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The Light of Advent

A SEASON OF HOPE, PEACE, LOVE, AND JOY

SARAH REINHARD

Savor the Advent season with brief reflections based on the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. Each paragraph includes ways to strengthen and share your faith, as well as references to the Gospel readings found in the *Lectionary*. A longer reflection envelops the remainder of the Christmas season—which ends in January on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord—reminding us that Jesus’ birth is so important it warrants an entire season of celebrating.



Hope: First Week of Advent



First Sunday of Advent As we light the first purple candle of our Advent wreath, let's focus on the hope we have in the coming of the Lord. Remember, the angel's visit to Mary at the annunciation got things started. This week we walk with Mary as we prepare, alongside her, for the coming of our Savior.

Year A: Matthew 24:37–44

Year B: Mark 13:33–37

Year C: Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

Monday Have you ever watched how people react to a baby? More often than not, there's a lot of cooing and smiling. In my experience, this reaction grows exponentially as the age gap widens between the admirer and the bundle of joy. My grandparents and great-grandparents had far greater appreciation for my babies than I did at the time. I think this is a reflection of the hope we all see in a baby, as we get older. Today let's look for that hope in the eyes of someone younger. Let's share the message of hope through an encouraging word or a warm hug.

Matthew 8:5–11

Tuesday In the northern part of the world, this is a time of darkness and cold. The days are short. Christmas lights bring twinkles of hope. But so does the spiritual meaning behind the season. Find a small source of light today and think about how powerful the spark of faith is in the face of the darkness that surrounds us.

Luke 10:21–24

Wednesday Advent is a time, each year, to realize that we will be the host to a grand guest, even if that guest is only a baby—one who came into the world under the most meager circumstances. No matter how dirty or neglected we feel our soul is, we can find hope in the power of reconciliation and in the promise of forgiveness—through the grace of the sacraments. How will you act on that hope this week?

Matthew 15:29–37

Thursday Christ's birth happens in the silence of a stable, in the middle of a small town, with only a few people to witness it. Often, God operates without loud noises or bright flashes. He gets our attention in small ways, using the silence of our hearts. Find a quiet place today and sit in silence. Spend some time with Jesus as you look toward his arrival on Christmas.

Matthew 7:21, 24–27

Friday Preparing ourselves during Advent means being open to what God has in mind instead of limiting ourselves to what we want out of the season. God knows what's best for us, and he will help us deal with the circumstances we have to face in life. While Advent is a time to get ready for Jesus' birth, it's also a time of grace when we can give Baby Jesus the gift of changing our inner selves.

Matthew 9:27–31

Saturday Advent is a busy time of year. We may find ourselves not looking forward to Christmas at all. If we're not careful, we might forget what it is we're preparing for and the hope that surrounds us. The birth of Jesus changed the world more than 2,000 years ago, and it continues to change the world today. He's coming to visit us, and we want to greet him joyfully. The time to celebrate is not yet here. But the hope that is planted within us begins to emerge.

Matthew 9:35; 10:1, 6–8



December 6: St. Nicholas

December 8: Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a holy day of obligation

December 12: Our Lady of Guadalupe

December 14: St. John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church

December 26: St. Stephen, the First Martyr

December 27: St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

December 28: Holy Innocents, Martyrs

Sunday after Christmas: Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Gospel Readings:

Year A: Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

Year B: Luke 2:22–40 or 2:22, 39–40

Year C: Luke 2:41–52

January 1: Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Gospel Reading, years A, B, C: *Luke 2:16–21*

January 2: Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops and Doctors of the Church

January 4: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious

January 5: St. John Neumann, Bishop

Sunday after January 1:

Epiphany of the Lord (Three Kings Day)

Gospel Reading, years A, B, C: *Matthew 2:1–12*

Sunday after Epiphany: (If Epiphany falls on January 7 or 8, it is celebrated on the following Monday.)

