



2025 Advent & Christmas Devotional

The Greendale Ecumenical Group
Worcester & Auburn, MA

Sunday, November 30, 2025

First Sunday of Advent

Pr. Andrew Borden

Romans 13:11-14 (The Message)

11-14 But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

Traditionally, in the church following Jesus' teaching, the time leading up to celebrating our Lord's Nativity has had an orientation of looking forward to the Parousia; Jesus' return at the end of the ages to roll everything up for God and lend some "judgement" for all the living and the dead.

Wow, I'm really looking forward to that day! There are so many misperceptions about religion and what Christians believe (and seek to enforce as "rule") it is no wonder the churches aren't full!

Let's be absolutely clear; our benevolent God is only about Grace and Mercy, not any form of retribution. Grace and Mercy are manifest in the person of Jesus and at the heart of his teaching and ministry example!

A better way of reading the Romans passage for this day would be in light of the Kingdom of God already being amongst us. Since the Ascension the revised covenant and Presence have been in-force with humanity; we are living in the intended Parousia of Jesus' enlightenment for-real in the present! Father Richard Rohr, in his book *The Universal Christ*, refers to this time as the "Forever Coming of Christ", which is anything but a threat. In fact, it is the ongoing promise of eternal resurrection."

Don't we hear in scripture of Jesus work with the Holy Spirit on our behalf, in effect helping to save us from ourselves and the effects of evil-intent?

Read in this way, we have been asked to ground our life and being in the teaching and practice of faith according to our Lord in order to be "up and awake" and not to "waste a minute" in aiding and assisting the Kingdom of God developing within the body of humanity on earth in the present age.

We can see the need for the attentiveness of the faithful in authentically living out Grace and Mercy every day as news of disconnected humanity and the effect of faithless practice wreaks havoc. Practitioners of faith are needed every day to meet the world with hope and peace and so the Spirit can work a redirecting of energies in positive ways!

This Advent season intends to emphasize the Grace of God in Loving us into our better selves through the Son's Incarnation, encouraging our increase of awe and humble observance for God's "breaking in" through Grace through what we celebrate as the thousands year-old Christmas event.

Let us lean forward with thanks at the beginning of this new church year!



Monday, December 1, 2025
Second Day of Advent

Rev. Aaron Payson
Psalm 124; Genesis 8:1-19; Romans 6:1-11;

“Signs of New Life”

Psalm 124:7-8 “7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the hunters; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. 8 Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

On the second day of advent we read from the Psalmist, the author of Genesis and Paul in his Epistle to the Romans the good news that there is life abundant ahead of us. Especially in an era that seems so trying on all fronts, this is indeed good news. Whatever we are currently faced with, whatever we perceive on the immediate horizon that threatens or frightens, there is a further horizon, in which we find a different reality. This is the faithful nature of hope, to go beyond what we currently experience, and in that journey, find evidence that things can change. During this Advent season, might we all awaken to possibilities yet to be imagined when we boldly hope and have faith beyond our fears.



Tuesday, December 2, 2025
Third Day of Advent

Rev. Dr. Julie Cedrone
Genesis 8:6-12

After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark⁷ and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth.⁸ Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground.⁹ But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark.¹⁰ He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark.¹¹ When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth.¹² He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him. (Genesis 8:6-12)

It's the dove that grabs my attention, the ubiquitous symbol of peace with symbolic origins that we tend to forget. We love doves soaring across a rainbow flag or decorating a peace pole, that tender instrument of peace flying by with grace. Of course, the Noah's ark story doesn't have the only claim on doves; there's a New Testament dove, too, flying with triumph following Jesus's baptism, a sign of mighty peace in the holy order of things. Certainly, I can't think about doves without a smile, remembering that man from my hometown who would appear at funerals and weddings to release his cote of doves at the conclusion, leaving us all marveling at their smooth circles, all united before they headed home.

What strikes me about the dove in Genesis is what I have always missed until now. Noah doesn't release the dove just once into the post-flood terrain, but repeatedly, and there are multiple flights before the dove soars into the big sky to begin life on its own. The first time, Noah pries open a window to observe the flood's damage

and the new world before him, sending out the dove to explore. That first flight, while we can never know what exactly transpired with that dove as the first purveyor of the soaked earth, we do know that the dove didn't find a place to perch, couldn't rest anywhere or build a home. So, the dove returns. Then again, after time passes and the dove gets sustenance back in the safety of the ark, Noah releases that dove again, and after a flight over yonder, the dove returns with an olive branch, our symbol of peace in the assurance of growing possibilities all held in the dove's beak. The third time, of course, the dove takes flight and never returns, severing from the months and months on board an ark packed with animals, the uncertainty and rocky ride, and finds its new adventure.

We overlook the dove's first flight, the one where the dove sets out to gather information and bring back a sign or a possibility of what is out there, but returns with nothing at all other than a desire to get back into that cramped boat for its familiar safety. Recalling this thwarted attempt at blazing a new journey, I am actually comforted, or at least, feel assured that our stumblings don't always result to much as we attempt as we leave the protective ark that God provides for us, and the peace offerings we try to forge often result in a try and not a binding at all. Whether we like it or not, whether it's an awkward conversation or a season of life that slaps us with its arrival, an actual flood or navigating the political landmine of our own neighborhood, God presents us with opportunities again and again to enter before vast new landscapes. We don't always get very far. Often, we come back home to regroup and regroup before setting out again. Sometimes, we have an offering to bring back, a vital shoot of life that can be worked with as a new way of seeing things as we venture forward, a needed one to permit our path. And, in the end, there is the liberation and loss that comes with flying away and embracing a new horizon, as the dove did, at last.

