



All I want
for Christmas!
HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE

DEVOTIONAL

2023



Week 2

PEACE

Saturday, December 2nd and Sunday, December 3rd

The Weekend-A Recap

Spend some time this weekend reflecting on your experience of worship (whether online or in-person). Use the following questions to help guide your through this reflection.

Which part of the message encourage or challenged you the most, and why?

If you were to restate the message in one sentence, what would it be?

Is your heart at war with someone in your life? How is this keeping you from living the life God desires for you?

PRAYER Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is sadness, joy; And where there is darkness, light. Grant that we may seek not so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned, and in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

St. Francis of Assisi

LISTEN

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly,
For His bed a cattle stall;
Oxen lowing, little knowing
Christ the babe is Lord of all.

Swift are winging, angels singing,
Noels ringing, tidings bringing:
Christ the babe is Lord of all.

Flocks were sleeping, Shepherds keeping
Vigil till the morning new
Saw the glory, heard the story,
Tidings of a gospel true.

Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
Praises voicing, greet the morrow:
Christ the babe was born for you.

You can listen to two different versions below. (They are linked to youtube.)

[A choir selection](#)



[A Contemporary Cover](#)

Monday, December 4th

Celebrating Advent

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS

Gather your family together over dinner, invite over some friends, or feel free to Zoom or Facetime them. You can also celebrate individually.

Advent in Latin means "Coming" or more accurately "Coming toward." It is a celebration of Jesus coming into the world, God Immanuel. For centuries, people have been using various traditions to celebrate this coming, but one of the most popular is the Advent calendar. Beginning with Advent (or at the start of December for most of the calendars you see around stores, an advent calendar counts down the time until Christmas day!

Each day of Advent has its own little window leading up to a larger window representative of Christmas Eve. Each day is an opportunity for people and children to enter fully into worship of that greatest gift and to reflect and meditate on its importance.

This tradition is believed to have originated from Germany in the 1800's where Protestant Christians placed chalk markings around their door frames as they eagerly waited for their Christmas Eve worship. Over the course of the 19th century, this practice developed into little wooden blocks families lined up, filled with Bible verses and biblical images -the last scene always depicted the Nativity story. The first printed calendar was printed in 1908 and featured twenty-four little cut-out doors that not only contained bible verses and images, but also various treats, like chocolates, that kept the children's attention.

If you would like to get a calendar and celebrate together, feel free to do so. As you open each day say a quick prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of the day and the lessons that come with each breath we take.

Turn down the lights, gather around the Advent wreath, and read aloud **John 14:27**.

Light the second purple candle and spend a few minutes in silence.

Thank you, God for the flame of peace. As we prepare for Christ's coming, help us to be peace for those around us, and help us to deepen the peace within us. Amen.

Tuesday, December 5th

Peace Is Stillness

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

Advent provides us a moment to be still and discover true peace that comes in the spaces of waiting. Unfortunately many of us strongly dislike waiting (maybe even more than we dislike silence), and we would rather throw ourselves into the season than hang out in the place of stillness and quietness. So we juggle so many to-do lists. We race between stores shopping for gifts, trying to get the best deal humanly possible. We spend time with family members (for some of us with great worry and anxiety about the whole thing) and we try our hardest to avoid conflict. Plus there are the endless Christmas concerts, parties, and gatherings. We like our Christmas stuff!

Perhaps, we instead try our best to hide from all the hustle and bustle of the season and we wish it away, taking solace in the fact that it will all be a distant memory in January. We gladly wave goodbye and it goes as quickly as it comes. So we skip over the entirety of the season. We don't really like all of the stuff around Christmas-- bah humbug!

In either case we don't really celebrate Advent in the way it encourages us to celebrate: to step back and pause, to honor the moment and embrace deep peace that surpasses all understanding. This peace comes in stillness. Think about how you might foster God's peace this holiday season. As you resist the bluster and stresses of the season, can you sit with the still, small voice? How might you extend peace to others? Perhaps it is in the form of grace, being gentle and understanding of others in a time where emotions and expectations run high. Maybe it is actively bringing a deliberate calm to a family gathering, where many different perspectives and lifestyles convene together under one roof.

Be still and remember the birth of the Prince of Peace.

PRAY

Help us remember that you hold all things together. You are the breath that supports us, the canopy of love that covers us in the present, the presence that sunk deep into our past, and the wind that moves us confidently toward the future bearing for us the peace we could never have attained for ourselves. Amen!

Peace Be With You

PUTTING PEACE INTO ACTION

Centering Prayer is a form of contemplative prayer where the pray-er seeks to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still center of Christ's presence. When we practice it (regardless of how "perfect" we think we do) we learn to listen to God and bring stillness into the busyness of life.

How does it work?

