh. What was closed begins to open. What was broken begins to bend toward mercy.

And still we ask: By what authority does love call us? By what right does compassion unsettle our assumptions?

Advent offers no easy reply.

Only this: that truth and kindness belong together, that justice grows from the ground beneath our feet, and that a changed heart may be the brightest sign of all.

So let us walk toward the light, not certain of every step, but willing to be transformed, until peace and righteousness meet in the way we live.

Sunday, December 6, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"Comfort the Road" Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

A voice is calling still, across the deserts of despair, across the long miles between what is and what could be. "Prepare the way."

Not by waiting passively for heaven to break open, but by leveling the hills of pride, filling the valleys of neglect, and making a straight path for justice and compassion.

The world tells us that all things fade: grass withers, flowers fall.

Yet love endures.

When time stretches longer than we hoped, when peace feels delayed, still mercy draws near, and righteousness walks before it.

So let us become what we are waiting for: a people of comfort, a people of courage, a people who clear a path through the wilderness.

For even now, the Holy approaches gently, gathering the scattered like a shepherd with a lamb, and teaching us that every road toward one another is a road toward the light.

Monday, December 7, 2026 Rev. Mark Nilson
"Light's Salvation" *Psalm 27*

So often, the beginning and ending phrases of these ancient prayers provide enough to get you through the day. Psalm 8 is structured this way; the beginning and ending phrases of Psalm 27 are more than a banquet to satisfy one's deepest hungers.

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold[a] of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!

The psalm's language is one of military conquest and protection. David prays that his troops will be successful in their efforts. But David's interests are not only in military conquest, but also in God's sure presence with him. He sought not just physical safety, but the security of knowing that his soul was right with God.

What strength might you find in the light of salvation and in the sure presence of the LORD.

Tuesday, December 8, 2026 Emily Miller Mlčák
"Light, space, zest – That's GOD!" *Psalm 27 (The Message)*

I'm sure now I'll see God's goodness
In the exuberant earth.
Stay with GOD!
Take heart. Don't quit.
I'll say it again:
Stay with GOD.
(Psalm 27: 1, 13-14)

Psalm 27 has two parts to it – the beginning in which the psalmist praises God – "Already I'm singing GOD songs; I'm making music to GOD." (v. 6) and the second half in which the psalmist pleads with God to not abandon him – "You've always been right there for me; don't turn your back on me now. Don't throw me out, don't abandon me." (v. 9) At the very end, the psalmist reassures himself and re-commits: "Stay with GOD! Take heart. Don't quit."

This reminds me of waiting, the waiting of Advent. At first waiting is easy – the excitement of what will come is foremost on the mind. But as the days go on (and here we are ten days into Advent), our mind wanders, filled with the frustration of waiting, wanting to make sure our place with God is secure. We're yelling – are we there yet? Are you still there, God? – wanting the miracle of Christmas, with all the promise of newness, to be right here, right now. Perhaps wanting our own newness, our own new commitment to life. Yet the psalmist is reminding us that it isn't God who abandons us. It's us – we are the ones who get distracted by all the noise around us, all our fears, all our insecurities. If we can bring our mind back to connection, to the "light, space, zest" that is God, we can remember that God is here now, with us, in our waiting. We can remember that the waiting of Advent is a ritual, a space of time to help us be in the here and now. This day, this day of waiting, is contains our eternal connection to the divine.

Structure of this psalm – ideas of waiting – the commitment to be present, without quitting.

Wednesday, December 9, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"*The Messenger in the Silence"* *Psalm 27; Malachi 2:10-3:1; Luke 1:5-17*

The light we seek does not always arrive with certainty. Sometimes it comes as a whisper in the sanctuary, a stirring in the heart, a promise spoken after a long season of waiting.

The prophets remind us: make ready. Clear away what divides. Be faithful to one another. For love is already on its way. And when shadows gather, when fear would have us turn back, still we sing with the psalmist: *The Holy is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

Advent is the courage to trust the promise before its fulfillment, to listen for the messenger hidden in the silence, and to walk toward the dawn knowing that every act of justice, every word of reconciliation, every seed of hope planted in the dark prepares the way for a brighter world yet to be born.

