

ADVENT 2008

BECOMING LIKE JESUS TOGETHER.

At Grace Community, we celebrate the weeks of Advent by considering the lives of four of the people of the Nativity story: Mary, John the Baptist, the shepherds, and the magi. Their stories express the themes of Promise, Preparation, Joy and Adoration. And their stories blend with the story of the Incarnation, helping us to enter into the Grand Story of Redemption and become a part of it ourselves.

Our theme for this year is "becoming like Jesus together". What is it about Jesus that attracts us to be his followers? What is it about him that we want to emulate? How will we become like Jesus? These meditations will help us to use the season of Advent to consider why we want to become like Jesus, how this is possible, and how we can do this together.

Candles are a symbol of waiting and help us to anticipate Christ's coming as the light of the world (John 1:1-9). There are various traditions regarding the color of the Advent candles. The blue candles can symbolize the royalty of Christ. The pink candle symbolizes joy and is lit on the third Sunday. Each Sunday another outer candle is lit, i.e., during the first week of Advent one candle is lit, two are lit during the second week, three (including the joy candle) are lit during the third week, and all four are lit the fourth week. The white candle in the center is the Christ candle, lit at the beginning of Christmas Day.

To use these Advent meditations set aside ten to twenty minutes a day for prayer. Establish a weekly rhythm. If you're able to set aside time on more than four days, take the extra day(s) to meditate on The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Mary's beautiful prayer of response to God's working in and through her.

You can also use these meditations for a weekly gathering with your household or with a prayer partner.

- *Have a time of silence after the prayer of presence and examen is read.*
- *Sing the song(s) together, with or without accompaniment.*
- *Read the 4 passages together (various readers can be assigned).*
- *Follow with silence, then allow for sharing of reflections on any of the prayer points.*
- *Say the prayer of re-entry together.*

Outline

Prayer of presence and examen

This prayer will change each week. Pay attention to how you are present with God and how God is present with you.

Song

Listen to the songs online at www.GraceConnections.com or, better yet, sing them aloud and let the words enter your heart.

Praying the Word

Read the Scripture passage slowly several times. You may find the prayer point helpful as you listen for what God wants to say to you.

Prayer of re-entry

If you can, say these words aloud (in solidarity with Mary and all of God's servants) as an affirmation of God's activity in and through you: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38)

Luke 1:46-55 The Magnificat

⁴⁶And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me--
holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

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

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

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

⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers."

1st week of Advent beginning November 30

Mary: Receiving the Promised One

Jesus is the One who fulfills all of God's promises. In 2 Corinthians 1:20 we are told that "...in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." (NRSV). The promises of God are reminders that we are God's beloved. Why do we want to become like Jesus? Because he shows us what it is like when God's promises are fulfilled and we are living in the joy and wonder of God's presence.

Prayer of presence and examen

To be present is to arrive as one is and open up to the other.
At this instant, as I arrive here, God is present waiting for me.
God always arrives before me, desiring to connect with me
even more than my most intimate friend.
I take a moment and greet my loving God.

Song: Of the Father's love begotten

1. Of the Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega, he the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been, and that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore!
2. O ye heights of heav'n adore him, angel hosts, his praises sing;
Pow'rs, dominions, bow before him, and extol our God and King;
Let no tongue on earth be silent, ev'ry voice in concert ring,
Evermore and evermore!
3. Christ, to Thee with God the Father, and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving and unwearied praises be:
Honor, glory, and dominion, and eternal victory,
Evermore and evermore!

Praying the Word

Day 1: Matthew 1:18-19

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.
Prayer point: The fulfillment of God's promises are sometimes unexpected and disquieting.

Day 2: Matthew 1:20-21

²⁰ But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."
Prayer point: Do I want to be saved from my sins?

Day 3: Matthew 1:22-23

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us."
Prayer point: In what ways do I sense that God is with me?