In this prayer we sit in the presence of God and give God our undivided love and attention. We do not give God information about all our needs, projects, ideas, programs, plans and agendas. Generally, the only words that are spoken in centering prayer are the prayer words that continually bring our drifting attention back to God. These are words such as Jesus, Abba, love, peace, Father, or a phrase from Scripture.

Set aside a minimum of ten minutes (but increase as you can). Set a timer if that helps you to be less concerned about when to stop.

Instructions

- ① **Prepare** | Find a comfortable position to sit that is relaxed. It is recommended that you sit for this prayer experience rather than walking. Pick a sacred word that will aid you in your prayer time with God.
- ② **Center** | Take several slow, deep breaths. Let go of all the cares and concerns of the day. Bask in the loving presence of Emmanuel, God With Us. You can do this by practicing a breath prayer: "Loving God..." on the in-breath; "...here I am" on the out-breath.
- ③ **Pray** | Take time to become quiet. It is not unusual for the first few minutes to be filled with many noisy thoughts. Don't worry about them or pay attention to them. Let them go (think about Frozen-Let it Go)!! Gently return your attention to the center of God's presence and love by repeating your word. Be with Jesus. Listen. Be Still.
- ④ **Repeat** | Practice this for at least 10 minutes. It is recommended that you work up to 20 minutes, but do this slowly as you grow more comfortable praying with silence.
- ⑤ **Rest** | Rest in the center of God's love. Trust that the Holy Spirit who abides in the depths of your spirit to connect you with God.

Tips

If you are finding it difficult to practice this, keep at it. The most common mistake we make is giving up before it becomes an engrained practice. Remember that this is a means of experiencing God's grace. That means let go of expectations. Simply make an intention to be present with God in your inner room.

Peace Is Ours

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

Luke 2:8-10

During the time of Jesus' birth, being a Shepherd wasn't exactly the best looked upon job to have. If you were looking for prestige or to impress someone special, a shepherd wasn't it! Most of the time the job was left to the social outcasts. However, in the Christmas story, shepherds were immensely honored by being one of the first group of people to witness the birth of the Messiah (besides the animals of course). The Angels came upon them and trusted to them the good news that was going to bring peace to all people.

Their first reaction was fear! But the Angel spoke words of peace. And they immediately found peace. They were so filled with peace that they wanted to go and see the Messiah themselves. So off they go following the star that guided them, pressing pause from their nighttime duties to make the journey.

And they approached the manger with a spirit of worship. They had nothing really to offer. There were no expensive gifts fit for a king. No Christmas cards. All they had was their imperfect selves that they gave freely. Yes, these outcasts and the poor willingly chose to put their jobs as shepherds at risk by traveling to see Jesus. In that act that began with a word of peace and their willingness to embrace it, they would be tasked to go and share the good news with anyone who would listen. And their humble selves fit perfectly with the humble beginnings of Jesus' life, born in a manger among animals and filth, who would later be called the Good Shepherd. Someone who would bring peace to all people, especially people like the Shepherds.

GO AND DO

As you go about your normal holiday busy-ness, be thinking about how you are instruments of God's peace for others. Challenge yourself: rather than being impatient as you wait in line for something, be a person of peace. If you feel like reacting in a negative way, take a moment to collect yourself and be a person of peace. Smile and thank those that work in retail (or other not-so-fun jobs during the holiday season).

Friday, December 8th

Peace & Truth

What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.

Ephesians 4:25 (MSG)

It can be difficult to embrace vulnerability in a world that acts harshly and can be unforgiving. We all grow up learning how to protect ourselves by carefully crafting armor around our hearts. We often don't speak up when we really want to speak up, or if we do we don't share the truth. Many of us don't really want to disappoint or hurt others. Some of us don't want to open ourselves in such a way where shame is triggered. So we get pretty darn good at fashioning "truth" around what ~~we~~ others want it to be (or at the very least, what we *think* others want it to be.

Maybe today, we can take a note out of Jesus' book, instead. Jesus came to earth as a human, so that he could embrace what it meant to be vulnerable, and to share that vulnerability with others. Jesus has loved and lost. Jesus has cried and been frustrated (I mean he did flip tables). Jesus felt alone and forgotten, even like he was forgotten by his Father. The truth is that Jesus understands what it means to be truly human and the pains of fragility. But he also knew the power of resilience that comes from embracing and speaking truth when needed. He was honest with his friends about how he felt and what he was going through. Jesus' prayers were honest and true. This gave him the kind of peace he was able to draw on during difficult times.

Maybe peace starts with the courage to share the truth with someone. Maybe it's something you have been sitting on for a very long time.

REFLECT

What is your truth that you need to speak to someone today? How can sharing your truth bring you greater peace in this season as you are freed from the isolation and loneliness that half-truths create?

Where do you need to speak the truth to yourself?