



Come

THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2016

WHAT ADVENT IS ABOUT

Advent, from the Latin *Adventus*, (which, in turn, is from the Greek παρουσία) means “coming,” and the Greek word is especially used to refer to Christ’s second coming. For 1,500 years, the Church has observed a season of preparation before the celebration of Jesus’ birth, giving context to the Messiah’s coming by remembering Israel’s centuries of waiting and longing. In the Western Church, the season of Advent looks back to Christ’s first coming but also looks forward to his triumphant return; so we too are longing and eagerly waiting, for “Behold, I am coming quickly.”

Waiting is difficult—the disciples could not wait even one hour for our Lord—but God sustains us through his word (by the Holy Spirit) and through the testimony of his saints. The testimonies in this booklet are organized under the parable of the ten virgins. (Read Matthew 25:1-13.) Where does one get the necessary oil? Typical of the parables, Jesus doesn’t explicitly say. This Advent, we will explore four ways to “keep your lamps trimmed and burning,” as this Spiritual puts it:

Keep your lamps trimmed and burning, (3x) the time is drawing nigh.

Children don’t get weary (3x) till your work is done. Keep your lamps...

Christian journey soon be over; (3x) the time is drawing nigh. Keep your lamps...

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

The materials in this booklet are divided into a repeated weekly pattern, with an appendix allowing for continued use through the twelve days of Christmas.

Each week begins with a Sunday writing by one of our ministers, expanding on that day’s sermon theme and suggesting a broader application to our lives, to keep our lamps trimmed and burning. Each Sunday ends with an invitation to pray one of the Psalms.

The remaining six days of each week offer:

- 1) Scriptures to **read** from the Old and New Testaments, exploring the rich promises of God. Sit in wonder before the word, delight in his glory, and **pray** in thanksgiving for his love.
- 2) Practical helps and testimonies from individuals in our church, showing how the theme of the week can translate into our lives. **Pray** that God would give me oil in my lamp, blessing us by these acts of love and obedience.
- 3) **To do:** for families with young children, there is a daily suggested activity.

Unless otherwise specified, all scripture comes from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®)

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Week One

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Sunday

JULIAN

How are we to prepare ourselves for Jesus' return? As God's people, believers are blessed to be a blessing. Put differently, all baptized believers are to engage in active witness to Christ, whether at home or overseas, so that non-believers can receive God's blessings in Christ. This is the God-given means to fulfill his promise to Abraham that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). Every ethnic group on earth will therefore be blessed as Abraham was, but not in some vague sense, rather as they identify themselves with Abraham's God and Abraham's people: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

The irony is that the more we give away this blessing, the more we ourselves are blessed. Paul writes "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ" (Philemon 6). Active personal evangelism, then, leads to a better grasp of the gospel. Conversely, apathy or passivity can only lead to spiritual inertia and to a decreased understanding of the gospel. Remember it was the foolish virgins' laziness that led to their lack of preparation for the bridegroom's arrival.

The more we give away this blessing, the more we function as God designed us to function. Paul describes the "priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16). Active witnessing to Jesus, therefore, is inextricably linked to our new identity in Christ. This spiritual duty applies to all baptized believers and is intended as a privilege rather than as a burden.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive us for keeping the blessings of salvation to ourselves. Refresh our hearts this Advent season with a sensitivity to our coworkers, neighbors, and relatives so that we can witness in word and deed to the gospel. Amen.

THIS SUNDAY'S PSALM: 72

Monday

2 SAMUEL 7:1-11, 16 NIV

¹ After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.” ³ Nathan replied to the king, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.”

⁴ But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:

⁵ “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?’ ⁶ I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. ⁷ Whenever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’”

PAULA HANNA BIBLE TRANSLATOR, THAILAND

“There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.” (Rev. 7:9) Each day, as I struggle with how one can translate scripture accurately into languages with very different structures from Greek or English, I remember the goal of bible translation: that everyone would be able to worship and understand God in his or her own language. This goal comes alive to me when we worship each Sunday with our Thai friends. Worshipping with this international community gives me a picture of heaven and helps me keep the goal in mind.