Thursday, December 10, 2026 Jackie Walsh

"Dreams as Scripture" *Habakkuk 2:1-5; Psalm 126;Philippians 3:7-11*

"Write the vision: make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come-it will not delay" Habakkuk 2:1-5

While experiencing a brief period of insomnia, I was referred to a sleep specialist. An enlightening and somewhat enjoyable part of the therapy was dreaming—the ability, the pattern and consistency of my dreams. A recommended exercise was to capture the dream upon awakening-otherwise it is lost during the day. I would lie in bed and literally pull the dream into consciousness and focus on it for several minutes. The more I concentrated on what I could remember, the more aspects of the dream came into focus and made sense.

Dreams, though many do not make sense, can be a message in slumber—a way for God to communicate. We think of Old Testament Joseph interpreting dreams for Pharaoh in Egypt; Jacob's ladder; Zechariah's vision in the Temple and Mary's betrothed Joseph who received the message to marry Mary and flee to Egypt. These are only a few of the divine stories of the Bible. But, many scientists, inventors, writers, composers have received assistance through dreams. Beethoven would jump out of bed in the middle of the night to write scores; Thoreau kept a pencil and paper under his pillow. We too have been given spiritual tools of prayer and meditation...why not incorporate dreams into our faith life?

Psalm 126 tells us "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dream". This verse celebrates God's power to turn sorrow, exile and struggle into JOYFUL restoration. And as Paul begins his letter to the Philippians "to write the same things to you is not troublesome to me…" he is writing a JOYFUL letter which we read mid-Advent to stress the JOY of the Gospel message.

Guided by our Bible, our dreams can be a way of listening to the joyful message of God. The birth of Christ is preceded by intense dream activity. As we anticipate the joyful coming of our Lord, let us remember the dreams of Zechariah, Joseph the carpenter and the shepherds watching over their sheep. And keep paper and pencil under our pillows as we pay attention to our dreams!

"A dream is a scripture" Italian novelist Umberto Eco

Friday, December 11, 2026 Pastor Dennis O'Malley
"Recognizing God's Presence" *Habakkuk 3:4*

"His coming is as brilliant as the sunrise. Rays of light flash from his hands, where his awesome power is hidden."

This Advent as we await the coming of Christmas let us be aware that God is relating to us constantly. Sometimes it seems his message is hidden because we are so busy with the day to day of life that we can't see that God is with us. When we do realize God's presence it is like a flash of light that humbles us because God is so faithful in His relationship with us.

Christmas is a day we celebrate God's presence in our world, Advent is a time we prepare ourselves to recognize God's presence in our lives, and as Christians we acknowledge God's presence in our lives every day.

Saturday, December 12, 2026 Pastor Andrew Borden
"Been there???" *Matthew 21:28-31a*

28 *"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'*

29 *"'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.*

30 *"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.*

31 *"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"*

"The first," they answered.

(*Matthew 21:28-31a* from the *NIV*

Our brain and heart can fill up with all kinds of "stuff" so that we aren't thinking straight when confronted with choices to make.

Been there???

Both sons in the gospel example Jesus' shares with us seem to have been "cluttered-up". But the point of the story seems to say that when our heart is generally set on the "right things", on God, how this can help to "break-through" the fog we might be in so that we gather ourselves up to actually do what's right. Instead, without a true God-link, "all bets are off."

Sunday, December 13, 2026 Rev. Mark Nilson
"Reimagining Mary" *Luke 1:46b-55*

I chose this day's lection largely because I will not be preaching; thus, reflecting on it in this devotional will keep me current with the flow of the Advent season. No, this year, my wife and I will be in Seattle to join my son, daughter-in-law, and 18-month-old granddaughter as we wait for the birth of a second grandchild due in just two days. I cannot fathom loving a second grandchild because our love for number one is so all-consuming, but I'm sure number two will arrive with her own special fanfare and demand a fresh love that will well up within us.

A new book sits on my desk this Advent: The Lost Mary: Rediscovering the Mother of Jesus. In it, a renowned historian argues that Mary is the best-known and least-known woman in history. After decades of intense research, he asserts that Mary has not only been lost to us but systematically erased, as we have removed her from her ancient roots and hijacked her for our own theological, cultural, and political ends. The author challenges the claim of her impoverished childhood and offers fresh evidence of a higher socio-economic upbringing (from a distinguished priestly pedigree). He argues that Jesus' family would have known firsthand the trauma of living under a violent Roman system. He also contends that Mary and her second-born son, James, took over the leadership of the movement after Jesus' execution.