Day 4: Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

Prayer point: I reflect on this vision of God's righteous reign through Christ.

Prayer of re-entry

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.

2nd week of Advent beginning December 7

John the Baptist: Preparing for the Truth

Jesus is the truth. Truth is not always “nice”. Speaking the truth can be jarring or unconventional. But knowing the truth changes our reality. How do we become like Jesus? Sometimes it is a painful process.

Prayer of presence and examen

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation;
Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins,
That we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
(from the Book of Common Prayer)

Song: May the mind of Christ my Savior (selected verses)

May the mind of Christ my Savior Live in me from day to day
By His love and pow’r controlling All I do and say.
May the peace of God my Father In my life forever reign,
That I may be calm to comfort Those in grief and pain.
May the love of Jesus fill me As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing – This is victory.
May His beauty rest upon me As I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel, Seeing only Him

Praying the Word

Day 1: Matthew 3:

¹ In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’ ”

Prayer point: What in my life needs to be straightened in preparation for Jesus’ Advent in my life?

Day 2: Matthew 3:

⁴ John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Prayer point: How did John’s unusual appearance make him a more effective communicator?

Day 3: Matthew 3:

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Prayer point: What phrase in John’s message stands out to me? Why?

Day 4: John 14:6

[Jesus said,] “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Prayer point: John pointed the way to Jesus. Do I?

Prayer of re-entry

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.

3rd week of Advent beginning December 14

The shepherds: the power of joy

Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. God's presence brings joy: "In your presence is fullness of joy." God's presence is life-giving and life-transforming. When I am becoming like Jesus, there is a connection with God's joy that transforms me and affects those around me.

Prayer of presence and examen

I pause for a moment, aware that God is here.
think of how everything around me,
the air I breathe, my whole body,
is tingling with the presence of God.

Song: Angels we have heard on high

1. Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plain;
And the mountains in reply, echo back their joyous strain:
Gloria in excelsis Deo! (repeat)
2. Shepherds why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be which inspire your heav'nly song?
Gloria in excelsis Deo! (repeat)
3. Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come adore on bended knee Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.
Gloria in excelsis Deo! (repeat)

Praying the Word

Day 1: Luke 2:8-12

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Prayer point: Coming into God's presence starts with hearing his word.

Day 2: Luke 2:13-14

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Prayer point: The praise of the angels blesses those who receive the Good News.

Day 3: Luke 2:15

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

Prayer point: May I be active in my response to the Good News.

Day 4: Luke 2:16-18

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Prayer point: If I am becoming like Jesus, who am I affecting?

Prayer of re-entry

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.

4th week of Advent beginning December 21

The magi: Worshiping together

Adoration is expressed in a group. From the number of gifts we guess that there were three magi (there were at least two!). Adoration is part of the transforming process. When we worship him together, re-telling who he is and what he has done, we open ourselves up to his presence and power to change us.

Prayer of presence and examen

Christ is born, give glory.

Christ comes from heaven, meet him.

Christ is on earth, be exalted.

O all the earth, sing unto the Lord, and sing praises in gladness,

O all you people, for he has been glorified.

Wisdom and Word and Power,

Christ our God is the Son and the Brightness of the Father;

and unknown to the powers both above and upon the earth,

he was made man, and so has won us back again:

for he has been glorified. (Eastern Orthodox)

Song: O come all ye faithful

1. O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.

Come and behold Him, born the King of angels:

Refrain O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.

2. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,

O sing all ye citizens of heaven above!

Glory to God, all glory in the highest. (*refrain*)

3. Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning,

Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n;

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing. (*refrain*)

Praying the Word

Day 1: Matthew 2:1-2

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

Prayer point: Imagine the journey of the magi. Who are my fellow travelers/worshippers?

Day 2: Matthew 2:3-7

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

Prayer point: What are some false motives in my life for worship?

Day 3: Matthew 2:9-11

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Prayer point: Worship should be both costly and joyful.

Prayer of re-entry

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.