To Do

If you haven't already done so, make an advent wreath for your dinner table and light the first candle when you eat together. Older children can light the candle(s) nightly throughout the season; younger children can help snuff them out. Explain the symbolism and tradition behind this practice; great resource at: <http://www.kencollins.com/answers/question-10.htm>

Tuesday

ISAIAH 61 (NIV)

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. ⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. ⁵ Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. ⁶ And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God.

JOANNA PARADA YOUTH AND PRISON MINISTRY, SOUTH AFRICA

Being constantly surrounded by all the physical and spiritual needs in South Africa heightens my awareness of my own need for a Savior, and motivates me to share in the work of the gospel. And miraculously, by loving the people around me, I am not drained. Rather, I am rejuvenated as I listen to them and tell them about a God who longs to be in relationship with them. What irony that God delights in using simple people like you and me to bless the nations!

To Do

If your family puts up a nativity scene as you decorate for the season, consider keeping a small basket of straw nearby. When a family member ‘catches’ another family member acting generously toward another, he or she gets to put a piece of straw in the crèche to prepare a bed for Jesus. “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

⁷ Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.

⁸ “For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹ Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.”

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

Wednesday

LUKE 3:1-18

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

[NAMES OMITTED IN WEB VERSION]

In our work among unreached cousins along the Silk Road, it feels more like we’re breaking up concrete than planting seeds. We’ve spent years learning the language, and yet each time Jesus enters the conversation, their response is so unaffected that we might as well be speaking Greek. Why does God not glorify himself? Yet, did it not feel exactly this way for the generations who longed for the consolation of Israel? Worshipping and studying God’s word with local believers (who themselves are the fruit of centuries of faithful witness) reminds us that God will glorify himself among these cousins.

To Do

Go out into your neighborhood with a stack of invitation postcards for the Dec. 11 Lessons and Carols service, and invite your neighbors to hear the story of Jesus’ birth.

Thursday

MARK 13:24-37

²⁴ “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And 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.

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³² “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the door-keeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

BILL O’DONNELL BUSINESS AS MISSION, CZECH REPUBLIC

The police state that existed in our country for forty years affected relationships very deeply, even at the level of parents and children. Parents could not share openly with their children, for fear of the children saying something unknowingly that would put the parents in prison. That has had a profound effect on people’s friendships and relationships to this day. Building relationships outside the family takes years, and when there is a breakthrough, you know the person really trusts you. I’ve learned that my students remember everything I said even eight or more years ago, and being consistent with my life, habits, and profession of faith as a Christian is scrutinized every day. So when one of my students—after about seven years of building our relationship—wanted to talk to me about deeper life issues, and especially to know what the Bible says about these things, it was an exciting moment. What a privilege it is to be part of God’s work!

To Do

Isaiah 11 says “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” Introduce your children to the genealogy of Jesus using the tradition of a Jesse Tree, an activity which can continue throughout Advent with a daily story from Scripture along with the hanging of a small ornament to represent each Biblical character. www.rca.org/jesstree click on “read more” below “Making a Jesse Tree.”

Friday

ROMANS 15:4–13

⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.”

¹⁰ And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

¹¹ And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.”

¹² And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

WOOJIN AND MEESOOK L. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE LEARNING, CENTRAL ASIA

There is no greater joy for God than to see his people return to him, and there is no better way to partake of that joy than to be witnesses of the Father's amazing redemptive work. We start each day with a deep desire to see God worshipped in our lives and in the lives of those he brings us to. We call upon the name of the Lord Jesus to break down the strongholds, and we intentionally and humbly learn to be with them. Helping them with English, babysitting, or simply drinking tea together, we eagerly and expectantly anticipate the Father's revelation of his glory in their lives, making our joy full. (John 15)

To Do

Download the Lessons and Carols booklet from: www.parkstreet.org/lessonsandcarols. Show your children “Once in Royal David's City,” a hymn written just for kids! Sing it together (if you don't have a piano, you can sing along with a YouTube recording).

