

Advent Calendar 2011

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Sunday, November 27

First Sunday of Advent

*No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen,
any God but you
doing such deeds for those who wait for him.*

—Isaiah 64:3

As a new year approaches, may we, like newborn babes in a new place, open our eyes and ears, as if for the first time. May we greet with open hearts the good news that is coming to pass.

Isaiah 63:16–17, 19; 64:2–7

Psalm 80

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Mark 13:33–37

Monday, November 28

*In days to come,
The mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest mountain
. . . All nations shall stream toward it;
many peoples shall come and say:
"Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
That he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths."*

—Isaiah 2:2–3

Perhaps the mountain has a name: the moral high ground. No nation has the right to claim it, but the One who is coming makes a home there and will draw all of us closer to its sacred slopes.

Isaiah 2:1–5

Psalm 122

Matthew 8:5–11

Tuesday, November 29

*A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.
The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him:
a Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
A Spirit of counsel and of strength,
a Spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord.*

—Isaiah 11:1–2

This is no hesitant spirit, no shy retiring violet, but a surge of life-transforming grace pushing out from the ancient root of our sacred story. This spirit will bear new fruit, new ways of thinking and relating, a fresh wind in the universe.

Isaiah 11:1–10

Psalm 72

Luke 10:21–24

Wednesday, November 30

St. Andrew, Apostle

As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

—Matthew 4:18–19

I wandered along the beach in northeastern Scotland, where my family has its roots, and listened to the local fishermen talking to one another in their broad dialect. These were men toughened by a hard life at sea, men who knew what life is truly about. I imagined what they would have made of Jesus' call and marveled at the magnetic power of this man who can attract instant allegiance, even across thousands of years, from the toughest and most skeptical hearts.

Romans 10:9–18

Psalm 19

Matthew 4:18–22



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Thursday, December 1

*Open to me the gates of justice;
I will enter them and give thanks to the Lord.*

—Psalm 118:19

It always takes me by surprise that when the gates of holiness open, however briefly, they usually reveal not some distant castle in the sky but our own backyard. Holy gates invite us to discover God right here.

Isaiah 26:1–6

Psalm 118

Matthew 7:21, 24–27

Friday, December 2

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?
The Lord is my life's refuge;
of whom should I be afraid?*

—Psalm 27:1

When I walk in God's light, I don't need to fear whatever may be lurking in the darkness.

When I lean back on God, I don't need to fear whatever may be standing in front of me.

Isaiah 29:17–24

Psalm 27

Matthew 9:27–31

Saturday, December 3

St. Francis Xavier, Priest

*Without cost you have received; without cost
you are to give.*

—Matthew 10:8

We come into this world with nothing but God's abundant gifts. All we can add to them is our own price tag. Doesn't that bring up some questions about the honesty of our accounting?

Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26;

Psalm 147

Matthew 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6–8

Sunday, December 4

Second Sunday of Advent

*Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill shall be made low;
The rugged land shall be made a plain,
the rough country, a broad valley.*

—Isaiah 40:3–4

God is the great leveler. This work may involve much more than smoothing out the mountains of difficulty and the valleys of despair. It may also mean leveling down the mountains of all-consuming prosperity to fill the gaping emptiness in the valleys of poverty.

Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11

Psalm 85

2 Peter 3:8–14

Mark 1:1–8

Monday, December 5

*Strengthen the hands that are feeble,
make firm the knees that are weak,
Say to those whose hearts are frightened:
Be strong, fear not!*

—Isaiah 35:3–4

The irony is that we cannot hear these encouraging words and take them to heart until our hands are weary, our knees are trembling, and our hearts are faint. Only then do we understand the power and love behind those actions.

Isaiah 35:1–10

Psalm 85

Luke 5:17–26



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Tuesday, December 6

What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray?

—Matthew 18:12

The television news broadcasts an appeal for a missing child. The local police force, the entire neighborhood, and all the friends and family are out searching. Those who love the little one will search ceaselessly for as long as it takes, for a lifetime if necessary. If we care that much, what can we say about God?

Isaiah 40:1–11

Psalm 96

Matthew 18:12–14

Wednesday, December 7

St. Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

*He does not faint nor grow weary,
and his knowledge is beyond scrutiny.
He gives strength to the fainting;
for the weak he makes vigor abound.*

—Isaiah 40:28–29

The One with unlimited understanding and boundless energy wants nothing more than to give it away to us, who have nothing.

Isaiah 40:25–31

Psalm 103

Matthew 11:28–30

Thursday, December 8

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

—Luke 1:38

When the Spirit hovers over our hearts, we have two choices: to resist and close down or to give our unconditional consent for God’s dream to come to birth in our lives. There is no halfway position. It’s not possible to be only a little bit pregnant.

Genesis 3:9–15, 20

Psalm 98

Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12

Luke 1:26–38

Friday, December 9

St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin

*If you would hearken to my commandments,
your prosperity would be like a river,
and your vindication like the waves of the sea.*

—Isaiah 48:18

It’s important to remember what might have been, but only as an aid in learning from the past, so that we can make a different kind of future.

