

Trinity Lutheran Church

Advent Devotional

2023



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We hope you will enjoy this collection of Advent devotions, composed by members of Trinity Lutheran Church. Advent begins on Sunday, December 3rd. In this booklet, you will find a daily devotion to bring you to Christmas. We look forward to your feedback!

Thank you to all who contributed to this collection.

Advent Week 1

HOPE



The first week of Advent is all about hope.

Think about hope as you hear Lamentations 3: 21-24:

“But this I call to mind,

and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,

God’s mercies never come to an end;

they are new every morning;

great is your faithfulness.

“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,

“therefore I will hope in the Lord.”

One purple candle is lit.

Gracious God, As the Advent season begins, we cry out to you. We come to you looking for hope. When everything else we rely on fails us, our only hope is in you. When we do not understand what has happened, we hope in you. We can hope for better days because we trust you. We know you and we know you are here with us no matter what we are facing. Some of us see only darkness this time of year. Some of us find life overwhelming. Some of us are filled with Advent joy. Wherever we find ourselves today, Loving God, remind us that our hope is in you. Be with us on this journey. Amen.

My Notes for Today:

Submitted by Rev. Susannah DeBenedetto

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good” Psalm 34:8a

Reflection for the Day:

Pay Attention

“Instructions for living a life:

“Pay attention

Be astonished

Tell about it.”

This is a favorite quote of mine from Mary Oliver’s poem Sometimes. She is a Christian poet and an observer of the natural world.

When we take the time to really look and listen, the creatures around us are fascinating. Have you ever watched a rabbit eat a dandelion which has gone to seed? It plucks the flower stem and eats it from the base up to the fluffy part at the top. Again and again and again all across the yard.

Have you thought much about a Great Blue Heron? A graceful beautiful bird with a majestic walk and the most raucous cry you’ve ever heard. Height is 4 feet. Wingspan is 6-7 feet. Weight is 5-6 lbs! What an amazing creature!

I think the above quote summarizes our faith. We can observe God working in the world, our community and in our lives. Do we keep it to ourselves? Do we share what we see with others? If we don’t speak out, who will?

Prayer for Today:

Creator God, give us the will and the words to share the wonder of all you are doing in our world. Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

"I will listen to what God the LORD says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—
but let them not turn to folly." Psalm 85:8

Personal Poem for the Day:

Snow White Dove

I sit beside our cabin that holds poignant memories,
And grieve for the plans we made, that were not meant to be
Memories of our love abound in my aching heart,
I gaze across the lake and feel the teardrops start.
As the breeze caresses my damp cheek...
I pray, "God send comfort that I seek."

Then I see on the roof above...
The presence of a snow white dove.
Waves of love wash over me,
As eyes meet mine in familiarity.
Singing in my soul with no physical sounds...
"Love still lives and life abounds!"
I feel the message in my heart...
"Tho not together - never apart!"

Prayer for Today:

Let us find comfort in our memories, Father, that bind you and us together. Let us trust the whispers of hope and life.

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4: 6-7

Reflection for the Day:

Coma Dreams

I was riding my bike one lovely spring day when a truck hit me, rendering me unconscious for many days. During my time in a state of coma in a hospital, I was only aware of floating in a comfortable mist.

Then I saw my dear grandfather who had been dead for many years. He was as I remembered him: strong, healthy and loving toward me. We spoke of many things; but his main message to me was that I must not give up on the situation I was in; and even though I wanted to take his hand and go with him he told me it was not my time yet and I had things to do.

I saw my grandmother too, off and on. During this time I felt her warm love and desire to hold me close, as she used to do. I could almost feel her warm hugs. Yet she kept her distance even as she smiled and talked to me. She seemed sad to know it was not time for me to join her, yet, I felt love all around.

I eventually felt and heard the prayers of mom and dad who were at my bedside constantly as well as friends whose prayers helped me recover. Their loving energy helped me wake up to communicate with them. I hold in my heart the knowledge that love survives and life goes on in Heaven but never forgets us.

Prayer for Today:

Father, Lord, Thank you for holding us close even in times of medical and/or emergency distress. Wrap us in a warm blanket of hope and love, held tightly around us by our guiding spirits of past and present.

Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

“He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:8-9

Reflection for the Day:

Faith

Each breath I take echoes a name...
Of joy, light, and loves refrain.
My mind sees His face, sweet and clear.
Radiant with light, pure and clear.

With eyes of spirit my heart can see...
The love and compassion held for me.
Pain of this world may take its toll...
But nothing can touch my faithful soul.