Saturday

2 PETER 3:8–15a

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and

godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. ¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him ...

[NAMES OMITTED IN WEB VERSION]

With the completion of a Bible translation project, I've experienced a range of emotions: great joy, knowing that people finally have access to God's word in their language, but also a sense of grief, loss and fears about my future. When I wonder if I should continue this work, I am encouraged by the power of God's word to transform lives and to give hope. The Lord's voice encourages me to continue on. I recently heard of a Central Asian believer in the USA who received a copy of the published Bible and was unable to put it down for three days: he was so thrilled to have it in hand and to read it. This inspires me to keep serving the Lord, to put my hope in him when I feel weak and afraid.

To Do

From the Lessons and Carols booklet, read the first lesson with your children, telling them about Adam's fall. Point out that a child will be reading this at the service on Dec. 11!

Week Two

HE BUILT AN ALTAR THERE

Sunday

KRIS PERKINS ASSOCIATE MINISTER OF FAMILIES AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Twenty-eight verses from the beginning of scripture God bestows the first blessing upon mankind. “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28) The command was in-and-of-itself a blessing, for imbued in this directive was the pleasure of exercising our calling to be image-bearers of the LORD. The previous verses highlighted the fruitfulness of God’s creative work. The empty void of the cosmos was now richly filled and brimming with life, the chaotic darkness subdued by the infusive presence of the God of light. Now in verse 28, we are given the task to continue and extend this great work of birthing life, vanquishing darkness, and filling the world with goodness.

Surely procreation is in mind in this directive, but we sorely underestimate the extent of this mandate if we were to stop there. Leveraging all contexts we are to deploy our creative power to multiply, fill, and subdue. Whatever we do and wherever we are, we are to create in the image of God so that the result of our volition, our spoken word, and the work of our hands might lead to the Genesis 1 declaration, “It is good,” not for our own glory, but for his. Our workplace is a primary example of such an extended context. Whether we are flipping burgers for McDonald’s or

flipping real estate for venture capitalists we are to be fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue based on kingdom creation principles. This is true of our work proper as well as the way in which we winsomely interact with our co-workers inviting them to participate in the expanding kingdom grounded in a Christ-centered life.

It is not surprising that John frames his birth narrative of Jesus in John 1 not in the events which unfolded with angels, shepherds, and Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, but in the cosmic creation narrative of Genesis 1. Jesus was all about new creation, and new birth. His primary mission was to fill and subdue, to vanquish darkness and bring about life. His primary message throughout the gospel was, “The kingdom of God has come.” Places where the kingdom of God had not been, the kingdom had now come.

Such a mission and message belongs to us now at home, in school, at work, in our worship, on the streets of Boston, in the words we speak, in the actions we take. Wherever we are, whatever we do we are to create, multiply, fill, and subdue that the kingdom of God, the new creation in which Christ is bringing about would expand until he comes again to finish the work of making all things good and new.

THIS SUNDAY’S PSALM: 146

Monday

ISAIAH 2:1-5

¹ The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,

³ and many peoples shall come, and say:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

ANDREW RENNEKAMP

Biological research can be a dark place. It can be dark because of the vast, uncharted territory that we just don't understand yet. It can be dark because of—paradoxically—a prevailing overreliance on visual observation in the present. For many, it's a place without God because he can't be found using the venerated instruments of science. For a Christian, it can be an uncomfortable place, governed and occupied by people who don't worship God. This is one reason why I'm a biologist. Like Abraham, I have been called to live in a land that is not my own (Genesis 12:1,4-6). Like Abraham, I have been called to build/grow things and sacrifice them along the way (v.7-8). Like Abraham, I have encountered hardship and detours (v.10), and have made mistakes along the way (v.11-16). Yet all territory is God's, and at times, for no apparent reasons, he blesses me (and those around me) in ways I never imagined (v.2-3), turning my mistakes to my benefit in the end (v.17-20).

