

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 1 — SEASON OF HOPE

First Sunday in Advent

Advent is from a Latin word meaning “coming” or “arrival.”

Jesus brings hope! Some say that the *expectation of his coming* is strongest in the book of Isaiah. As much as any other wise man he sees the coming of a “great light.” Not an ethereal, whimsical light but a *child* whose multiple titles invoke hope! Doubt and gloom are vanquished in the great light of His appearing! But often the message is watered down or distorted by those who have earthly motivations. We too are often distracted like Martha doing good things; after all Martha was serving Jesus. What have we to compare to that?!

Yet if we could carry the possibility of hope in our pocket we might constantly touch it to reassure us of the hope of Jesus appearing. The Apostle Paul tells us that the scriptures were “written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” The celebration of Advent has been valuable for centuries, through a series of lessons and themes, to help seekers restore hope in His appearing. Each Sunday before Christmas has a focus. The first is hope! Our hope as Christ followers as we gather each week is to strengthen and encourage each other in his Presence. As Peter says, “And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” Jesus is our Morning Star! In John’s gospel Jesus says, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us.”

Advent’s custom is the Advent Wreath with a candle marking each of the four Sunday’s. The candles may be purple or white depending on church tradition. One candle is usually rose colored and marks the third Sunday in Advent. The candle opposite the rose colored candle begins the Season celebration.

The first candle is called the Prophecy Candle. God revealed to seers and prophets from olden times concerning the coming one. Here are a few of the high points.

NIV; Isaiah 9:1-6; Isaiah 53; John 12:46; 2 Peter 1:19; Hosea 11:1; Romans 15:4; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 42:1-9; Malachi 4:5-6; Rev 22:16

Surprised by Hope: Week 1, Monday

Sometimes hope comes to us in disguise. The writings of the Holy Spirit (the Bible) are so assorted! Poetry, history, philosophy and then the story of Jesus – ah, the Christmas story is hidden in the Bible! This may be our opportunity to unpack the writings of the Nativity story and rediscover the hope God has for us!

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Who is the prophet writing about here?

Who has believed our message... He was despised and rejected by men...But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...

(Read the whole chapter! Isaiah 53)

O God, let hope arise in our hearts;

We are open to hear what you would say.

Let us hear the word written for us;

Encourage us as we see your plan unfold! Amen!

Awareness of Hope: Week 1, Tuesday

Peter and Paul stood ready to remind Christ-followers at any opportunity to read the scriptures to reinforce the living hope which Christ-followers have “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3) The scriptures predicted the coming of Jesus to earth hundreds of years before the event! That is so awesome!

(Philippians 3:1 & 2 Peter 1:12)

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

(Paul, Ephesians 1:17-19)

Amen

Power of Hope: Week 1, Wednesday

Sometimes the hard knocks of life give way to an unrelenting disappointment that leaves you with little or no hope at all. It is just then, right at that moment, that we need reminders that hope remains. The prophets left us reminders that one was coming who would bring light and hope, and the power to release us from enslavement or whatever causes us to stumble.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:2, 6)

The word of the prophets is a sure thing!

Help us to give it our full attention!

It is a light to us, like the sun,

or like the sunrise of a new day.

Enlarge our hearts with Your Presence,

and transform us in the process!

(See 2 Peter 1:19)

Amen

Message of Hope: Week 1, Thursday

One day Jesus spoke of John the Baptizer, and he pressed the people several times for an answer, "What did you go out to see?" Today when you come to church, what is your hope; what do you seek? Are you fed up, sad or worried? Is it hope you seek? The Holy Spirit is here—ready and willing to speak life to you! It is the Holy Spirit that spoke through the prophets and used John to get people used to the idea that Jesus is coming! And this is what Jesus says about John, "if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come." John was more than a cultural oddity because he announced the hope of the world! (Matthew 11:7-15)

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. (Malachi 3:1)

My soul finds rest in God alone;

my salvation comes from him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation;

he is my fortress, I will never be shaken...

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;

my hope comes from him.

Amen! (Psalm 62:1-2,5)

Triumph of Hope: Week 1, Friday

Picture this: you are taking a walk with a friend, and a stranger joins your company. You are discussing a difficult situation and the stranger asks if he may join the conversation. He seems acquainted with the facts and astutely offers compelling wisdom and suggests a possible course of action. You both are amazed and say so. Then he systematically breaks down the cues you missed and the opportunities you squandered until you both realize the answer was there all the time. Jesus does this a lot in our lives, as he did for the disciples on the Emmaus Road. Read it for yourself in Luke 24.

[Jesus] He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

Jesus you are the bread of life;

broken for us that we might have life.

Open our eyes to see you at the table,

and teach us to know the Scriptures.

We long to have our hearts overcome with your word;
speak to us afresh today!