Such work fascinates me and sets my mind spinning with new thoughts and reflections. Some might ask, does such new insight somehow detract from the faith's tradition and my deep belief in the power of the Advent story?

My response is a strong NO! Absolutely not. If anything, it drives home the pure essence of a savior sent into a broken world to save me from everything I need saving from, and it is the same story that I hope will fill the hearts and souls of granddaughters one and two.

Monday, December 14, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"Stand in the Long Dry Season" *Psalm 125; 1 Kings 18:1-18; Ephesians 6:10-17*

The hills stand firm through wind and weather, held by a faith deeper than certainty. The rains have not yet come. The fields wait. Truth-tellers are questioned. Hope feels costly. Yet still a voice rises, "Stand your ground." Not clothed in armor of fear, but girded with truth, sheltered by justice, and guided by peace. For Advent is the season of holy persistence, when we trust that unseen clouds are gathering beyond the horizon, and that every act of courage helps prepare the way. So let us remain steadfast, rooted as mountains, watchful as prophets, ready as pilgrims.

For even in the drought, the promise is alive, and already the first drops of mercy are beginning to fall.

Tuesday, December 13, 2026 Emily Miller Mlčák
"Using Our Breath for Good" *2 Kings 2:9-22*

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"

"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

"You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours – otherwise, it will not."

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.

Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over. (Kings 2:9-13)

Elisha asks for a "double portion of your spirit." The Hebrew word for spirit is ruah, meaning breath, spirit, wind. This is the same word in Genesis, the breath of God, the spirit of God bringing creation into being. Here, this breath, spirit, wind, is everywhere – the spirit of Elijah (his authority), the whirlwind, even – with a bit of imagination – the movement of air that the cloak makes as it hits the water, parting it. Elijah grants Elisha's desire for a double portion "if you see me when I am taken from you." If Elisha can see the whirlwind, can see the breath and spirit of God, he will recognize it as in himself as well. Our ability to be a prophet, to stir up good trouble, is to recognize when the spirit is in us.

We are asked to breathe in the spirit of God. I think of the chant "Meditation on Breathing" from the UU hymnal Singing the Journey. Sarah Dan Jones wrote this after 9/11 and it is a reminder that even in the deepest of uncertainty and turmoil, we can still create calm by using our breath for good. When I breathe in, I'll breathe in peace. When I breathe out, I'll breathe out love.

Wednesday, December 16, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"Remember the Dawn" *Psalm 125; Malachi 3:16-4:6; Mark 9:9-13;*

Like mountains encircling the valley, love holds us fast when shadows lengthen and the night seems endless. The prophets speak of a coming day, not to kindle fear, but to awaken remembrance: that every act of kindness is known, every seed of justice

remembered, every faithful heart held close. And still we wait, between promise and fulfillment, between vision and understanding.

Advent is this holy in-between, when we carry glimpses of light down from the mountaintop into an unfinished world. So let us walk gently, trusting what we have seen, honoring those who prepared the way, and tending the small flames entrusted to our care. For even now, beyond the horizon of our knowing, the sun of hope is rising, its healing already touching the edges of the dark.

Thursday, December 17, 2026 Pastor Andrew Borden
"Helping Bring About The Kingdom of God" *Hebrews 1:1-3a* from the NIV

1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his Powerful Word.

A lot has been made of the "end-times" and scripture has no shortage of references. Like today's example: "…but in these last days…" However, more appropriately, "…in these days of enlightenment…" is a more accurate rendering, because since Jesus' coming as the incarnate that is what truly describes our state; God has made known through the person of Jesus just what is needful in our living to be whole and right with each other and God, all of us practicing faith helping bring about the kingdom of God in the present.

Friday, December 18, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"Carrying the Presence" *Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:12-19; Hebrews 1:5-14*

We sing of love that endures, a promise older than kingdoms, steady as the stars and wide as the sea. We dance toward its presence, like pilgrims bearing a sacred treasure, not locked away in distant temples, but carried in the fragile ark of every human heart. Around us, voices proclaim power and splendor, yet Advent points elsewhere: to the holiness that draws near, the mystery that chooses companionship over dominion.