Our Bible study recently revisited Noah's Ark as part of our "Bible Studies for Grown Ups" series, reading it not as the popular story for children about a boat of animals and a bright rainbow overhead, but a story of one man's (crazy?!) faith to build an enormous vessel for only him, his family, and two of every animal as the world perishes in the depths of water around them. Noting the mixture of trauma and courage faced by Noah and family, we settled on the ark as God's embrace during the unsettling. We loved the detailed description of the ark, the tools to create it, its massive size, and the idea that God does indeed provide us with the instruments to build our own spiritual home, should we dare listen. And while that may result in unexpected transitions and loss, there is persistently a new horizon to explore. Isn't it just wonderful that the peaceful dove is there to teach us how to leave our fortresses? The dove reminds us to discover what is out there, a process that takes attempts, time, growth and the ability to carry a gift back home, our version of a fresh olive branch clenched in a beak.

And so, as we begin our Advent season, may we remember this, the dove of peace offering us the secret to knowing that peace: a nonlinear flight that emerges from God's protection and concludes with the birth of whatever is next.



Wednesday, December 3, 2025

Fourth Day of Advent

Pr. Dennis O'Malley

Psalm 124; Isaiah 54:1-10; Matthew 24:23-35;

Matt 23:26 If, then, they say to you, "Look, here is the Christ", or, 'He is there', do not believe it.

At times people tell us how we should prepare for the coming of Christ, they say we have to do this or not do that; you have to see this or listen to that, if you want to experience the true meaning of Christmas. The truth is we don't have to do anything to experience Christ, because he is always present. We just have to look at the world with eyes of faith, and listen for the Spirit's voice. Christ comes to us every day, and all we have to do is invite him in.

Advent is a time where we can sharpen our awareness of Christ's presence, and work on inviting Him in.



Thursday December 4, 2025

The Fifth Day of Advent

1:12-17, 21-26

Jackie Walsh

Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts

"Gathering of the Twelve"

All of us at some time in our lives have been a staff member, a part of a team or a congregation. As such, we probably have experienced the pain, sadness and confusion of having to replace a group member. No matter the reason, this can be an emotional and difficult process.

According to The Acts of the Apostles, the remaining Eleven have returned to Jerusalem after Judas Iscariot's betrayal and death. The Apostles have a job.....to put forward a candidate to replace Judas. The sacred number 12, corresponding to the tribes of Israel, need to be restored. The criteria was to be a witness to the Resurrection of Jesus. Verse 14 tells us the eleven devoted themselves to prayer for guidance but then cast lots between Barsabbas and Matthias; the lot fell to Matthias who was then enrolled to become the Twelfth.

Wait....first they prayed for guidance....then they cast for lots....the disciples gambled to choose the next apostle??? So, Matthias was chosen by luck rather than by answered prayers? Google tells us that casting lots is an ancient practice for making impartial decisions, divinely guided, through a random process like drawing straws and rolling dice or stones. It was used to discern God's will—not as a form of gambling, but to reach "a divine verdict"..." a way to reveal His will".

What people call luck is actually a result of God's will. God's will, or "the branch of the Lord" described in Isaiah 4 verse 2, is the Messianic title for Jesus Christ who will fulfill God's message of hope and salvation. May we focus on this message during our Advent season as we wait with hope, pray for peace, celebrate with joy and love more fully as we prepare for the birth of Jesus.



Friday, December 5, 2025

The Sixth Day of Advent

Pr. Dennis O'Malley

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 30:19-26; Acts 13:16-25;

Acts 13:23 God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants.

God has raised up for us, people of faith, a person that is the incarnation of Himself. Two thousand years ago we call that person Jesus the Christ. He was the embodiment of the Spirit of God. Just for the fact that Jesus was human, means he was born of humble beginnings. We are all born of humble beginnings because we humans have to struggle to come to know our spiritual nature, the part of us that was created in God's own image. When we come to know our spiritual nature, we feel connected to God and to one another and all creation. That connection with God keeps guiding us to becoming Christ.

This Advent let us keep working on developing our spiritual nature so that when people interact with us, they will have a sense that they felt connected to God. Be Christ for each other, and experience Christmas every day.



Saturday, December 6, 2025

Seventh Day of Advent

Laura Lennox

Isaiah 40:3

Isaiah 40:3 "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"

If you're anything like me, you might look at this verse and think, "A highway? In my life? It feels more like a congested, winding back road!" It's so easy for life to become overwhelming, full of to-do lists, worries about family, or just the everyday noise that crowds out peace. We don't always feel put together and ready for a grand, holy arrival. However, the incredible hope of Advent is rooted in the promise that even when our lives feel like a wilderness, God is actively speaking into the mess. The very act of this promise, the call to prepare the way, is a loving invitation to simply stop, breathe, and trust that comfort is on its way.

The hope gives way to peace once we get started. When we clear the path, we're not scrubbing our lives clean until they are perfect; we are moving aside the things that block the light. Think about the things that are weighing you down right now, those little rocks and bumps on your road. Maybe it's that constant feeling of rushing, or a worry you keep turning over and over. When we spend time quietly focusing on these things and consciously handing them over to God, we are actually straightening the path for true, steady peace to enter. This preparation is an act of loving readiness, believing that the Divine Presence is coming to meet us.