Prayer for Today:

Lord, thank you for the gift we call faith. Let today be one where my mind can be open to your messages and trust that you will show me a path to love and understanding.
Amen

My Notes for Today:

Majesty Around Us

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

“Lord, through all generations you have been our home! Before the mountains were created, before the earth was formed, you are God without beginning or end.”

Psalm 90: 1-2

Photo:



Prayer for Today:

Lord Jesus, my Redeemer and King, as we celebrate the glorious advent of Thy coming into the world, I, Thy humble servant, open wide my heart to Thee. Cleanse and purify it from all sin and evil desire. So rule my life that I may yield the members of my body instruments of righteousness to Thee, my Lord.

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

Jeremiah 1:4-5

Personal Poem/Story/Reflection for the Day:

"22"

There are more wonders between Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy, Horatio. William Shakspeare

This sums up my feeling about the number 22 that keeps repeating in our family's happy events. It started when my father stepped ashore on Ellis Island on Aug. 22 to begin a new life in America. It may be a reminder of loving attention being paid to our family by Angels unknown to us, yet felt deeply at times.

We feel a gentle affinity to the number 22 and wonder if other families have similar experiences of a caring universe that is aware of our desire to be closer to God and each other in this journey we are all on.

Prayer for Today:

So often, Lord, we wonder if things are coincidence or providence. Open our hearts and minds to the wonders of your world. Let us share with one another the glories of your world.

My Notes for Today:

Advent Week 2

PEACE



For the second week in Advent, we focus on peace.

In John 14:27, Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Two purple candles are lit.

Prince of Peace, reveal yourself to us today. We need peace in our lives, our homes, our families, our church, and our whole world. Help us to slow down and seek out the peace you provide, so we may become peacemakers for ourselves and others. In your name, Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.

My Notes for Today:

Submitted by Rev. Susannah DeBenedetto

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

Genesis 21:2-3 "Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age ... Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son"

Poem for the Day:

Sarah I
Sarah laughed.
No wonder.
Yes, WONDER!
It was ludicrous.
So longed for
Yet
So impossible to accept -
An unbelievable, wondrous child
Named "Laughter"

Prayer for Today:

We are thankful, Lord, for our children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Each child is a miracle and a blessing. We laugh for joy.
Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

"I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens." Psalm 89: 2

Reflection for the Day:

Communion Is Our Strength

(This is an excerpt from a Temple Talk given by member Joanne Killenbeck several years ago.)

My journey of Faith started as an infant when I was placed into the "Cradle Roll" of the Trinity Lutheran Church in Berwick, PA, My earliest memories are how my father held my hand during church and gently stroked the back of it with his thumb, which was very comforting and almost hypnotic so it kept me quiet and at least gave me the opportunity to listen to God's Word and try to understand.

...(After a number of years), I married Robert Wilson and we joined a Presbyterian church. A year and a half later we were blessed with the birth of our amazing daughter. I remained a member for approximately 12 years. I'm sorry to say that the last several of those years I did not attend regularly because I became depressed over personal problems and felt lost and alienated.

As time passed, I again suffered depression and felt I was unworthy to ask for God's help when others had "serious" problems He needed to address. So I again did not attend services on a regular basis. Depression is difficult to explain to those who have never experienced it; but in my case, it robbed me of sleep, energy and the ability to think clearly and make decisions. I often used the expression "I can't see the forest for the trees". Ironically, I read something recently that would have been a much more helpful thought about trees and perhaps would have helped send me back to church and end my self-made isolation. **It was written by Charles Spurgeon and says the following:**

"COMMUNION is STRENGTH and SOLITUDE is WEAKNESS. Alone, the fine old beech yields to the blast and lies prone in the meadow. In the forest, SUPPORTING each other, the trees LAUGH at the hurricane".

To clarify my feelings during that time, I assure you that I never lost my Faith!!! I simply felt that I was unworthy to ask for help and thought I should, as the old saying goes, "pull myself up by my bootstraps", but I seemed unable to do that. However, I continued supporting the church financially and tried (with both professional help and that of my family and friends) to address the issues that seemed to be pulling me "down" and fought to regain my confidence and self- esteem so that I could again be useful to others, with God's help. It was a long, hard road but I came to know that the Lord had not abandoned me, even though it seemed as though I had abandoned HIM!