To Do

Explore the history behind the character of Santa Claus by reading a book about St. Nicholas with your children. Learn about his acts of generosity, and how children in many countries observe St. Nicholas Day tomorrow, Dec. 6. <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/celebrate-at-home/>

Tuesday

ISAIAH 40:1-11 RSV

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries:
“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ 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.

⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

⁶ A voice says, “Cry!”
And I said, “What shall I cry?”
All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

HILLARY TOPAZIAN

My day takes place in academia through epidemiology and global health. As one of few Christians among my peers, identifying my work as a vocation from God involves hearing out my colleagues' perspectives on tough moral health and human rights issues that I don't always support. Willingness to listen and engage in conversation, without judgment, helps to reconstruct the image of a hypocritical Evangelical Christian most people hold in their minds. My obligation is not to convert everyone to my way of thinking, but to become a channel for God's love to flow through me in the everyday situations where I live my earthly life.

To Do

Today is St. Nicholas Day. Following the example of St. Nicholas' generosity, consider visiting a local food bank as a family to make a donation, or choose another way of giving. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...”

Wednesday

JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²² So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us.

What do you say about yourself?” ²³ 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.”

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

JEFF OSBORNE EARLY INTERVENTION SPECIALIST

Luke 19:45-48 —I recently came to see this passage in a whole new way, when I noticed how verse 47 tells us that “every day” after Jesus threw out the moneychangers, he continued to teach in the temple courts. For the final week of his life, Jesus actually took over the temple, restoring its original intent to connect people to God.

Before going into a family’s home, I always pray that God would use me in some way, but one particular day I felt the need more keenly. At the end of a visit, one member of this family asked about my weekend plans. I mentioned a worship event, and she began asking me questions about my faith and Jesus. She even recalled a movie about Jesus she had seen as a child, asking, “Didn’t they do something to his body?” while pointing to her arm. As I answered her questions, I felt like a cross-cultural missionary explaining the Christian message to someone who had never fully heard it before. In the remaining time I worked with this family, I continued to pray that they would be set free from the false religion they followed and, like the temple in Jerusalem, be restored to their original purpose of worshipping the true God.

To Do

From the Lessons and Carols booklet, read your children the Third Lesson, and talk with them about the promises of God for our salvation. Talk about kept and broken promises in your family and compare/contrast that with God’s faithfulness.

Thursday

LUKE 1:67-79 RSV

⁶⁷ And [John the Baptist’s] father Zechari’ah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has visited and redeemed his people,

⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us

in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies,

and from the hand of all who hate us;

⁷² to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,

and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath which he swore to our father Abraham,

⁷⁴ to grant us

that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people

in the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ through the tender mercy of our God,

when the day shall dawn upon us from on high

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

SIMON FOWLER LEARNING TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST

From the day God woke me up at age 22, he has taught me to love and marvel at the way of people and things that he has made— and seeks to redeem. In all things I see him (Gen 1:27, Rom 1:20, Rom 8:28, Gal. 6:9): “Wow! How did you do that?!” “Yeh sorry, that was my fault” “Look what I made!” “This is so tedious I could chew my arm”, “Dude, threatening me isn’t going to get the job done faster!” “You look upset, what’s going on?” —To love my colleagues and do good work with them is a great privilege. May I be found faithful.

To Do

From the Lessons and Carols booklet, read your children the Fifth Lesson, and marvel in Mary’s obedience. Find and listen to a musical setting of the “Magnificat,” Mary’s song, hundreds of which can be found in any musical style from chant to rock.

Friday

1 THESS. 3:9-13

⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make

you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

JOEL STANTON, SENIOR RESEARCH MANAGER/CONSULTANT

“By their fruit you will know them” (Matt. 7:16-20). In my office, where we work with financial data, accuracy is key. I try to model helpfulness, accuracy, and love in Jesus’ name. My colleagues have also seen my willingness to travel to challenging places in the world – the Middle East and Africa – to serve others, and they are curious to know why. This leads to deeper conversations about faith. May God use it all to his glory!

To Do

From the Lessons and Carols booklet, read your children the Eighth lesson, noting the story’s intrigue. It’s an adventure thriller! Using your family’s preferred translation, assign roles and read it as a play!

Saturday

ROMANS 13:11-14

¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and

drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

MELISSA WILLIAMSON ARTS ADMINISTRATOR AND MUSICIAN

At Missions Emphasis Week, we were reminded that, as Christians, we are missionaries wherever we go, and we are called to reach those who do not yet know Jesus. The Holy Spirit dwells in us, and those around us notice something different about us – even if they don’t know we are Christians. By using the gifts God has given me in the workplace, I have been able to share parts of my faith journey with my colleagues. When I have these opportunities, I am refreshed, sometimes challenged, but always reminded of the importance of sharing God’s love, peace and joy.

To Do

Tomorrow: attend the service of Nine Lessons and Carols with your whole family. Make sure kids who can read have a service booklet, and help everyone know when to stand and sit.

Week Three

BLESSED BY THE SCRIPTURES

Sunday

WALTER KIM LEAD MINISTER

The figure of Melchizedek arises unforeseen and unannounced in Genesis (14:18-20). With dignity and power he strides into the unfolding narrative of God's redemption as priest of God Most High and king of Salem to bless Abram at the successful conclusion of a battle. His simple but symbolic meal of bread and wine accompanies a blessing over the patriarch: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Abram responds by giving a tithe in recognition of Melchizedek's high position, and more importantly, in response to glory being given to God.

Then this priest-king disappears from the life of Abram and the pages of Genesis. But a lasting impression has been made. While Melchizedek remains shrouded in mystery, this meeting proves to have enduring theological significance that reaches us even today during Advent. Melchizedek's blessing of Abram foreshadows the ultimate Savior and the ulti-

mate blessing of salvation (cf. Heb 7:2). As suggested by his name, which means 'king of righteousness', his brief appearance raises expectations for One who would rule rightly and who would make things right. Moreover, since Salem means 'peace', his rule resonates with the Advent longing for a kingdom of "peace on earth."

It is no wonder that Melchizedek reappears in Ps 110 as a template to shape our expectations of Israel's true Messiah: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek'" (110:4). Here in a song of worship, the psalmist expresses the deepest longing of God's people for the prophet who fulfills the covenant; the king who rules in righteousness; the priest who mediates peace with God. The mystery of Melchizedek resolved in the Advent of our Messiah.

THIS SUNDAY'S PSALM: 110

Monday

JEREMIAH 33:14–16 NIV

¹⁴ “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

¹⁵ “In those days and at that time

I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;

he will do what is just and right in the land.

¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it will be called:

The Lord Our Righteous Savior.”

FROM JEFF SCHULIGER MINISTER TO SMALL GROUPS AND YOUNG ADULTS

In praying the psalms, I often come across the directives, “Wait for the Lord” and “Put your hope in God.” Though these certainly were relevant instructions to the people of God from a long time ago—I realize how much more they are imperatives for me today. The act of opening the Bible and opening myself up to what God wants to say to me each day is an act of “putting my hope in God” and reminds me to “wait for the Lord” before rushing headlong into the day’s activities.

To Do

Have the oldest child choose from the list of any-day activities on page 37.

Tuesday

ISAIAH 7:10–17 NIV

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” ¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a

son, and will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. ¹⁶ But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.”

XINDI SONG CAFÉ SMALL GROUP MEMBER

One night a week, for the past three years, I have experienced moments of seeing God’s will, worship, self-reflection, and hopefulness in life. Three things are necessary for this; four puts it over the top: Bibles, Christians, chairs, and delicious snacks! Our small group meets every Tuesday night, snow or shine, to study and discuss passages of Scripture. These sisters and brothers have listened and spoken and rejoiced and prayed with me through:

getting pushed out of a job, feeling cut off from my first church family, battling depression, six months of unemployment, life with new roommates, my first years as a teacher, a family hospital emergency, impatience and happiness in dating, a new job working with people of a different faith...

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, WE have already come. Dear church body: seek life, and read the Bible, together: www.parkstreet.org/find-small-group

To Do

Have the second-oldest child choose from the list of any-day activities on page 37.

Wednesday

ISAIAH 11:1-10 ESV

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,

and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

² And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

MICHAEL ROLAND SMALL GROUP COORDINATOR

The more I study the Scriptures, the more I appreciate God's story and his enduring promises. His consistent forgiveness and the redeeming of his people throughout history reminds me that God will never leave us nor forsake us. The God who authored this story is the same God who created the earth, sacrificed himself on the cross and lives in us by the Holy Spirit. By studying the Scriptures I learn about his nature and understand his promises more clearly, so I can prepare myself for Christ's return and patiently await the joyful coming of the Lord!

To Do

Choose an any-day activity from page 37.

Thursday

ISAIAH 64:1-9 NIV

¹ Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

² As when fire sets twigs ablaze

and causes water to boil,

come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!

³ For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,

you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

⁴ Since ancient times no one has heard,

no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any God besides you,

who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

⁵ You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.

But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry.

How then can we be saved?

⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;

we all shrivel up like a leaf,

and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

⁷ No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you;

for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to [b] our sins.

⁸ Yet you, Lord, are our Father.

We are the clay, you are the potter;

we are all the work of your hand.

⁹ Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord; do not remember our sins forever.

Oh, look on us, we pray,

for we are all your people.

SCOTT ARMBRUST CAFÉ SMALL GROUP LEADER

As I read the Scriptures, I am frequently reminded of God's steadfast love for his people. No matter how many times God's people hurt or frustrated Him, God continued to love his people. This reminder empowers me to offer the same steadfast love to my neighbors, enemies, and Christian brothers and sisters – even in times when I don't want to.

To Do

Choose an any-day activity from page 37.

Friday

1 COR. 1:3–9 NIV

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

MELISSA WILLIAMSON CAFÉ LEADER

Reading a Proverb every day has helped me be consistent in my Scripture reading. Whatever day of the month it is, that is the Proverb I will read. It is a short piece of Scripture, packed with power and wisdom. I typically read it on my way to work; that way I am in the right mindset when I arrive in the workplace. Sharing your Bible reading goals with a friend, or with your small group, will help provide additional accountability for deepening your relationship with God through Scripture

To Do

Choose an any-day activity from page 37.

JAMES 5:7–11 RSV

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. ⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors.

¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

¹¹ Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Saturday

2 PETER 1:12–21 NIV

¹² So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This

is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things.

²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

JAMIE BROWN CAFÉ WORSHIP LEADER

When I hear the word “advent,” I often think of sermons about waiting on the Lord, just as Israel was waiting for the Messiah. But taking it one step further, when I read the Gospels, I also see people who were actively preparing their hearts for Jesus to be born, like Anna and Simeon who prayed daily for the restoration of Israel. They weren’t passively waiting for Emmanuel to appear and change their lives. With whatever you are waiting for, I challenge you to be active doers, not passive waiters. Don’t confuse waiting with passivity.

To Do

Choose an any-day activity from page 37.

Week Four

LOVE FOR THE LEAST OF THESE

Sunday

TONI KIM MINISTER OF MEMBERSHIP

Many of us are looking forward to a sumptuous Christmas feast, perhaps with a ham or turkey and traditional sides of cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes. Food sustains us, and ideally, it brings pleasure as we savor the flavors and the joy of sharing it with others.

“My food,” said Jesus to his disciples, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). Our sustenance comes through doing God’s will and work. We often treat service as draining, one more neglected thing on our to-do list that leaves us feeling guilty. What would it look like for us to understand service as life-sustaining? To know that doing God’s will feeds both us and the people we serve?

Jesus knew his Father’s will, as he read from the scroll of Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and

recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). The gospel is more than our personal salvation and peace of mind; Christianity is not only about satisfying our desires with good things, but primarily about spreading the good news of the kingdom, especially to “the least of these” (cf. Matt 25:40). When we do the will of him who sent us, we find that there is much cause for celebration, as we share the banquet that the master has prepared for all of us.