This season is a quiet reminder that we don't have to strain ourselves or try to earn that peace; we just need to be willing to open the door. So today, let's take a moment to clear just one small area in our hearts, allowing that beautiful, powerful Presence to have a smoother way in. It's the small, sincere commitment to hope and the intentional clearing of our path that brings us the deep, sustaining peace of Advent.



Sunday, December 7, 2025
Second Sunday of Advent

Marie Sturdevant
Isaiah 11:6

"A Different Day"

The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them. ~ Isaiah 11:6

Today is National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day. How profound that today's Scripture from Isaiah falls on the same date referenced in a speech by President Franklin D. Roosevelt which he gave the day after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. – "Yesterday, December 7, 1941 - a date which will live in infamy..." In the days that followed, war expanded and would eventually encompass over 50 countries with its effects being felt throughout most of the world. December 31, 1946 marked an official end to World War 2, but the chapter on war never truly closes as one conflict eventually leads to another.

The root causes of conflict are multifaceted, but among them is a misunderstanding of people whom we think are not "like us" – people of a different race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation or class. Over time discrimination and resentment can build. Unchallenged prejudices persisting over time create systems of racism and hatred. Jesus modeled inclusion by intentionally associating with marginalized people, challenging social norms, and demonstrating love and acceptance towards those typically excluded. As followers of the Way of Jesus, when we spend more time with people who we might see as different, we learn that we are very much the same. We are all children of God, with the same needs for love and acceptance. We begin to break down the walls that once separated us.

Today's reading from Isaiah speaks of a future time of completeness and wholeness through the webbing together of God, humans, and all of creation in justice, harmony, and perfect peace. Shalom - when former adversaries will live together, and where innocence and childlike faith lead to the resolution of conflict - a time marked by humility and a deep trust in God, where all nations are one and all people live in harmony with each other and with all of creation. May we begin to reach across those boundaries that once separated us and expand our tent of inclusion – a vision of the day when all people and all of creation will coexist in God's perfect peace. Amen.



Monday, December 8, 2025
The Ninth Day of Advent

Rev. Mark Nilson
Isaiah 24:1-16

THE LORD WILL REIGN

How is it that I chose this text?

It is a note-counter note pericope. We begin in utter destruction and chaos. The world, it seems, offers nothing to the common person who works in the marketplace. The people and nations addressed are cosmic in orientation, and the text offers no historical specificity. Yahweh uses that old word, scatter, which is usually affiliated with those caught up in the Jewish exile, but here the word is used in a more expansive note – all creation is vulnerable, exposed, and will be displaced. It is clear that "God ain't happy!"

Verse 1 reads like a total rejection of the land and its peoples. There will be a twisting and a scattering on a global scale.

When one looks out the window into our world, similar feelings might arise – that the world is in utter chaos, such that you wouldn't blame the Almighty for any judgment that would come down.

But then, something strange. There are those, even among the chaotic ones, who sing a different note and tune – one of joy and confidence. We have a hard time knowing who the "they" is, but if it is the exiled Jew, this one, even in his estrangement, has clung on to the sovereignty of Yahweh. Perhaps, as Walter Brueggemann writes, "They have consistently received from this buoyant, brutalizing world order only abuse and exploitation. Not only do they not benefit from the system, but they are glad to see it go, given their deep confidence that Yahweh will have for them a better future."

There is a message here in this strange text that tests the foundations of our faith. Is your faith one that believes in the good news of a "benevolent universe", and that God, even amongst all that is so bad, still works tirelessly to heal our communities and is pulling the brokenness of our world back together again? Or, are you one who cannot see past the darkness that currently envelops our globe.

People of faith are the remnant that cheer for God's sovereignty and believe that all God's work is in bringing health, restoration, and grace back into our vocabularies and experiences. Are you willing to work for such a cosmic benevolence?



Tuesday, December 9, 2025
The Tenth Day of Advent

Pr. Andrew Borden
Romans 15:14-21 NRSVUE

Romans 15:14-21 NRSVUE

14 I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. 15 Nevertheless, on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the Grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God. 18 For I will not be so bold as to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the gentiles, by word and deed, 19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 20 Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, 21 but as it is written,

"Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand."

Each of us has benefitted from one person or another teaching us things. It is of human design to absorb information so to learn and grow in navigating our environments in the best way possible.

However, there is selective teaching that delimits broad-spectrum growth. This can result in poor decision making that may outwardly cause harm, leaning towards self-doubt.

I encountered a colleague many years ago in engineering who held promising talent and judgement in their young life. As we spent time together, training them for the work I was leaving behind to move onto new ventures, they discovered I was a person of faith and in seminary. What spilled-out was how they had never been directly exposed to faith in any form as their parents decided they and their sibling should decide upon the things of faith as adults if they so wished.

This person had dealt with life without the benefit of prayer and support of a faith community in their developmental years. But, the witness of my faith, and that of others in the corporation they came to know, revealed our orientation for dealing with stress and challenges seemed better and led them to investigate God directly with the outcome of becoming baptized and joining a Protestant tradition.

With this new center in their life, I personally witnessed their growth as a person!

Each of us, through living authentically as people of faith, can make a difference simply by being in proximity to others we encounter in life. The Spirit will work through us what is necessary, we don't need to stress over what to say and do.



Wednesday, December 10, 2025
The Eleventh Day of Advent

Rev. Dr. Julie Cedrone
Genesis 15:5

***“Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can count them,” Then he said,
“So Shall your offspring be” Genesis 15:5***

Many of us can't quite understand the power of stars, unless we spend some time camping or trekking into the wilds far away from the light pollution of the Worcester Area. It is then, gathered around a camp fire long after dark, with the chirping of crickets and rustling movements in the distance, that we can look up at the big sky and see just how intense and bright are the stars that populate our skies. Imagine living in a time and place when stars were a guide, when their placement and constellation dictated your behavior or travel. Or, let's adjust our expectations, and just imagine spending a little time this evening or the next, driving just a ways away to see the starscape over a pasture or a body of water, someplace that is less peopled with more illumination from every star, so that their patterns and sizes are observable, calling to you, even. I tend to do this just before Epiphany, when I am preparing for Three Kings Day and remember to find their constellation overhead in the chill. I just love the idea that God created skies dotted with stars that I can see in Massachusetts in 2025 and someone else can see across the globe and someone else already saw in another place and someone else will see those same stars long after I have departed this earth.

And, it is those stars that are the bright spots of our Genesis scripture during this season of light in darkness, a foreshadowing of those magi who will use them as a map, and a lesson for us to look at those stars as well. Perhaps we are intended to see those

stars not so much as a map to get from one geographic place to another (after all, think of all the apps we have for that purpose now!), but as a spiritual map to replenish us and remind us that we are not alone at all, but surrounded by those believers who came before and those who will come, a reminder of God's artistry and the holy light show that really is there with a splendor that not even New England Botanical Garden can rival (although their annual light show is pretty special).

“Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can count them,” Then he said, “So Shall your offspring be” Genesis 15:5

God says these words to Abram during a vision, following a successful rescue mission for his relative Lot, and a triumphant role in a battle between kings. Abram has devoted himself to the Lord's victory over gaining riches and power, setting the context for this covenant between them. Abram is developing into a leader, building his spiritual shield, and the Lord uses the expansive sky and glittery stars to illustrate what the promises to Abram. While Abram believes, he had wanted data and a sign, some proof of his legacy. And while he is deeply faithful, he isn't fully convinced, still asking, “how can I know?” We are then told that Abram settles into a deep sleep, and twice told of the thick darkness around him. It is in the darkness, this “thick and dreadful darkness,” that the Lord speaks to him, eventually appearing as a blazing torch illuminating the scene of sacrifice and questioning, sealing the covenant.

I wish I could tell you that Advent was all about the glorious light and those shining stars...but it isn't entirely. For many of us, Advent is about being in “thick and dreadful darkness,” and what remains in the shadows and prevents us from being illuminated, trying to walk in the darkness and adjust our vision, stumbling along the way. Advent is a season of preparation that lands in celebration, but it doesn't necessarily find that celebration throughout the journey; like Abraham, we wonder if our faith is fruitful and if our efforts will endure. That wondering inevitably leads us into dark places, trusting that the light will always overcome.



Thursday, December 11, 2025
The Twelfth Day of Advent

Rev. Aaron Payson
Psalms 146:5-10; Ruth 1:6-18; 2 Peter 3:1-10;

“Blessing Both”

Ruth 1:17

*“Do not press me to leave you,
to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people
and your God my God.
17 Where you die, I will die,
and there will I be buried.
May the Lord do thus to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!”*

In a time of such social, religious and political polarization, it is interesting and important to encounter the lessons contained in the first passages of the Book of Ruth. What is particularly challenging and, I think, chastening, is that the image we have of the prophetess is not one of choosing which side to bless, but demonstrating the reality of blessings that is available to all. It is worth remembering this as we enter the holiday season, during which time so many people fret about gatherings with those in their family and friendship circles who differ with us in so many important ways.

Kimberly Knight, a UCC Pastor, provides an important lesson found in the first part of the Book of Ruth, “And wow, to feel Naomi’s kiss extended blessing in both directions – to the one who would leave her and stay with ways foreign, even counter to Naomi’s faith and understanding AND to bless Ruth who chose the new life, the life of a unknown future for the sake of a love too large to understand, too huge to contain, to consuming to set aside. Blessed be those who choose a life with us AND those who choose a life outside of us. Blessed be the ears who hear the Word in new ways AND those who cannot let go of previous understandings to traverse into the unknown. I hear in my own life a call to love those who chose to stay behind in a theology of literalism and punitive justice AS WELL AS those who are determined to journey with me into a life with the God of love, radical hospitality and social justice.”

https://day1.org/articles/5d9b820ef71918cdf200289b/and_she_blessed_them_both



Friday December 12, 2025
The Thirteenth Day of Advent

Jackie Walsh
Ruth 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:11-18

“FORWARD!”

In 2016 the Swedish side of my family had a reunion. Along with my many cousins, we began planning over a year in advance. While some of my more “techie” relatives explored our genealogy through DNA testing and companies like Ancestry.com, most of us searched our attics and basements tirelessly uncovering our family history. Typically, exploring our family tree starts with the current generation and works backwards. However, the book of Ruth, chapter 4, verses 13-17 tells a family story working FORWARD.

The author of Ruth may have been a village teacher such as a priest or wise-woman who told the ancestral stories to instruct and inspire the people. The Book of Ruth tells us the beautiful story of three of Israel’s ancestors....Naomi, a widow; Ruth, her foreign daughter-in-law; and Boaz, a wealthy farmer. The book ends with the birth of a child and lists the descendants of this child going FORWARD. Ruth’s story offers hope. If you have not read it, or even if you have, read it again.

2nd Peter verses 11-12 tells us “we should live holy lives and serve God as we wait and look FORWARD to the coming of the day of God”. But, are we able to both wait and look forward? We forget to look...we are too content. Do we allow the Holy Spirit to interrupt our plans and lead us? In this season of Advent, let us wait FORWARDLY...but let us wait.



Saturday, December 13, 2025

The Fourteenth Day of Advent

Pr. Andrew Borden

Psalm 146:5-10 NRSVUE

Psalm 146:5-10

5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, 6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; 7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free; 8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.

9 The LORD watches over the strangers [and] upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked [is brought] to ruin.

10 The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

How did the people this psalm references know happiness? How did they become lifted up out of depression? How did justice come to take place?

The psalm speaks to the revelatory nature of faith, that the practice of ongoing relationship with God brings with it comfort, joy, strength, an intuitive sense, a determination to do what is right and what my mom referred to as “stick-to-it-tiveness”; the ability to keep on “keep’in-on” even when things get tough!

Jesus’ coming brought through his ministry the invitation for engaging with the Source of who we are who knows us best and what we need, so that we might access the best of what can feed, nourish and mature us to become our best in this world!

And the really good news is that this Grace we receive through faith has no expiration date, but is forever!

Truly HAPPY are people of faith!



Sunday, December 14, 2025

The Third Sunday of Advent

Marie Sturdevant

Isaiah 35:5-6; Matthew 11:4-5

“Open My Eyes, That I May See”

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. - Isaiah 35:5-6

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. - Matthew 11:4-5

The words of the prophet Isaiah, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,” speak of a physical as well as spiritual restoration of sight, signifying future enlightenment, redemption, and fulfillment of God's promises through the coming Messiah. It is more

than just physical healing of those who are blind, it is also a spiritual awakening of people who are blind to God's truth – those blinded by cultural and personal bias. This prophetic message of hope and transformation is fulfilled in Christ Jesus who revealed himself as the light of the world, that anyone who follows him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life.

Our worship and prayer life is enhanced through hymnody because it provides a way to express devotion, fostering a deeper spiritual connection with the divine and focusing our hearts and minds on God's truth. There are many beautiful hymns that speak to us in different seasons and circumstances in life. Today's readings brought to my mind one of my favorite hymns that was composed and published in 1895 by Clara H. Scott; "Open My Eyes, That I May See." This heartfelt expression of faith moves beyond opening our eyes, ears and mouth to a readiness to let go of our bias, opening us up to God's healing and allowing the Light of Christ to shine in us and through us. As we contemplate the words of this beautiful hymn, may we be healed and released from that which hinders us from being fully present with that divine light that shines, transcends and permeates all the broken edges in our lives. In this season of hope and expectation, may we find time in quiet contemplation of God's grace that brings wholeness and restoration. As our vision is made clearer, may we discern our true calling in life as agents of God's love, grace and mercy. God's will be done. Amen.

*"Silently now I wait for Thee,
ready, my God, Thy will to see;
open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!"*



Monday, December 15, 2025
The Sixteenth Day of Advent

Roberta F. Briggs
Psalm 42

Psalm 42: The Prayer of someone in Exile:

- 1 As a deer longs for a stream of cool water, so I long for you, O God.*
- 2 I thirst for you, the living God. When can I go and worship in your presence?*
- 3 Day and night I cry, and tears are my only food; All the time my enemies ask me, "Where is your God?"*
- 4 My heart breaks when I remember the past, when I went with the crowds to the house of God and led them as they walked along, a happy crowd, singing and shouting praise to God.*
- 5 Why am I so sad? Why am I so troubled? I will put my hope in God, and once again I will praise him, my savior and my God.*
- 6-7 Here in Exile my heart is breaking, and so I turn my thoughts to him. He has sent waves of sorrow over my soul; chaos roars at me like waterfalls thundering down to the Jordan from Mount Heron and Mount Mizar.*
- 8 May the Lord show his constant love during the day, so that I may have a song at night, a prayer to the God of my life.*

9 To God, my defender, I say, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go on suffering from the cruelty of my enemies?"

10 I am crushed by their insults, as they keep on asking me, "Where is your God?"

11 Why am I so sad? Why am I so troubled? I will put my hope in God and once again I will praise him, my savior and my God.

This reading is a lovely prayer to God. We all can get a bit discouraged at times and think God has forgotten us. But, if we take the time to talk with God, we quickly realize God never abandons us. We may abandon God at times, But God NEVER abandons any one of us.

People may make us feel like we are worthless by slandering us, insulting us, teasing us, making fun of us. God loves each and every one of us so very much! He gave us his only begotten son who died on the cross that our sins will be forgiven.