So let us make room for wonder. Let us bless one another with bread for the journey, songs for the waiting, and hope for the weary. For the Light approaches still, not as a ruler enthroned above, but as a promise dwelling among us, teaching us that the truest glory is love made present, shared freely, and carried together.

Saturday, December 19, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson

"*The Promise Hidden in Plain Sight" Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Judges 13:2-24; John 7:40-52;*

We sing of a love older than our doubts, a faithfulness woven through generations. In forgotten places, among ordinary lives, the sacred still arrives, announced not with certainty but with wonder. Some recognize it at once. Others question and debate. Many pass by unaware. Yet Advent teaches that hope often comes this way: quietly, unexpectedly, growing where no one thought to look.

So let us keep watch with open hearts, trusting that grace is already near, hidden in neighbor and stranger, in questions as well as answers. For the Holy is always arriving, and the world is always being made new, one glimpse of wonder, one act of courage, one promise fulfilled at a time.

Sunday, December 20, 2026 Marie Sturdevant

"Here Am I: When God Calls Ordinary People" Luke 1:37-38; Luke 1:46b-55; Psalm 89:1

God's purpose often moves through ordinary people who might never have imagined that their lives would become part of God's great story. God does not wait for us to become powerful, perfect, or wealthy before calling us. God meets us where we are in our weakness and vulnerability. When Mary hears the angel's message, she doesn't know everything that lies ahead or what this calling will ask of her. But she knows the One who is calling her. She responds, *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to Your word."* Mary's "yes" is not a declaration of her own strength or certainty, but an act of trust in God who has called her. And Mary discovers that her "yes" to God is part of something much larger than herself. The blessing she has received becomes a lens through which she sees God's mercy at work throughout the world.

Mary's song, known as the *Magnificat*, a word meaning "magnifies," begins with the words, *"My soul magnifies the Lord,"* and moves from her personal joy to a sweeping vision of God's justice and mercy. She sings of a God who scatters the proud, brings down the powerful from their thrones, lifts up the lowly, and fills the hungry with good things. Mary's song is a beautiful reminder of our shared calling. We, like Mary, are called to be vessels of Christ's presence in a broken world, trusting that God can work through us even in our weakness. God can use our ordinary lives to carry God's love and mercy into the world. Our calling as God's servants begins, not with knowing exactly what will happen, but with trusting the One who calls us. We respond because God is faithful, and we serve because God's love and mercy first embraced us. Mary's *"Here am I,"* becomes our *"Here am I."* Mary's song becomes our song as we trust that the God who has been faithful to us is still at work in the world, inviting our ordinary lives to become part of God's great story. And our song, like Mary's song, echoes the words of the psalmist: *"I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations."*

May it be so. Amen.

Monday, December 21, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson

"A Song from the Waiting Heart" *Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:1-18; Hebrews 9:1-14*

In the quiet sanctuary of unanswered prayers, a song begins to rise. Not from certainty, but from longing. Not from power, but from trust. A weary heart pours itself out, and discovers it is already held. The proud towers of the world may cast long shadows, yet mercy keeps turning the earth, lifting the lowly, filling the empty-handed with hope.

Advent teaches this gentle mystery: that the holiest offering is not found in distant shrines, but in a heart made open to love's transforming presence. So let us wait with courage, sing with gratitude, and trust that even now the sacred is preparing new life within us, turning our deepest yearning into a blessing for the world.

Advent Hymn: *We Walk The Path of Faithful Promise* by A.R. Payson

1. My soul magnifies the Holy One,
whose mercy reaches age to age;
The lowly rise, the proud are humbled,
and justice turns another page.
Like Hannah we pour out our longing,
our silent prayers, our hidden tears;
The God who hears the cry of yearning
brings hope to hearts through all the years.

2. Before the veil and sacred altar,
through rites of old and offered flame,
the people sought the living Presence
and called upon the Holy Name.
Yet Christ has entered through compassion,
not with the blood of beast or ram,
but with a love that heals and frees us,
revealing God's eternal plan.

3. O God of Hannah and of Mary,
you lift the burdened and oppressed;
You strengthen those whose strength is failing,
and give the weary soul its rest.
The hungry find your feast of plenty,
the empty-handed find their share;
Your promised reign draws ever nearer
where all are held within your care.