Isaiah 48:17–19

Psalm 1

Matthew 11:16–19

Saturday, December 10

*Blessed is he who shall have seen you
and who falls asleep in your friendship.*

—Sirach 48:11

Does that seem to rule you and me out of the running? We haven’t seen God—or perhaps we have: in the daily miracles that lie everywhere around us. We haven’t died yet—perhaps we can, at the end of every day that closes with a thankful heart and a mind at peace with those around us.

Sirach 48:1–4, 9–11

Psalm 80

Matthew 17:9a, 10–13

Sunday, December 11

Third Sunday of Advent

*As the earth brings forth its plants,
and a garden makes its growth spring up,
So will the Lord God make justice and praise
spring up before all the nations.*

—Isaiah 61:11

God’s creation is organic, dynamic, alive, and always growing big dreams from tiny possibilities. Just as God draws the fruit and the flower from a little seed, so, too, God is drawing the very best from every person and every nation.

Isaiah 61:1–2, 10–11

Luke 1:46–50, 53–54

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

John 1:6–8, 19–28



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Monday, December 12

Our Lady of Guadalupe

[The angel] said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus."

—Luke 1:28–31

Whenever God's power touches human lives, whether in dramatic visions or subtle inner movements, our natural reaction is to feel disturbed and fearful. If we dare to trust the angel's reassurance, however, our fear can be transformed into awe and our resistance into life-changing response.

Zechariah 2:14–17 or Revelation 11:19; 12:1–6, 10

Judith 13:18–19

Luke 1:26–38 or 1:39–47

Tuesday, December 13

St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

*On that day
You need not be ashamed
of all your deeds,
your rebellious actions against me;
For then will I remove from your midst
the proud braggarts,
And you shall no longer exalt yourself
on my holy mountain.*

—Zephaniah 3:11

Imagine a children's game in which the Barbie dolls and toy soldiers come alive and take over the planet. I sometimes wonder whether this is how we appear to God as we strut around on God's holy mountain, Earth.

Zephaniah 3:1–2, 9–13

Psalm 34

Matthew 21:28–32

Wednesday, December 14

St. John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church

*I am the Lord, there is no other;
I form the light, and create the darkness,
I make well-being and create woe;
I, the Lord, do all these things.*

—Isaiah 45:6

We could read this comment as an expression of the illusion we have of being the center of the universe. It is the task of a lifetime to recognize this as the illusion it is and then to discover that God alone is the axis around which all creation spins.

Isaiah 45:6–8, 18, 21–25

Psalm 85

Luke 7:18–23

Thursday, December 15

*Though the mountains leave their place
and the hills be shaken,*

My love shall never leave you

nor my covenant of peace be shaken.

—Isaiah 54:10

In the devastation left behind by the most disastrous earthquake, we find human hands reaching out to feed the starving and bind the wounded. In the wake of a catastrophic tsunami, we hear the march of human feet rushing to help and to rescue. These are the hands and feet of Christ.

Will ours be among them?

Isaiah 54:1–10

Psalm 30

Luke 7:24–30



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Friday, December 16

*Thus says the Lord:
Observe what is right, do what is just;
for my salvation is about to come,
my justice, about to be revealed.*

—Isaiah 56:1

There is a causal connection here. It is those who care for justice and act with integrity who are preparing the way for the salvation we long for. And it is those whose hearts are just and whose eyes see the truth who will recognize it when it is revealed.

Isaiah 56:1–3, 6–8

Psalm 67

John 5:33–36

Saturday, December 17

*The mountains shall yield peace for the people,
and the hills justice.*

—Psalm 72:3

All creation is striving to bring forth a mystery beyond itself, a kingdom of peace and justice. The created world models it, the prophets foretell it, the psalmist celebrates it, and Jesus shows us what it looks like in reality. All of these invite us to let God's kingdom come to birth in our own lives.

Genesis 49:2, 8–10

Psalm 72

Matthew 1:1–17

Sunday, December 18

Fourth Sunday of Advent

The angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

—Luke 1:35

The mere shadow of God is brighter than our brightest sunlight, and it rests upon us with a generative, life-giving power that bursts open our imagination and potential.

2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8–12, 14, 16

Psalm 89

Romans 16:25–27

Luke 1:26–38

Monday, December 19

*But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until
the day these things take place, because you did not believe
my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.*

—Luke 1:20

I pray that if I do not speak from a baseline of faith and trust, I, too, might be silenced, or at the very least that others might have the good sense not to listen to me.

Judges 13:2–7, 24–25

Psalm 71

Luke 1:5–25

Tuesday, December 20

*They will receive blessings from the Lord,
and justice from their saving God.
Such are the people that love the Lord,
that seek the face of the God of Jacob.*

—Psalm 24: 5–6

Do we dare offer God the blank check of our hearts and souls and lives? Can we do this—will we do it—knowing that it may cost us all we have and all we are?