Baptism of the Lord (Christmas season ends)

Gospel Readings:

Year A: Matthew 3:13–17

Year B: Mark 1:7–11

Year C: Luke 3:15–16, 21–22

Peace: Second Week of Advent



Second Sunday of Advent This week, we light the second purple candle in our Advent wreath. Let us reflect on the peace that comes from repentance.

Year A: Matthew 3:1–12

Year B: Mark 1:1–8

Year C: Luke 3:1–6

Monday Making things right with the people in our lives frees us from the burdens of fault that can get in the way of fully embracing our Savior. Our journey this week brings us closer to the peace that passes all understanding, that of Jesus himself.

Luke 5:17–26

Tuesday Ridding ourselves of the burden of guilt and making things right with the people around us—and even establishing a new positive habit or two—will open us further to the experience of the manger, the glory of Christmas Day and the King who awaits us. He promises us peace of a different kind than what the world offers.

Matthew 18:12–14

Wednesday Part of our excitement about Christmas can come from the grace that envelops us when we repent fully to God. Repentance is an act of love. We show God we love him by apologizing to him and others we've wronged. What are the ways we sin over and over? How do we resist what's best for us, what God wants for us, what we should do? Consider how and when we can begin to fix these culpabilities, knowing that God will grant the knowledge and strength to do so.

Matthew 11:28–30

Thursday Imagine yourself covered in dirt, grime, and sweat. Now picture the feeling of cleanliness and the relief you feel after a long hot bath. Often, we emerge with the sentiment of: "I feel like a new person." When we tell God we're sorry, God responds by hugging us tightly and bestowing on us the gift of forgiveness.

Matthew 11:11–15

Friday In God's response of forgiveness, we should also hear, "I love you." He wants what is best for us in every circumstance. If we offer up our faults and fears to God, he's promised to lead us on a righteous path. Allow God's grace to wash over you and emerge anew.

Matthew 11:16–19

Saturday True repentance should move us to also generously forgive. Do we treat the people in our lives like the gifts they are? Sometimes we are hardest on our family and those around us all the time. They know how to get under our skin and irritate us. Let's remember that we owe it to these people to be mindful of our role—to offer love and support—and be aware of how we treat them.

Matthew 17:10–13

Joy: Third Week of Advent



Third Sunday of Advent This week, we light the pink candle in our Advent wreath. This candle reminds us that, even though Advent is a penitential season, joy is also all around us.

Year A: Matthew 11:2–11

Year B: John 1:6–8, 19–28

Year C: Luke 3:10–18

Weekdays of Advent (December 17–24)

See *Lectio*, weekdays of Advent, for Gospel readings for December 17–24

If a Sunday occurs, the weekday reading is omitted. In cycles where December 17 is a weekday, the reading is:

Matthew 1:1–17

December 18 As we journey through Advent, we empty ourselves of the extras—those things that can bog us down—and open ourselves to be filled by Jesus. This week, as we practice love, let's feel and, more importantly, share the joy of the season.

Matthew 1:18–24

December 19 Although the feeling of the Christmas season—one of celebration and cheer—is seen everywhere this time of year, remember, there are a lot of people in pain. They may be sick and in physical pain or dealing with other struggles—ones that aren't visible on the outside. Is there anyone special you can think of who could use a kind word, a hug, or a special card?

Luke 1:5–25

December 20 At this point in Advent, it's easy to forget that we're not in the Christmas season just yet. We still have some work to do to prepare ourselves. We have to remember the purpose of our Advent journey: to prepare for the coming of Christ. Who are the people in your life who do the most for you? Have you thanked them? Have you told them how much joy they bring you? Have you brought joy to them?

Luke 1:26–38

December 21 We experience hurt—physical and emotional—in many ways and multiple times throughout our lives. After a while, we can get discouraged. It can become easy to forget that God loves us. It's important to take in the love and beauty that surrounds us—in the people we encounter and in creation. Allow the signs of God's grace and love to fill you with joy.

