

Prepare

ADVENT DEVOTION – WEEK 2 | DECEMBER 10-16, 2017

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Preparation this time of year brings to mind all manner of activities: cooking, cleaning, decorating, gift shopping, present wrapping, card writing. Annual parties that require getting dressed up, bringing food, recalling co-worker's spouse's names. Advent gets little airtime in our culture of Christmas that hits the shelves earlier and earlier each year. "Get ready for Christmas!" the advertisers scream. But liturgically, the message of preparation counters those consumerist claims. Christians *prepare* for the coming of Jesus Christ and welcoming the Messiah involves not buying and busyness, but culling and contemplation. Advent preparation calls for serious self-reflection, honesty and resultant change.

We ask ourselves what blocks the path for Christ to come into our homes and hearts, what behaviors need to stop and what actions need to start so that we can heed the angels' birth announcement and immediately go and worship Emmanuel.

As we *prepare* for parties, houseguests and holiday cheer, how are we making ready for the coming of the Messiah? John the Baptist's cries of "Repent!" reverberate through the ages and the baptized then and now must heed his command. 'Tis the season to turn, do a 180, and remember our baptism, remember the one that named us, claimed us, cleansed us and enlisted us into the work of the Kingdom. Preparing to meet both infant Jesus and the returning, victorious Christ means dying daily to self and growing in holiness, putting aside the sin that clings so closely and praying, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"

DAILY PRAYERS AND PRACTICES

Monday

SCRIPTURE READING: ISAIAH 40:1-11

Today be mindful of what really matters, what lasts and what fades over time. If you find yourself anxious, fretful or overwhelmed, return to Isaiah 40:11 and trust the promise that the Lord our God feeds us like a shepherd and gathers the lambs and carries them, and you.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Gracious and loving God, we hear your word of comfort and care, your promise to feed and carry us, and yet we are often worried, stressed and uncertain that all will be well. Quiet in us any voice but your own so that we will be prepared to hear your reassurance that we are yours and you will not let us go.

Tuesday

SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 3:1-17

Today be open to hearing John the Baptist's words of costly grace. Imagine you are gathered by the side of the river with the wild array of people who've been drawn to John's voice. How does John respond when you ask, "What should we do?"

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Often, God, when we come to you in prayer we want to tell you what we would have you do. If we are honest we pray, "Not your will but mine, Lord." We ask instead today, "What should we do?" and we eagerly listen for your direction. Help us to hear and heed your voice, even if it requires great change from us. Amen.

Wednesday

SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 26:6-13

Today offer to Jesus your very best. Make every act, every word, every thought, every exchange an offering to the Messiah. Like the woman with the alabaster jar, trust that what you offer in love is welcomed and remembered by Jesus Christ.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Lord Jesus, you never failed to accept those who came seeking you. You welcomed their touch, their cries, their questions. Accept us this day, allow us to pour ourselves out to you, the One who poured himself out for our sake. Help us to hold nothing back from you so that we will be prepared to follow you, from Bethlehem to Galilee and even to Jerusalem. Amen.

Thursday

SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 22:7-13

Today as you prepare meals for yourself or others, remember the meal that Jesus' disciples prepared for him. Remember the meal he instituted in the upper room, the Lord's Supper, and be mindful of welcoming others to your tables, just as Jesus welcomes you to his.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Eating, drinking, meals with tax collectors and at the home of a Pharisee, expansive hillside picnics and an intimate Passover with closest friends, Lord, you long to sit at table with us. No matter where we break bread this day, what is served or who is with us, may we be prepared to see you and give thanks for your sustaining presence. Amen.

Friday

SCRIPTURE READING: JOHN 14:1-7

Today, no matter where you go, imagine that Jesus has gone ahead of you and made ready for your arrival. Know that you are welcomed, valued, included and loved. Consider doing something that shows someone else that you have been eagerly expecting their arrival.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Belonging, having a place to call home and knowing someone waits to greet us enables us to endure the trials of our turbulent world. Christ's promise to prepare a place for us in the household of heaven, even as the Spirit guides us in the present, grants us the courage to be the salt and light you call us to be, Lord God. When we falter in the faith, remind us that we have a place of refuge and shelter in you. Amen.

Saturday

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 PETER 3:8-17

Today prepare to return evil with a blessing. In other words, if someone angers or annoys you, pray God's blessing upon them. If someone is hurtful or rude, ask God to bless them. At the end of the day, pray for them and others you find difficult to love.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, taking on our guilt in order that we might be redeemed and reconciled. And yet, we withhold mercy and forgiveness from others. As we consider the imminent incarnation, prepare us to embody the grace given to us through the coming of Jesus Christ. Help us to forgive as we have been forgiven and return no one evil for evil. Amen.

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