In conclusion, when I made the decision to move here in 2004, I was anxious to again get back to my Lutheran roots. Being a member here has been a BLESSING for me and A LOT of the credit goes to all of you in the congregation and Pastor Ann Zimmerman for making me feel so welcome. I sincerely thank you for that, and I look forward to relearning things I've forgotten and strengthening my Faith. THANK YOU.

Joanne

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

Deuteronomy 24:13

You shall give the pledge back by sunset, so that your neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the LORD your God.

Personal Poem for the Day:

Neighbors

When the sunshine of day goes to rest,
And darkness takes over from the day,
Do you know who lives like you,
Behind the windows across the way?

Have your neighbors, like ours have been,
Hand-wave acquaintances
Or Christmas cards friends?
People you value without knowing why
Until life opens a door to let you try.

Take that first step, without delay,
For you will find friends across the way.
Each of us is a gift to someone else
If only we are open to the best.

Prayer for Today:

Make us aware, Lord, of the neighborhoods we live in. Open our hearts to the potential relationships that surround us. Send your warming love among us that we may find one another. Amen.

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against ... against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6:10-12

Reflection for the Day:

Long Distance

My two daughters and I were in the lawyer’s office, finishing up some legal family matters which my son Daniel had been an integral part of planning when he visited in June from his home in Atlanta.

It had been two weeks since we got the heartbreaking news that Daniel had passed away in his home unexpectedly.

His home and possessions had been secured and locked up by a trusted friend, awaiting the arrival of his sister to take care of the legal affairs.

We had finished our business so Gayle prepared to call her son to tell him we were on our way home. May and I heard her surprised gasp as she opened the phone. *There was Daniel’s name and number displayed!* We all saw it before it faded away. Obviously she had not called the number in at least two weeks; his phone had not been charged in that time.

We feel that it was a message that he is aware of our efforts, and that love survives, and he is alive and well in the care of Jesus.

There still remains the sad business of closing the chapter of a loved one’s life.

Prayer for Today:

Lord, thank you for families, for life, and for love. Support us in times of grief, and reassure us that ultimately, we all are together in Love. Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

Reflection:

Scripture

It resonates.

It sits with you,
And grips you,
Then slips through
Past your defenses,
Beyond your comfort zone

To depths,
The tender place
Where your heart hides.

Prayer for Today:

Lord, help us understand the meaning of your Holy words in the Bible.
Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

Psalms 25: 1-2

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

Poem for the Day:

Gentle Soul

Dear God, I pray for gentle soul...
Send boundless love to make him whole.
Lonely sadness please erase...
Shine healing light upon his face.

Enfolded in the warmth of angel wings...
Let him feel the love your light now brings.
Banish sad and empty fears...
While angels kiss away his tears.

Let the light of which he is a part...Illuminate his yearning heart.
As he opens his arms and heart so wide...
Let him feel the light he is...inside.

In Jesus Christ name we pray,
Comfort and heal this soul in every way!

Prayer for Today:

Sometimes, Lord, the darkness attacks us and pulls us into its hold. Connect your light to that which glows within each of us, and link us together in shared light. Let us be open to your love and the companionship of one another. Amen

My Notes for Today:

Advent Week 3

JOY



During the third week in Advent, we spend time thinking about joy.

From Psalm 5:11, we hear these words,
“But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
so that those who love your name may exult in you.”

Two purple candles and one pink candle are lit.

Too often, we think joy is something big, O God. A brass band or a parade can certainly bring us joy. Just as easily and far more often, we can feel joy in a hug or the squeeze of a hand, we can see joy in a smile or hear it in laughter. Help us to not overlook the simple joys that peak into our lives daily. This week in our Advent journey, open our eyes to the joy that surrounds us. Amen.

My Notes for Today:

Submitted by Rev. Susannah DeBenedetto

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

“But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:20

Poem for the Day:

Your Angel

Reach for your angel who is always near,
Her soft sweet voice whispers in your ear,
Singing softly of love and heavenly care.
Assuring you gently she’s always there.

May angels comfort as they gently hold you.
When you are tired, may soft wings enfold you,
Bringing rainbow dreams touched by rosy hue,
As again you greet those dear to you.

May you hear the music of heavenly song:
Assuring you that those you love are never gone.
May your dreams comfort and enlighten...
And your days begin to joyfully brighten.

With lilacs always to scent the air,
Lily of the valley to wear in your hair.
With angel kisses on your sleeping brow...
Awake to enlightenment here and now.

In Jesus Christ we pray...
Enlighten this soul in every way!