Since I was eight years old, and am now almost 88, I have known God's presence always with me leading me, guiding me, taking care of me all these years. I love this psalm as it is a reminder that no matter what happens, God is right there with me leading me to think and do what is right. Teaching me to be kind to others and share what I know about God with anyone who will listen. Sometimes

I may not think I got through to them about God's Love. But many of the same people with whom I have shared God's presence have told me later, sometimes, much later, how much I was able to help them learn to love and trust God and to accept God and believe in God and listen to what and how God is with them as well.

This Psalm talks a lot about loneliness, sadness, hurt feelings, but, also talks about the Love of God and says, "Where is your God?" The answer to that for me, is, My God is right here in my head and in my heart all the time! 24/7. AMEN



Tuesday, December 16, 2025
The Seventeenth Day of Advent

Rev. Mark Nilson
Psalm 42

THE DEER KNOWS

Dehydration can be a medical emergency. The same is true in the spiritual world; dehydration can sap the soul of all strength and courage.

Disappointment in life, in our friends, even in ourselves, is tough going – but it is the most common malady we all face. Sure, our tears can be a source of hydration, but our tears are only salty and only exacerbate our dark moods.

This pray-er wants to drink, wants to fill her soul up again with God, but is having trouble finding the source of some good divine drink. He/she not only desires God, but it must be God alive, and not some flagging substitute.

Who has not experienced such dry places? But the experienced pray-er knows when we have been pushed to the extreme, that is the exact place where God does God's best work. It is called the pathway of descent. God is on the ground with us in our struggles. God does not reside above and beyond but is right here in the suffering.

Sometimes it feels like the evil and destructive ones always win out, but here and in all places of scripture, look to the rule of “end-stress”. “Just as every experience of need opens us up to receive God’s help, so every act of injustice creates an opportunity for us to share his deliverance.” Hope belongs to everyone as we are all God’s creatures, the deer included.



Wednesday, December 17, 2025

Rev. Aaron Payson

The Eighteenth Day of Advent *Psalm 42; Zechariah 8:1-17; Matthew 8:14-17, 28-34;*

“Participating in Divine Return”

Zechariah 8:16-17 - 16 These are the things that you shall do: speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, 17 do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord.”

Faith is participatory. It is not simply a passive acceptance of one’s relationship with the Divine, it requires that as part of the covenant to be one of God’s people, we actively participate in the bringing about of the Heavenly realm that is both present and evolving. All of the readings for this day in Advent point to the necessity of a faith that is demonstrable of the promises made to us by the poets, prophets, and healers who have witnessed to that power and potential that is available to each of us who has ears, to hear, eyes to see, hearts to understand, and bodies to bear witness to those truths that are far more powerful than violence, death, destruction, enslavement (by many means) and capitulation to worldly ways. During this season of Advent, might we all rediscover that within us that is alive in faith and partner again with God to bring about more of the Heavenly realm here on earth!



Thursday, December 18, 2025

Rev. Aaron Payson

The Nineteenth Day of Advent

*Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:1-17;
Galatians 3:23-29;*

“Heirs to the Kingdom”

2 Samuel 7:12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

Galatians 3:28-29 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring,[b] heirs according to the promise.

If ever there was a better vision of the faithful truth that we are all “children of God” then these passages from 2 Samuel and Galatians, I do not know where. Advent is often experienced as a time of anticipation, the celebration of the arrival of new life, literally and faithfully. And yet, it is also a time of remembering the life that has been given, a time of celebrating the life that has been gifted to each of us, now, who bear witness to the possibility of that life continuing to grow and flourish. It is as if we are bidden as

people of faith to not only rejoice in the arrival of new life, like the first Christmas we new born babes, but also to remember with each Christmas hence, how we rejoice in the life that changes, flourishing before us, evolving in its capacities, growing in goodness. Take time this season to both expect and reflect the life that is within, before us, and coming.



Friday, December 19, 2025

The Twentieth Day of Advent

Rev. Aaron Payson

Psalm 80:1-7, 14-19; 2 Samuel 7:23-29; John 3:31-36;

“Turn Again, O God”

Psalm 80:14-15

14 Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven and see;
have regard for this vine,

15 the stock that your right hand planted.

Nancy Koester writes of this passage from Psalm 80, “One of the most intriguing things about this . . . verse [is]. . . where the Psalmist asks God to “turn again” or repent, and look with love on the people once more. For some the thought that God might change course, turn around, or repent, is disturbing. Yet the God of the Bible is emphatically a God in relationship.

And to be in relationship calls for continual adjustment, like sailing or gardening or parenting. If God cannot “turn” and “remember” us, then we are praying into empty space, changing our own minds perhaps but not communicating with anything or anyone beyond ourselves. There is hope in a prayer that asks God to “turn again.”

How many of us can relate to this passage as fallible human beings? Much of life is the art of returning again, starting over, or picking up where we left off. Change is the only constant in life and the idea that we are ever advancing suggests that we are always traveling forward, and yet most of us recognize that life often returns us to the very same experiences, issues, situations. It is as though we haven’t learned something yet and continue to be provided opportunities to grow beyond certain ideas, behaviors, attitudes, etc.

This makes sense when it comes to human beings. But God? One who returns? I like what Nancy Koester has to say on this subject. Returning, it turns out is not so much retreating, or having to do something over, but an act of remembering, literally remembering ourselves, and the Divine, into situations that seem to perpetually come around. During this Advent season, might we take the opportunity to return again, and bring with us the hope that is so much a part of this season. As a chant by Shlomo Carlebach, in the hymnal *Singing the Journey* entreats:

*Return again, Return again,
Return to the home of your soul.
Return to who you are,
Return to what you are,
Return to where you are
born and reborn again.*



Saturday, December 20, 2025
The Twenty-First Day of Advent

Pr. Andrew Borden
John 3:31-36 (The Message)

John 3:31-36 (The Message)

31-33 "The One who comes from above is head and shoulders over other messengers from God. The earthborn is earthbound and speaks earth language; the heavenborn is in a league of his own. He sets out the evidence of what he saw and heard in heaven. No one wants to deal with these facts. But anyone who examines this evidence will come to stake his life on this: that God himself is the truth.

34-36 "The One that God sent speaks God's words. And don't think he rations out the Spirit in bits and pieces. The Father loves the Son extravagantly. He turned everything over to him so he could give it away—a lavish distribution of gifts. That is why whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever! And that is also why the person who avoids and distrusts the Son is in the dark and doesn't see life. All he experiences of God is darkness, and an angry darkness at that."

If all we ever heard were the voices of unrest and dis-ease that would be the sum of what molds our outlook.

It is largely a milieu such as this into which our God entered in the flesh as the Christ to expose the hopelessness of purely earthbound reasoning and logic!

Through the person of Jesus, light now beams into all the recesses of darkness in revealing the Way out towards abundant, whole and Grace-centered life!

Come and be drawn into abundant life and realize extravagant Love for the soul!



Sunday, December 21, 2025
The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Rev. Dr. Julie Cedrone
Love

By lighting the fourth Advent Candle, we complete the circle, and Love rounds out Hope, Peace, and Joy. True, we don't have that bright glowing Christ candle in the center, what sustains it all, but Love is the force that leads into Advent's homestretch. And, we sure need it, in a season that is all about birthing, to fuel us as we continue our preparations for what is new in us, what is new through the birth of Jesus.

The love of Advent is not an easy one to define with words, although if I asked you, most likely, you can tell me what it feels like, the essence of it. Love is a force and a prayer and an expression of God. Love is a great motivator, a risk and a safety. Intense love and intense grief often go hand in hand, and love is also just that, feeling like we are hand in hand with another...or an entire community. There are people who are so darn easy to love, just cozily yielding to love's requests and returning it with embrace. There are those who are so NOT easy to love, who demand us to persistently reframe and pause, bite our tongue and work at finding what is lovable in them. There are four official kinds of Christian love (and so many unofficial kinds!), love

of God, the love between friends, sensual love and love for one's community. Just reflect on all the ways you love are loved!

Then, there is Advent love, which has its own character. I always think about Advent love as a love of endurance, a love that is more of the momentum to a journey. Advent love is also about listening to dreams and responding, being attentive to the ways that God provides messages for us to see and hear. Of course, there is the love accompanying a baby's entrance into the world, the most tender dance of honoring that new human being and the mystery of their potential.

The biblical examples of Advent love are so familiar in our imagination, and I ask you to try and enter these characters as you meditate on them:

Mary, with a round belly following a big YES to God, trekking to Bethlehem, not sure where this baby would be born or what it meant to be the mother of God. That is love.

Joseph, who doesn't separate from her, despite the "scandalous" circumstances of her pregnancy, but devoted to God's assurance in a dream that choosing love means staying with her and fathering this baby. That is love.

Magi and their camels, maybe three or maybe more, determined to meet the Messiah, relying on stars and holy messages to reach their destination, averting King Herod in the process, all so they could worship and share gifts. That is love.

A newborn baby, the birth of potential, totally vulnerable and precious, powerless but having the power to bring us together in a new light beneath a brilliant light. That is love.

May you know that you are loved, worthy of love, and able to love – that is also the Advent love for you to garner and illuminate as we approach Christmas Day.



Monday, December 22, 2025
The Twenty-Third Day of Advent

Rev. Mark Nilson
Rev. 22:6,7, 18-21

WHAT TIME IS IT?

Most of us live under the threat of the clock. We are always aware of time and how far behind we are. This is only made worse in this technical age, where the clocks are always on our phones and our watches are alarming, telling us to take our next dose of medicine, get up and walk around, or that our next appointment happens in 30 minutes, so get to it. With so much time staring us in the face, it would be easy to fall into hearing a pushy, threatening voice in these last verses of the New Testament.

You've probably heard before the differences found in Chronos time and Kairos time. Chronos is the time of our world. We think of time as linear and spatially – past, present, and future. Clocks and calendars keep this kind of time, and Chronos time measures duration.

Kairos time is markedly different. Kairos time is about opportunity and expectation. When we wait those moments for our firstborn to arrive, time is measured not so much in Chronos schedules (we know exactly when in date, hour, minute, and seconds), but Kairos time – time measured in great anticipation of who this child will be and how they will change our lives.

God's timing in Kairos time, where the future is a source of hope and expectation as to how we will all be changed and how the world will come into closer proximity with God's new heaven and earth.

Each Sunday, as we celebrate in worship, we take a deep breath in and out, letting go of the anxiety of Chronos time and breathing freely and easily into Kairos time as the children of God.



Tuesday, December 23, 2025

The Twenty-Fourth Day of Advent

Pr. Dennis O'Malley

*Luke 1:46b-55; 2 Samuel 7:18, 23-29;
Galatians 3:6-14*

Luke 1:46 My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.

