EPISCOPAL DIOCESE *of West Texas*

CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Songs of Advent

2026 Advent Devotional

1st WEEK OF ADVENT

Dawn McLendon

READ

Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence--

as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil--

to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.

You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.

But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.

We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.

We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;

for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

1 Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; *
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.

2 In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, *
stir up your strength and come to help us.

3 Restore us, O God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

4 O Lord God of hosts, *
how long will you be angered
despite the prayers of your people?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears; *
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.

6 You have made us the derision of our neighbors, *
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

16 Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, *
the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.

17 And so will we never turn away from you; *
give us life, that we may call upon your Name.

18 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

Mark 13:24-37

Jesus said, “In those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,

and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

LISTEN

Heaven Come Down by Citipointe Worship featuring Jasmine Hodge

Lyrics by Elliot Burnett, Aaron Lucas and Jose Isai Valdez

Links to Youtube, Spotify, Tidal, etc

REFLECT

Do Only What You Do

The Psalmist in Psalm 80 calls upon the *Lord God of hosts*. The self-existent and redemptive Lord. The Lord who commands all heavenly and earthly forces. The phrase emphasizes God’s presence over all powers, dominions, forces and realms. In the chorus of *Heaven Come Down*, we call down our God to be present and “Do only what you do.” From the psalm, a plea to give God’s right hand. That which we should burn for. Through God’s sovereignty, let your “hand be on the man of your right hand.”

Through God comes the “allness” of our Savior, Jesus Christ. (Yes, I made up the word “allness,” because sometimes there isn’t a word complete enough to define what you mean to communicate. So I created a new one.) To this earthly place, the prophet Isaiah implores that the Lord of hosts bring to the nations, heaven, a place of God’s presence that comes with the unstoppable power of earthquakes. The fuel of a fire that changes all that is in one state to another. Like water to a steaming boil. We will be changed in God’s presence. We will meet God as we live now. In our brokenness and in God’s presence, the thick shadows of sin dissolve. “Do only what You do.” Not through our pleas, but through your folding hands that work to mold your people.

There stands a call in this song & scripture, let our spirits “burn like fire” for God. As the ancient words of the Lord’s prayer tumble from our mouths, do our hearts burn with fire for our Lord of hosts? As we serve others, do we place our feet in the muck of details, or do we burn for our Lord?

Picture if you will, a guard standing and waiting. Fire by his side, waiting for the master. Standing and waiting for God’s signs and wonders. As God moves through the Lord’s people, are their fires ready? As in the word from the Book of Mark. “Be on guard, keep awake.”

WONDER

1. In this Advent season, how can we gather kindling and begin growing this fire within our spirits?
2. What do we need to do to stoke the fire inside as we celebrate the story of God’s first coming and for heaven to come down (again) and do what only God can do?

PRAY

Lord of hosts, as we lift our eyes to your presence and power, we pray to recognize and claim that we believe in your strength and glory. We await, not only to embrace all that you are, but to wake each day burning for the life that you have planned. To await a living God and say, “We can’t wait to see you do what you do.” Amen.

2nd WEEK OF ADVENT

Tom Curry

READ

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

A voice says, “Cry out!”
And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;

lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”

See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,

and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

LISTEN

Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord by Stephen Schwartz from the Musical “Godspell”

Youtube link

Spotify link

REFLECT

It is not uncommon during this time of year to see people displaying signs and bumper stickers displaying the phrase “Jesus is the Reason for the Season.” And we know that the reason behind this slogan is to remind people that Christmas, and the weeks afterwards, have been set aside by the church for thousands of years to commemorate Christ’s birth, which is the dawn of the new covenant God is making with his people. However, if the season of advent had a catchy slogan it would likely be something to the effect, “John the Baptist is the Reason for the Advent Season,” because John’s whole mission was to prepare, or make ready.

As we know, the birth of Christ is no small event. Because it was something so important, the birth of Christ was something that the Scriptures have prefigured for at least a thousand years before it happened. Jesus is God incarnate, who entered creation to, “To proclaim liberty to the captives and to bind up the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1-3) Jesus took on flesh to redeem all flesh from sin, suffering, and death. In other words, Christmas, or Christ being born into the world, is the beginning of one of the most important acts in salvation history. God became one of us so that we may be united to God.

The scripture readings for this second Sunday of Advent understand the importance of Christmas and remind us that to receive the long-awaited Christ, we must be prepared. And as I read the readings for this second Sunday of Advent, all I could think of was the opening song to the musical Godspell, where the character playing John the Baptist began the entire musical by singing, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” In fact, the Old Testament reading and the Gospel for today highlight the ministry of John the Baptist, which was dedicated to making straight the path for the Lord (Mark 1:3).

This second Sunday of Advent, our readings emphasize the importance of preparing for the arrival of Christ at Christmas, because it marks the beginning of the redemption of the world from sin, suffering, and death. John the Baptist’s ministry marked by his message of “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord,” is the reason for the season of Advent. Let us all use this time of the season of Advent to prepare ourselves for what it means to know that Christ is in our midst. So when we awaken on Christmas morning, we will have prepared a strait path for the Lord to enter our hearts and redeem us from sin, suffering, and the sting of death.

WONDER

1. What does John the Baptist's ministry teach me today?
2. What are some ways that I can "Prepare the Way of the Lord" during this Advent season?
3. How can I inspire others during this Advent season to prepare the way of the Lord for their lives?

PRAY

Lord God, Creator and Redeemer of all. We thank you for the gift of your son our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born into the world to save it from sin and suffering. I ask that you help me to be reminded what the gift of Christ's presence is for me and for all of creation. During this season of Advent help me to prepare myself to receive this gift of *Christ in Our Midst;* so that when I welcome the newborn Christ in my heart, I will be able to carry his presence and blessing to all I encounter. Amen.

3rd WEEK OF ADVENT

Susan Turlapati & Nicki Hunter

READ

John 1:6-8,19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

LISTEN

Children Go Where I Send Thee by Peter, Paul and Mary

Album: A Holiday Celebration with The New York Choral Society

Youtube Link

Spotify Link

REFLECT

Each season has its own heralds. The smell of suntan lotion, the sound of cicadas, and the light of longer days signal the arrival of summer. Pumpkin everything everywhere (regardless of weather) tells us that autumn is upon us, while spring is often announced with a burst of color and the clap of thunder. And as a child, I knew that the Advent & Christmas season had truly arrived when I started to hear Christmas music. The days after Thanksgiving were filled with sounds of Mannheim Steamroller, George Winston, and Bing Crosby. But my favorite was Peter, Paul, and Mary's Live Christmas Album. It is a true gem. And when I read this week's Gospel, I immediately thought of track 7, the trio's version of Children Go Where I Send Thee.

This beautiful, cumulative folk song is built on a commissioning structure (I'm gonna send thee…") that tells a story of the mission of sending. Through 10 call-and-response verses, the song asks and answers "How shall I send thee?" Our gospel reading challenges us to understand that John was sent by God with a specific, appointed mission. In essence, to lay the groundwork for Christ, to prepare, to witness, to do the work of Advent.

The song serves as a form of oral catechism— guiding children and listeners step-by-step through a biblical history of faith that ultimately always leads us to Christ. John 1:7 mirrors this exact pedagogical function: John's entire life's work was pointing others away from himself ("He was not the light") and toward the child born in Bethlehem.

As a child, Children Go Where I Send Thee was one of my favorite Christmas songs. As an adult, it's still a favorite, but I now understand it to be an Advent song, telling the story of those that, like John, were sent by God to prepare for Christ.

WONDER

Visio Divinia (https://www.st-barnabas.org/blog/visio-divina)

This link will take you to an image for this exercise:
https://library.nd.edu.au/sjbtour/baptismofjesus

After spending some time with the image, consider the following questions:

> What emotions does this image evoke in you?
> What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
> Is there an invitation for you in the image?
> Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write, draw or doodle them.

Offer your prayers to God now in a time of silence.

PRAY

Stir up, O Lord,

The wills of your faithful people

To be alert to your calling, and awake to your Advent

That we may hear the voice in the wilderness, and prepare our hearts for the coming of your Son.

Allow the anticipation of this season, to create in us a renewed fervour to repent, and 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'

Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

The Collect for John the Baptist

Almighty God, who called your servant John the Baptist to go before your Son our Lord both in life and death; grant that we who remember his witness may with boldness speak your truth and in humility hear it when it is spoken to us, through Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns one God forever and ever. Amen.

4th WEEK OF ADVENT

Daniel Rentfro

READ

Luke 1:26-30

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

LISTEN

Gabriel's Message by Sting

Album: Very Special Christmas Album

Youtube Link

Spotify Link

REFLECT

N. T. Wright and Samuel Wells, two of our finest Anglican theologians, analogize the Christian story to a great five - act drama, beginning with creation, running through the chronicles of the Old and New Testament, continuing with the history of the Church, and culminating in the arrival of the Kingdom. In Luke Chapter 1, the curtain rises on the center of that drama, the story of Jesus.

Luke's is the most cinematic of the four gospels. Many scenes found only in Luke would make wonderful set pieces in a stage play or film: Gabriel's foretelling the birth of John the Baptist, the angels announcing the Messiah's birth to the shepherds, Simeon and Anna recognizing baby Jesus as their savior, the adolescent Jesus in the temple, the encounter with Zacchaeus sitting in a tree, the road to Emmaus.

The annunciation to Mary by the angel Gabriel tops the list. Many people, including Pope Francis, have called this the turning point of human history. If I were filming this scene, my soundtrack would be the (Anglicized) Basque folk hymn (# 265) "Gabriel's Message:" not a choral rendition, but rather Sting's version from the first *Very Special Christmas* album.[1] The whole song has an air of mystery about it. But listen to the percussion. The first verse has a drum pitter-pattering at four beats a second or more in the background. Angel wings flapping? Perhaps. Mary's racing heart? More likely. She is, after all, hearing a creature with eyes of fire tell her that she's about to give birth to the Messiah.

Then listen to the percussion at the end. Tap tap **BAM**, tap tap **BAM**. What in heaven's name is that? Gabriel banging his staff, setting the seal on his message? A sound effect or stage direction, the door slamming behind Gabriel as he leaves, announcing the end of the old age and commencement of the new? Or is it the sound of a hammer driving nails into a cross, reminding us of the next great crux of human history – "the day the revolution began" as Bishop Wright titled his book on the crucifixion? Or even Jesus banging on the stone from inside the tomb, commanding the stone to roll away so that He can re-enter the land of the living?

I say that drumbeat carries all of that. This is the true Good News of Christmas. Not just that a child is born unto us, but that the child will endure all the evil that the world can throw at it and abide with us forever in love, a light for an all-too-often dark world. And all this depended on a young virgin saying "yes." No wonder her heart raced.

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[1] Note: Sting performs "Gabriel's Message" on his video *A Winter's Night*, filmed in Durham Cathedral. The video is lovely and worth a look this Christmas season, but the arrangement of "Gabriel's Message" is different and doesn't have the effect described here.

WONDER

1. I wonder what it feels like to suddenly know that your life is about to change, forever.
2. Think about a time when you got wonderful news that was nevertheless a bit scary.
3. According to Bishop Wright and Rev. Wells, all of us are players in the Christian drama, trying to figure out what our role is. Reflect on what your part might be. Is it a speaking, or a silent role? Or part of the crew?

PRAY

Almighty God, who has a part waiting for each of us, You sent your angel Gabriel to call on a young, unmarried woman to bring your Son our savior into the world. Let your Holy Spirit come upon us also, so that when You call on us to play our role in your great drama, we may answer, “Hear I am, the servant of the Lord.” And may your Son reign in our hearts forever. Amen.