Prayer for Today:

Guardian angels are around us in places we can only imagine. Father, open our hearts and minds to the reality of their comfort for us. Share Your love with us.
Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

“Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me, everyone who hears will laugh with me.” Genesis: 21: 6

Reflection:

Sarah II

Laugh with me.

(Not at me.)

You who scorned me.

You who thought you were blessed
and I was not.

But now

Will you rejoice with me?

Will you celebrate with me?

Will you laugh with delight

at this happening

that could only come from God?

Prayer for Today:

Lord, you bring us delight. Help us to be patient and remember that your timing is perfect. Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

“ The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD, searching every inmost part.”
Proverbs 20:27

Poem for the Day:

In Limbo...

Glass enclosure, awe, wonder, pride,
Afraid to feel? Incapable?
Answers trapped inside.
Intellectual understanding...
Overwhelmed occasionally by fierce emotion...
Unable to cope.
Do you feel the love?
One can only hope.

Unwilling or unable?
All sweet sensations...
like lovely creations wrapped in limbo.
I press against barriers.
I cannot see.
I think of love's freedom...
But I am trapped and lonely.
I Speak through a poem...

Can you hear me?

Prayer for Today:

Lord, honor our attempts at communication, and open the hearts of our friends to also receive the messages . Lead us to share with one another freely. Amen.

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

Reflection for the Day:

Wonder

Do you ever wonder about things? I do.

I wish I could talk with you.

I wonder what you are thinking as you read this page.

I wonder if God is near me as I write this. (I know He is, but still...sometimes I wonder.)

Sometimes I wonder what the future holds. And then I pray.

What would happen if we wondered together?

Prayer for Today:

You gave us imaginations and free will, Father. Let us use all of our gifts and talents to protect our world, and make it a better place. Draw us together, and draw us closer to you. Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse for Reflection:

Hebrews 1:14 "Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?"

Poem and Reflection for the Day:

Wellspring

Our creator has provided us...
the energy of life;
and a body that contains it.
Within us lives a wellspring of eternal health and joy.
Nourished by the sea of love
that surrounds and sustains it. Let us accept in love...
the access to our birthright.
With hands of comfort
Let us hold it close...
While radiating the healing light of love, to those both far and near,
with eyes to see, and ears to hear
whose hearts can accept and believe,
"as above, so below."
Circle of life provides the flow...
As we give, we cannot help but receive.

Prayer for Today:

Help us turn within, Lord, to find a special connection with you. Urge us to listen quietly, that we may see, hear, and feel the circle of life that You have placed within each of us.
Amen.

My Notes for Today:

Today it's your turn to make your own choices about your devotions

Scripture Verse for Reflection: *Do you have a favorite scripture? Or just open the Bible.*

Personal Poem/Story/Reflection for the Day:

Draw a picture. Write a poem. Take a photo. Have fun!

Prayer for Today: *Have your own chat with God today. He's easy to talk to.*

My Notes for Today: *How did this feel today?*

Advent Week 4

LOVE



Scripture Verse for Reflection:

"Your love, God, is my song, and I'll sing it! I'm forever telling everyone how you are. I'll never quit telling the story of your love— how you built the cosmos and guaranteed everything in it." Psalm 89:1-2

Poem for the Day:

A Parting Thought

Refreshing as rainbows after the rain,
Surrounded by love, free of pain.
Immersed in the aura of healing gold
Streaming from clouds my eyes behold.

I delight in the rays of rainbow love
Pouring in grace from heaven above.
Sweet as the song an angel sings,
Soft as the touch of butterfly wings.
As I'm embraced in loving tranquility...
Oh glorious surprise! The light is me!

Prayer for Today:

Lord, thank you for your redeeming grace. Stir up your power and come! With your abundant grace and might, free us from all sin that we may bear your redeeming love to all the world. Amen

My Notes for Today:

Scripture Verse: Luke 2:1-7 The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the... line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Poem for the Day:

Christmas Hymns

As Christmas love surrounds you
And hymns ring round your tree...
May the joy and wonder of this time
Be part of tomorrow's memory.

As the past lays gently on you
And the choir softly sings...
If your heart will listen carefully
You'll hear the flutter of wings.

Now the present is precious in its time
As you listen to each joyous song
You'll hear a dear familiar voice...
Altho he's long since gone.

May the present of this perfect time
Bring back the love you have
dispersed...
Multiplied by God's sweet grace
Till you feel in love immersed.

As the chorus reaches its crescendo
To welcome God's own son...
Sweet angel voices sing of him...
Stronger now, by one.

Prayer for Today:

Happy Birthday, Baby Jesus! Amen

My Notes for Today:
