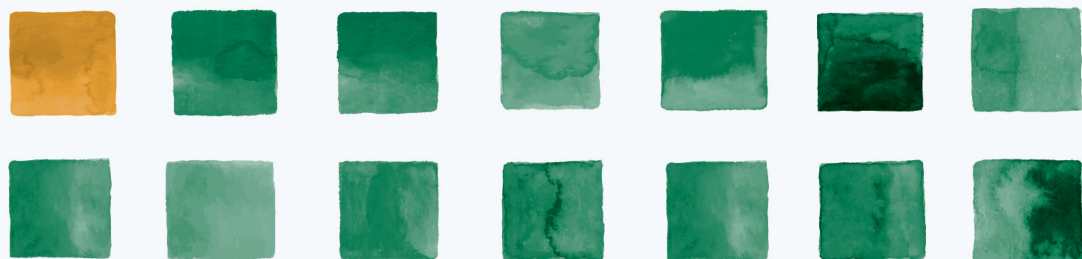


LIVING THE WAY OF JESUS



*Practicing the
Christian Calendar
One Week at a Time*



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THE SEASON OF ADVENT



We often assume Advent is the countdown to Christmas: the church equivalent of how many shopping days we have left. The season does begin four Sundays prior to Christmas Day, but we aren't preparing ourselves for Christ coming as a baby. Instead, Advent is the preparation of people who live in the in-between: looking back on Christ's birth, and looking forward to when Christ will come again.

As a result, the scriptures of Advent feel decidedly un-Christmasy. They are filled with prophetic words of judgment against oppressive earthly powers and proclamations of the justice and peace that will replace these powers in God's kingdom. Advent is not so much a season of light and hope as a season of waiting in the dark.

It is significant that the Christian calendar begins this way. We begin the year in an honest place, admitting that we do, in fact, need saving, and that the One who saves chooses to do it in a different way than we expect.

In these weeks, we do not celebrate the God who comes to us on *our* schedule, conforming to *our* list of requirements. In Advent, we recognize that God comes to us not in the way or timeline we *expect* but in the way we *need*. The best things—forming new life, making people whole, restoring the world—cannot be rushed.

During this season, we will take on practices that help us prepare our hearts and minds for this God who comes to us. *May we grow in awareness, trust, and expectation of our God as we wait in the dark.*

First Sunday of Advent

Be a Gossip Buster

Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5

THE WEAPONS WE most often use against each other in daily life tend to be words rather than swords. This week, practice turning your swords into plowshares by avoiding gossip. Whenever you or someone you are with begins to speak ill of someone else or spread rumors, quickly end it. Guide the conversation to a different subject. If you're not sure whether something qualifies as gossip, imagine the subject of the conversation standing with you. If you wouldn't be having the conversation in front of that person, you probably don't need to be having it in their absence. When you hear others using words to do harm toward someone, see how quickly you can offer words to bring peace.

Date(s) Used: _____

What did I learn about myself and/or God in this practice?

Second Sunday of Advent

Provide Safety

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-10

ISAIAH TELLS US that in God's future there is safety for all—wolves and lambs alike. The church is where this reality can be experienced even now. You can practice being a person of safety for those you encounter this week by keeping these things in mind:

- Listen well when someone is speaking; do not interrupt.
- Keep your opinions to a minimum; share only when you are asked.
- Protect the safety of those who are being mistreated by speaking up on their behalf and/or reporting the mistreatment.

Date(s) Used: _____

What did I learn about myself and/or God in this practice?

Third Sunday of Advent

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Scripture: Isaiah 35:1-10

THOSE WHO LIVE in wealthy areas of the world often do not see the damage created by our trash, but how humans use and discard material goods greatly affects the rest of creation. This week, join in God's care for creation by thinking carefully about what gets thrown away. Use some of these ideas to help you:

- Generate as little trash as possible, opting for non-disposable items wherever and whenever you can.
- Reduce the amount of water, disposable products, and goods you use, consuming only what is absolutely necessary.
- Reuse all materials (grocery bags, paper, containers) as much as possible before throwing them out.
- Recycle everything you can: paper, plastic, glass, and metal. If your area waste removal doesn't include recycling pickup, look online to find the nearest recycling center.

Date(s) Used: _____

What did I learn about myself and/or God in this practice?

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Naming our Fears

Scripture: Isaiah 7:10-16

FEAR IS A powerful yet subtle force that often directs our decisions and actions, as it did for King Ahaz. It may be even more powerful when we are not aware of its influence. This week, carve out at least thirty minutes for this exercise of naming your fears and allowing our with-us God—Immanuel—to release you from them.

- First, spend a few minutes calming your mind and heart. Settle in and get comfortable in silence. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- Imagine Jesus, our with-us God, asking you, “What do you fear?” Examine your heart, mind, and emotions. Write down the fears that come to you (e.g., sickness, shame, bankruptcy, loneliness, etc.).
- Look over what you have written. Imagine God being fully present to you in every circumstance listed. How does this awareness change your fears?
- Jesus who is with us offers freedom from the oppression of fear. What, if anything, would you do differently if you weren’t afraid of the things on your list?
- Respond with obedience to anything the Spirit is guiding you to do, say, or write. Close your prayer with gratitude.

Date(s) Used: _____

What did I learn about myself and/or God in this practice?