Like Mary, our souls should be proclaiming the greatness of our God, because the Spirit of God resides in us, waiting for us to give birth to our spiritual nature. What joy for us to know God's Spirit is within us. What a wonderful way of thinking, that we have the potential to give birth to Christ to a waiting world.

This Advent let's rejoice because God has blessed us with His Spirit residing within us, and with the sacred task of sharing His Spirit with the people we meet.



Wednesday, December 24, 2025

The Twenty-Fifth Day of Advent

Rev. Aaron Payson

Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

A UCC colleague, Quinn Caldwell, wrote recently, about how he opens the service on Christmas Eve say,

"If you came to this place expecting a tame story, you came to the wrong place.

If you came for a story that does not threaten you, you came for a different story than the one we tell.

If you came to hear of the coming of a God who only showed up so that you could have a nice day with your loved ones, then you came for a God whom we do not worship here.

For even a regular baby is not a tame thing."

Indeed, babies are far from tame, and the story that is so often told in churches on this night are dressed in the season's finest sentiment, glowing, if you will, with Divinity. I've come to understand the season a bit different. As a child, I was awed by the pageantry, music and candlelight. And to be honest, I still am. As I child, however, I was spared the experience of turmoil, other than the necessary and often fun excitement of

gathering for the evening's festivities. What I mean is that, like most of you, I now experience the season in its fullness the stresses and strains and anxieties. At first, I was repulsed and a bit downtrodden by the experience.

Where did Christmas go? I asked. Every year I returned to the same story, the one with such spectacle, the one that enthralled me as a child with the star, and angels, and animals, and wise men, the wandering family and their baby, singing familiar hymns and sipping warm spiced tea. Then wondering what the morning would bring.

In its fullness, however, Christmas isn't just about anticipation, it's also about preparation, about the work of wonder if you will, and it is full of all the stuff that I was spared as a child: travel woes, money worries, meal preparation, end of the year work, gift purchases, cleaning, and tending to those who whose in the community or family whose lives consist of none of these stresses but who continue to bare a whole lot more than any person or family should be saddled with, especially at the holidays.

Now I get it. Now I understand the fullness of this holiday, and so many more like it at this turn of the seasons. And I appreciate even more my colleague Quinn Caldwell's words, when he says:

But. . . If you came because you think that unwed teenage mothers are some of the strongest people in the world.

If you came because you think that the kind of people who work third shift doing stuff you'd rather not do might attract an angel's attention before you, snoring comfortably in your bed, would.

If you came because you think there are wise men and women to be found among undocumented travelers from far lands and that they might be able to show you God.

If you came to hear a story of tyrants trembling while heaven comes to peasants.

If you came because you believe that God loves the animals as much as the people and so made them the first witnesses to the saving of the world.

If you came for a story of reversals that might end up reversing you. . . .

If you came to be reminded that God loves you too much to leave you unchanged.

If you came to follow the light even if it blinds you.

If you came for salvation and not safety, then, ah, my friends, you are in precisely the right place."

And here's the point for me. On this night, salvation comes not in the form of one child, but all children, not in the form of one family in strife, but all striving families, not in the form of one star but all the light that illumines a different way to be in a world with forces and systems that thrive on our anxiety, anger and appetite. Salvation comes in the perpetual process of awakening to true power, true purpose, true presence. And so we gather again in honor of that awakening. And for this, we offer three gifts on the Altar of Love: faith, hope, and joy. Amen.



“Merry Christmas”

One of my favorite Christmas readings, one that I return to regularly this time of the year, is by the English author and Christian apologist, G.K. Chesterton on his belief in Santa Claus. May it give you as much joy and introspection as it gives me. Blessings.

“What has happened to me has been the very reverse of what appears to be the experience of most of my friends. Instead of dwindling to a point, Santa Claus has grown larger and larger in my life until he fills almost the whole of it. It happened in this way.

As a child I was faced with a phenomenon requiring explanation. I hung up at the end of my bed an empty stocking, which in the morning became a full stocking. I had done nothing to produce the things that filled it. I had not worked for them, or made them or helped to make them. I had not even been good – far from it.

And the explanation was that a certain being whom people called Santa Claus was benevolently disposed toward me...What we believed was that a certain benevolent agency did give us those toys for nothing. And, as I say, I believe it still. I have merely extended the idea.

Then I only wondered who put the toys in the stocking; now I wonder who put the stocking by the bed, and the bed in the room, and the room in the house, and the house on the planet, and the great planet in the void.

Once I only thanked Santa Claus for a few dolls and crackers. Now, I thank him for stars and street faces, and wine and the great sea. Once I thought it delightful and astonishing to find a present so big that it only went halfway into the stocking. Now I am delighted and astonished every morning to find a present so big that it takes two stockings to hold it, and then leaves a great deal outside; it is the large and preposterous present of myself, as to the origin of which I can offer no suggestion except that Santa Claus gave it to me in a fit of peculiarly fantastic goodwill.”



Authors & Participating Greendale Ecumenical Group Congregation

First Congregational Church of Auburn

Rev. Dr. Julie Cedrone
Laura Lennox

Grace Lutheran Church – Bethel & Zion

Pr. Andrew Borden
Roberta Briggs
Marie Sturdevant
Jackie Walsh

Greendale People's Church

Pr. Dennis O'Malley

Salem Covenant Church

Pr. Mark Nilson

Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester

Rev. Aaron Payson