4. In Advent hope we watch and listen
for signs of mercy yet to bloom;
A world made new through holy justice
already stirs within the gloom.
The proud divisions of the nations
shall yield before love's gentler way;
And all who wait with patient courage
shall greet the dawn of God's new day.

5. So let our songs join Mary's blessing,
and Hannah's faith-filled voice arise;
Let hearts be cleansed for sacred service,
made living offerings, pure and wise.
Till every longing finds fulfillment,
and every wound is brought to peace,
we walk the path of faithful promise,
where love and justice never cease.

AI generated recording of this hymn can be found at:
https://suno.com/s/Zjs28pATxZQ4VqDu

Tuesday, December 22, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"*Written on the Heart"* *Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:19-28; Hebrews 8:1-13*

A song rises from the waiting soul, from prayers once whispered through tears and silence, from promises carried longer than we thought we could bear. The Holy remembers. Not with ledgers or laws etched in stone, but with love inscribed upon the tender places within us, where hope and courage meet. The lowly are lifted. The hungry are nourished. The forgotten are called by name. And what seemed impossible begins to take shape in the hidden chambers of the heart.

So in this Advent season, let us trust the quiet work that unfolds beyond our sight. For the promise is not far away. It is growing within us, becoming flesh in acts of mercy, becoming song in grateful lives, until our deepest prayers become gifts for the world.

Wednesday, December 23, 2026 Pastor Andrew Borden
"Magnificat" Luke 1:46-55 from the *NIV*

46 *And Mary said:*

"My soul glorifies the Lord ***47*** *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,* ***48*** *for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,* ***49*** *for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.*

50 *His Mercy extends to those who [respect] him, from generation to generation.*

51 *He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.*

52 *He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.*

53 *He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.*

54 *He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be Merciful* ***55*** *to Abraham and his descendants forever just as he promised our ancestors."*

Joy!!!

Delight, thanksgiving, acknowledgement all rolled up in a state of awe and blessed exultation at the perceived Grace and Mercy through Love expressed in the Divine coming to earth!

The long arc of God's agency with humankind is expressed with the generational language and inclusion of Abraham in making the case for the Promise in dealing faithfully with us;

the Divine laboring to give us what we need no matter what is happening to fortify us with wholeness and hope!

Jesus is the covenant of ongoing resurrection, redemption and life!

Thursday, December 24, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"Christmas Eve" *Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)*

The world holds its breath tonight. The long ache of prophets, the songs of generations, the prayers whispered into darkness, all gather at the edge of a promise. The people who walked in deep night have not yet seen the dawn, but already a light is kindling, small as a spark, strong as hope. The stars keep watch. The fields lie still. Shepherds listen to the silence between heartbeats. And there, in the ordinary and overlooked, love chooses to arrive. Not with armies. Not with splendor. But in vulnerability, in tenderness, in a child carried into a weary world.

So let all creation prepare its song. Let those who mourn trust that joy is coming. Let those who fear remember that peace is near. Let those who wait know they are not forgotten.

For this is the holy mystery of Christmas Eve: before the light fills the sky, before the angels break into song, before the world knows what has begun, love is already here, quietly entering the world, making its home among us, and teaching us to keep watch for wonder.

Friday, December 25, 2026 Rev. Aaron Payson
"Christmas Day" *Isaiah 62:6-12 Psalm 97 Titus 3:4-7 Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20*

The waiting is over, yet the wonder has just begun. The light once glimpsed on distant horizons now shines among us, not from a throne, but from a manger, not in splendor, but in a child. The watchers lift their voices. The shepherds leave their fields. The very earth seems to sing a new song of joy and belonging. For love has drawn near.

The promise carried by prophets, the mercy sung by generations, the hope hidden in long winters has stepped into the world with gentle hands and open eyes. And still the invitation remains: Go tell the good news. Clear the road for peace. Lift up the weary. Welcome the forgotten. For Christmas is more than a birth remembered. It is a calling renewed.

The light has come. The gates stand open. The Holy walks among us. And every act of kindness, every gesture of justice, every word of compassion becomes another star shining in the darkness, guiding the world toward the dawn that never ends.

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