As we prepare for our Lord’s return, feast on doing the will of him who sent you and on finishing his work. Celebrate the coming of our Lord by expanding his banquet table to include those who have been marginalized by society but are loved by the living God.

THIS SUNDAY’S PSALM: 124

Monday

ISAIAH 35: 1-10 RSV

¹ The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.
³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
“Be strong, fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”
⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a hart,
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

SARAH STACY PARK STREET REFUGEE MINISTRY

Jesus, himself once a refugee, reminds us that as his disciples, we are called to be a light in a dark broken world. Throughout my work with Park Street’s Refugee Ministry, I have heard firsthand accounts of God’s people having to flee war and destruction in their homelands, only to be told once they arrive here in America that they are unwelcome, not trusted, and that there is not a place for them in our society. This Advent, I encourage you not to turn away from the most vulnerable population in today’s world, but rather to show compassion and humanity to everyone here by welcoming them as neighbors.

To Do

Choose an any-day activity from page 37.

Tuesday

ZEPHANIAH 3:14-20

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgments against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil.
¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
“Fear not, O Zion;
let not your hands grow weak.
¹⁷ The Lord your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.

¹⁸ I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,
so that you will no longer suffer reproach.
¹⁹ Behold, at that time I will deal
with all your oppressors.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
²⁰ At that time I will bring you in,
at the time when I gather you together;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes,” says the Lord.

WILL JAMARA LEADER OF THURSDAY NIGHT OUTREACH

Thursday Night Outreach (TNO) ministers to individuals experiencing homelessness on Boston Common each week. We hang out with new and old friends who come to chat, and enjoy a hot meal, and spend the last half hour of the evening singing and listening to a devotional. One thing I particularly appreciate is that we as a group incorporate a collaboration where individuals currently experiencing homelessness serve alongside us. Community and contribution intrinsically provide spiritual and social health to all who participate. Working together helps all of us feel the value of being created in God’s image.

To Do

Choose an any-day activity from page 37.

Wednesday

LUKE 1:39-55 RSV

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechari'ah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." ⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, ⁵² he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

ABIOLA LANIYONU SOUTH AFRICA SHORT-TERM MISSIONARY

I didn't realize how weak my working understanding of the Holy Spirit was until I saw him act in power in South Africa. Until then, he was the indefinite member of the Trinity, a vague Force, out of focus and out of reach. But while serving in a South African prison, I witnessed the Spirit achieve lasting transformational change in the lives of our offenders, far beyond our ability to accomplish. Even as I was humbled by our inability to meet the needs of those we had come to serve, I was awed by God's ability and desire to redeem and restore all his people, even by means of broken vessels like us.

To Do

Choose an any-day activity from page 37.

Thursday

MATTHEW 11:2-11 NIV

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

⁴ Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

⁷ As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into

the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

GEORGE DUNCAN PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF EAGLE'S NEST LEARNING CENTER

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he addresses him as "my true son in the faith." While fellowshiping with some of my sons in the faith from my after school program, one of them, Jeremiah, said something that really spoke to the heart of discipleship. He said, "Mr. Duncan, when I finish college, I want to come back and be the director of Eagle's Nest to carry on the vision of touching lives."

To Do

Download the Christmas Eve bulletin PDF at: www.parkstreet.org/christmaseve Make sure everyone in the family knows all the carols and hymns that will be sung at the service you plan to attend!

Friday

REVELATION 3:7-12 NIV

⁷ “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep

you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

CHRIS SHERWOOD PARK STREET CHURCH ASSISTANT MINISTER

Five of the virgins in Matt. 25 ran out of oil. When the emergency came, they were not prepared. One of the most intense aspects of ministry is walking with members as an illness slowly takes their lives. It's pain and relief, hope and discouragement, and finally helplessness and loss. The saints who consistently nurtured their faith through prayer and good teaching inspire us in the ultimate crisis by the way they clearly show that they have all the oil they need. The concrete reality of their hope in Christ empowers them to face life's most definitive catastrophe with a calm confidence built upon authentic faith.