Luke 1:39–45

December 22 Though many of us may not see it up close in our daily lives, there is a lot of need in the world. There are people who do not have homes, food, or clothes beyond the ones they carry. It is our responsibility to help those who are less fortunate. Full dedication calls for sacrifices.

Luke 1:46–56

December 23 The people we can impact the most are the ones we encounter every day. We want to be valuable and sinless in God's sight. We want to be gathered into his stable, used for his purposes, giving him glory. As we draw closer to Christmas, we should become ever more focused on being loving, kind, and generous with the people in our lives.

Luke 1:57-66

Love: Fourth Week of Advent



Fourth Sunday of Advent Our anticipation is at its height! As we start the fourth week of Advent, we light the last purple candle. In anticipation of Christmas, let's feel the love of the season even more deeply.

Year A: Matthew 1:18-24

Year B: Luke 1:26-38

Year C: Luke 1:39-45

December 24: Christmas Vigil

Today, draw on the significance of Christ's birth to us. We can find comfort in knowing that Jesus was once just like us. He faced difficulties in his life, just as we do today. Jesus' love surpasses all. He wants to help each of us in our daily struggles. Even as we prepare to rejoice in his birth, we can remember to ask him to be with us in our troubles, both large and small.

December 25: The Nativity of the Lord

The Light of the World is here! Rejoice! Light the white candle in the center of your Advent wreath, and as you see it completely lit, pray for the grace to bring this Christmas miracle into every aspect of your life. On Christmas Day, we see God's love for us reflected in a tiny baby, huddled in the arms of his parents, surrounded by animals in a barn. He was born among the poorest of the poor, and yet he would save the world from its sin. Consider, also, the hope, peace, joy, and love that this Advent has brought you. Look at the babe in the manger and realize that we have much to be joyful about on this Christmas and every day, forevermore.

Vigil: Matthew 1:1-25 or 1:18-25

Midnight: Luke 2:1-14

Dawn: Luke 2:15-20

Day: John 1:1-18 or 1:5, 9:14

Christmastime



Sometimes we forget who we are and what we're supposed to be doing. Instead of praying, we play. Instead of obeying, we hide. Instead of speaking up for someone who needs us, we stay quiet. John the Baptist gives us an example and a reminder to always point others to God. Our actions speak loudly about what we believe and what's important to us.

We can spend this Christmas season giving our hearts to Jesus and others. Through the Gospels, Jesus has taught us that when we help the weak, the needy, the poor, and the disadvantaged, we help him. Jesus can be found in the people all around us. Let's consider how we can share the love of the season with them. The Christmas season continues through Epiphany, and ends after the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. While the secular world packs away the Christmas decorations, our Christian celebration is just beginning.

Jesus' birth is so important that it warrants a season of celebrating. During this time, we should still be celebrating and rejoicing over the newborn King. After hearing the news from the angels, the shepherds must have been excited. Can you picture them running quickly toward Bethlehem, arriving out of breath? They must have wanted to tell everyone they encountered about the exciting news of Jesus' birth. We should act similarly—excited and bursting with joy. While we rejoice; however, let's not lose sight of the sorrow in the world. Remember those less fortunate in both our prayers and our actions. Our rejoicing should lead us back to God and remind us of the many lessons on love Jesus taught during his life.

Sarah Reinhard continues to be delighted—and challenged—by her vocations of being a Catholic wife and mother. She holds a bachelor of science degree in agricultural education and a master's in marketing and communications. Sarah is an avid reader and a freelance writer. She wrote Welcome Baby Jesus (Liguori 2011) and Welcome Risen Jesus (Liguori 2012); A Catholic Mother's Companion to Pregnancy: Walking With Mary From Conception to Baptism; and Catholic Family Fun: A Guide for the Adventurous, Overwhelmed, Creative or Clueless. Online, Sarah is at SnoringScholar.com.

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