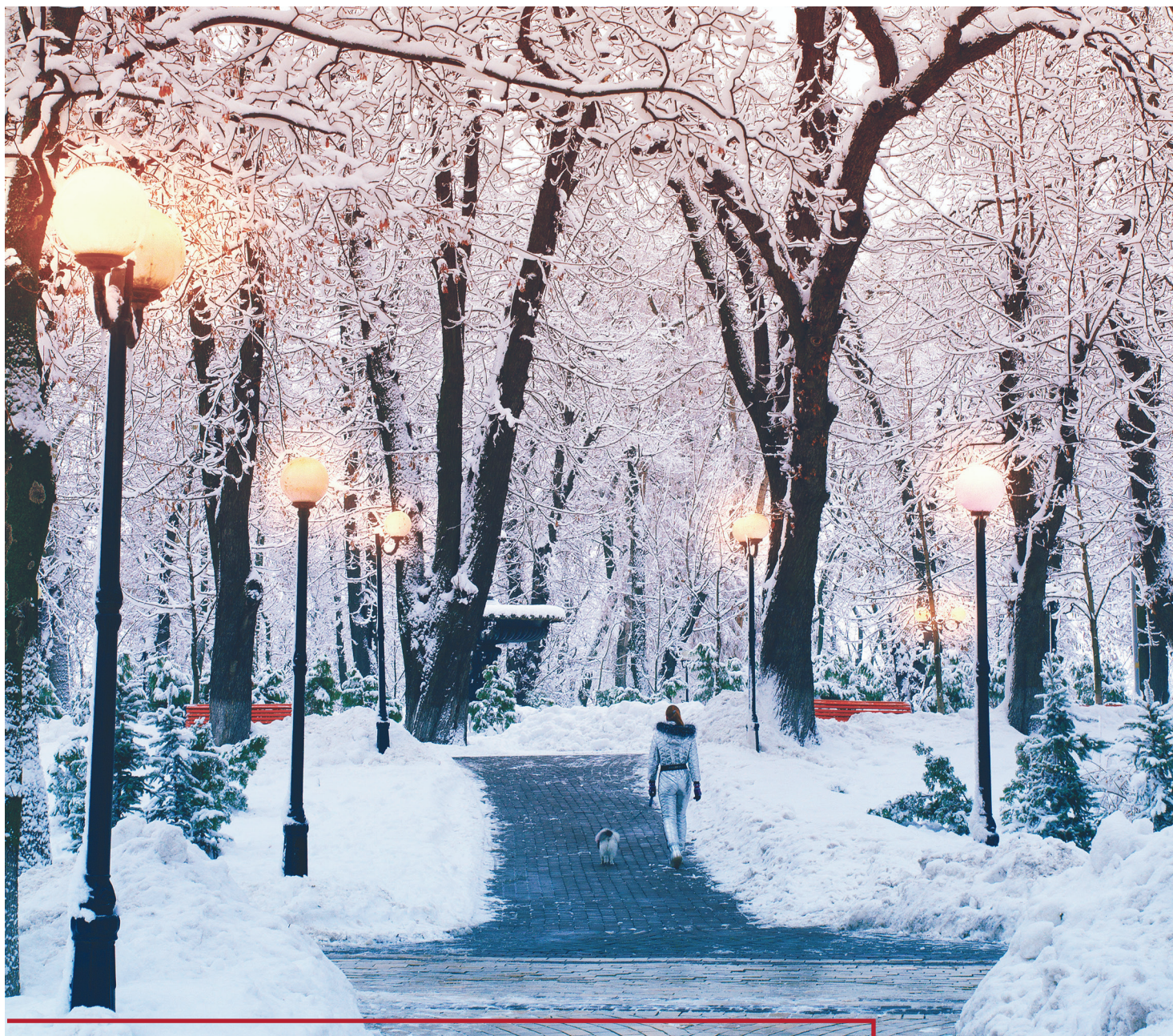


# Advent HERITAGE



Second SUNDAY OF ADVENT



# THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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*Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight;  
All flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

— Matthew 3:3

We live in a world of sound bites and blogs, in a world overloaded with the noise of competing viewpoints and voices. It can sometimes be difficult to discern what is really worthy of our attention. While we may not often think of it in this way, Advent is a season of discernment. As St. Paul reminds us in the Letter to the Philippians:

*It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. (Philippians 1:9-10)*

If we settle for the mediocrity of sound bites and half-truths, without seeking to discern what is truly important, we run the risk of losing sight of the hopes and promises that can only find fulfillment in a life commitment to Christ.