To Do

Make sure you have mittens ready to place on the mitten tree at tomorrow's 3pm service (or give them to a friend who is attending that particular service)

Saturday

LUKE 2:1-7

² In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. ² This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

MATTHEW 2:13b-15

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

LESLIE BODKIN DIRECTOR OF ENABLE BOSTON DISABILITY MINISTRY

Having spent much of my life reaching out to children with disabilities and their families, I am awed at God's presence in each situation. Every person is a reflection of God's image; this is no less true for those with disabilities. Sometimes people with disabilities are ignored or minimized; I see this as a prompt from the Holy Spirit to reach out, to learn, and to love as Jesus loved. Then we find that we are not different at all: no matter our level of ability, we are in need of grace and a Savior. During Advent, consider how you can reach out to people with disabilities and reflect the light of Jesus.

To Do

Attend one of our three Christmas Eve services and worship the King of kings as a family. Enjoy a delicious dinner and allow the oldest child to light the Christ candle in your advent wreath. Explain how, in Jewish culture, the day begins at sundown, so this “Eve” business simply means the “evening” of Christmas – which precedes the morning of Christmas. If you have a nativity scene, right before bedtime tonight is a great time to put baby Jesus in the manger.

Sunday

CHRISTMAS DAY

To Do

Eat a delicious Christmas Breakfast. Then join us for Christmas Day worship at Park Street Church at 11:00 AM.

Any-Day Activities

Read your children John 1:1–14, explaining to them the wonder of the incarnation. Work on memorizing an age-appropriate portion of this passage for the remainder of Advent, in your family’s preferred translation.

Have a baking day, and make cookies for friends and neighbors.

Go for a ‘pajama drive’ before bed to look at the Christmas lights in your neighborhood. “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Cozy up by the fire with hot chocolate and watch the Christmas portion of Handel’s Messiah (about 50 minutes) as a family. Your kids may enjoy seeing that many of the choir members in this performance are their own age! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTMJVvld9ok>

Help your children create homemade gifts for family members.

Try a new holiday recipe and let your kids decide whether it should become a tradition in your family. Some suggestions: gingerbread pancakes, braided cardamom bread, or cranberry coffee cake. Ask a friend—or your next-door neighbor—for his or her favorite recipe in this season.

Get together with some friends and neighbors and go Christmas caroling—it’s fun no matter your musical acuity! Free online resources are countless—from simple sets of lyrics to this beautiful and exhaustive collection complete with 4-part harmony: <http://acollectionofchristmascarols.com/pdfs/ccc.pdf> While you’re out, invite your neighbors to join you for church on Christmas Eve.

If your children play an instrument or you enjoy singing as a family, find a nearby assisted living facility or nursing home and go share the joy of Christmas music with residents.

Attend a local Christmas concert or a performance of *The Nutcracker*.

If you have Christmas pillows or blankets, get them out and initiate the season with a cozy family reading night. A few suggestions for a variety of ages: *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey*, (Wojciechowski); *The Gift of The Magi* (O. Henry); *The Story of Holly & Ivy* (Godden); *The Twenty-Four Days Before Christmas* (L’Engle); *Room for a Little One* (Waddell).

Christmastide

SUGGESTED READINGS

CHRISTMAS DAY Luke 2:8–20, John 1:1–14

2 Matthew 1 (Sing Good King Wenceslas)

3 Psalm 148

4 Matthew 2:13–23 (Holy Innocents)

5 Galatians 4:1–7

6 Psalm 96

7 Hebrews 1

8 Luke 2:15–21 (Holy Name)

9 Psalm 97

10 Rev. 21: 1–7; John 8: 12–19

11 Psalm 98

12 1 Samuel 2:18–20, 26; Luke 2:41–52

EPIPHANY Matthew 2:1–12; Isaiah 60:1–6; Ephesians 3:1–12



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