Isaiah 7:10–14

Psalm 24

Luke 1:26–38

Wednesday, December 21

St. Peter Canisius, Priest and Doctor of the Church

*Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you
by the Lord would be fulfilled.*

—Luke 1:45

God's promises are like seeds. If they take root in our hearts, if we really trust them, then they will grow to fulfillment and bear the fruits of blessing for ourselves and for others.

Song of Songs 2:8–14 or Zephaniah 3:14–18

Psalm 33

Luke 1:39–45



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Thursday, December 22

I prayed for this child, and the Lord granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the Lord.

—1 Samuel 1:27–28

When a gift we have longed for and that truly comes from God is actually given to us, then a strange thing happens. We lose any desire to keep it all to ourselves and experience instead a desire to give it back to God, to be multiplied and shared among many.

1 Samuel 1:24–28

1 Samuel 2:1, 4–8

Luke 1:46–56

Friday, December 23

St. John of Kanty, Priest

All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be?" For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.

—Luke 1:66

Whenever we gaze at a newborn baby we might ask, "What fragment of God's dream will this new life reveal?" The newborn John was to become the pointer to the One who would reveal all of it.

Malachi 3:1–4, 23–24

Psalm 25

Luke 1:57–66

Saturday, December 24

You, my child, shall be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

—Luke 1:76–77

We stand, tonight, on the threshold of the new covenant. Leadership now rests in the hands of a little child who comes, helpless, humble, and poor, to prepare human hearts and minds for a new vision of God's dream for God's people. This little child will turn all our assumptions on their heads. Will we recognize him? Will we have the courage to follow where he leads?

2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8–12, 14, 16

Psalm 89

Luke 1:67–79

Sunday, December 25

The Nativity of the Lord * Christmas

What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

—John 1:3–5

A first-century philosopher observed: "When I light a candle at midnight, I say to the darkness: 'I beg to differ.'" As we light our Christmas candles, we, too, say to the darkness in our world and in our own hearts, "You have no final power over us, for the first and final word is eternal light."

Vigil:

Isaiah 62:1–5

Psalm 89

Acts 13:16–17, 22–25

Matthew 1:1–25 or 1:18–25

Midnight:

Isaiah 9:1–6

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11–14

Luke 2:1–14

Dawn:

Isaiah 62:11–12

Psalm 97

Titus 3:4–7

Luke 2:15–20

Day:

Isaiah 52:7–10

Psalm 98

Hebrews 1:1–6

John 1:1–18 or 1:1–5, 9–14



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Monday, December 26

St. Stephen, First Martyr

But he, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

—Acts 7:55–56

The stones that battered Stephen's body broke open the doorways of his soul to reveal to him the eternal promise of God, transcending the very worst that human cruelty can inflict.

Acts 6:8–10, 7:54–59

Psalm 31

Matthew 10:17–22

Tuesday, December 27

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

*For the life was made visible;
we have seen it and testify to it
and proclaim to you the eternal life
that was with the Father and was made visible to us.*

—1 John 1:2

A little girl discovered her granny spinning golden thread in the midst of a dark and dangerous forest. As a token of her love, Granny tied one end of the thread to the child's finger and sent her back to the forest with the promise: "Wherever you go, whatever happens, you are connected to me by this golden thread, which can never be broken." Jesus is to us the visible evidence of God's continuous presence and love.

1 John 1:1–4

Psalm 97

John 20:1a, 2–8

Wednesday, December 28

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

This is the message that we have heard from Jesus Christ and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, "We have fellowship with him," while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth.

—1 John 1:5–6

It takes only one candle to banish the darkness from the darkest of rooms. It takes only one gleam of faith to banish the fear from the darkest of situations.

It may be asked of each and any of us, at any time, to light that single candle in our own situations. In the midst of the pain, fright, or confusion, we may be the only ones who have a candle or the faith to light it.

1 John 1:5–2:2

Psalm 124

Matthew 2:13–18

Thursday, December 29

St. Thomas Becket, Bishop and Martyr

Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

—Luke 2:34–35

I love to think of Jesus having godparents. Today we meet Simeon, whom I like to think of as a godfather to this very special child. His insight penetrates the mystery that he's witnessing. He sees both falling and rising, death and new birth, something wonderfully offered and incredibly rejected. He sees a blade of truth and integrity that will both wound and heal.

1 John 2:3–11

Psalm 96

Luke 2:22–35



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Friday, December 30

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

—*Luke 2:39-40*

The pattern set by the Holy Family holds good for all families in every culture and every age. First, discipline provides the foundation for healthy growth, and growth allows wisdom to emerge, and God's blessing and favor embraces the whole process.

Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14 or Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17

Psalm 128

Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22, 39-40

Saturday, December 31

*He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.
But to those who did accept him he gave
power to become children of God.*

—*John 1:11-12*

Tonight in Scotland, the old tradition of first footing will be reenacted. Will the first person to cross the threshold of our home in the new year bring blessing? Suppose the first footer is the One who gives us abundant life. Suppose God comes asking us to enter God's own domain deep in our heart. Will we welcome God home, and rejoice in his promise to lead us into 2012 as his own, his beloved ones?

1 John 2:18-21

Psalm 96

John 1:1-18



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