In a particular way, John the Baptist, the “voice crying in the wilderness,” reminds us of what it is we are called to do and be. In essence, his call for us to *prepare* for the Lord’s coming is a charge to discern the voice of the Lord calling to us and to persevere in the ways of faith. As the priest and theologian Origen asks us, “Is it not a way within ourselves that we have to prepare for the Lord? Is it not a straight and level highway in our hearts that we are to make ready?” In response to these essential questions, he reminds us: “Prepare a way for the Lord by living a good life and guard that way by good works. Let the Word of God move in you unhindered and give you a knowledge of his coming and of his mysteries” (Homilies on Luke, 21).

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## THE JESSE TREE: THE PROPHETS

Among the shining lights nestled into the branches of the Jesse Tree are the prophets of Israel.

Beginning with creation itself and the movements of the human heart — and then, later, through signs and wonders — God invited humanity into a relationship of intimate communion. Through the prophets, God formed his people in hope, “in the expectation of a new and everlasting Covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts” (“Catechism of the Catholic Church,” 64). The prophets were not fortune-tellers. In many ways, it could be said, the future was a secondary concern. The prophets were called by God to look at the world around them and to recognize how God was at work in the lives of His people.

In times of war, exile, famine, prosperity, or plague, the prophets tirelessly proclaimed a message of salvation. This is embodied in the preaching of the great prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel), the minor prophets (such as Micah, Haggai, Baruch, and Zechariah), and, finally, John the Baptist. Women, like Sarah, Rebecca, Miriam, Deborah, and Judith, also helped the people keep the flame of hope burning.

Inspired by these prophets, we remember that Advent calls us to a prophetic wakefulness, challenging us to look at the world around us with the eyes of faith, seeing how the Spirit is at work, even now, in hidden places, especially in the human heart.

### For Reflection

*How can I create a space of quiet and stillness to listen for the Lord's voice during these Advent days?*

*What do I hear the Lord inviting me to do? To become?*

## ADVENT INSIGHT

**Q.** What's the story behind the Advent wreath?

**A.** Each season in the liturgical calendar comes with its own local and regional rituals. During the Advent season, wreathes adorn church sanctuaries and family dining room tables. You may have said Advent wreath prayers in childhood or taken a turn lighting the candles. The Advent wreath is full of symbolism about Christ and his coming at Christmas. The wreath is made of evergreen boughs, reminding us that the life of grace doesn't falter with the changing seasons. It always remains fresh and new. Similarly, a circular wreath reminds us of the eternal, never-ending nature of God's love.

Candles remind us that Christ is the light of the world, the One who “shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” We use four candles to represent each week of Advent. Traditionally they come in the liturgical colors of the season. Purple has historically represented penance and sacrifice. We see the same color for the season of Lent. On the third Sunday of Advent, however, we light a rose color. The priest will wear rose vestments at Mass. This is Gaudete Sunday. *Gaudete* means “rejoice” in Latin. Whatever the color and whatever the day, the Advent wreath is a beautiful practice to focus our attention on Christ's coming at Christmas.





As we learn about the family tree of Jesus, here are some ways to research your own.

## CONNECT

Family is about being together and sharing experiences. If you are the planning type of person, consider holding a family reunion where extended family can come together and reminisce.

## EXPLORE

There are numerous ways that you can research your family history. Websites like [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) and [findmypast.com](http://findmypast.com) have millions of records to help you discover your family's unique story and start building your own tree.

## SHARE

Take time this week to record the history of your family, either by writing it down, or recording it via video, so that future generations can learn.

## Prayer

*Inspired by John the Baptist,  
and the prophets of old,  
we ask you, Lord God,  
for the gifts of courage and perseverance  
to live in the present moment,  
watching for the light of the dawn of the new day  
you have promised.  
Help us to be aware of your coming among today,  
in the poor, the forgotten, and the marginalized,  
nurturing in them the same hope  
that your Spirit keeps alive within us.  
Amen.*

