

PREPARING TO HEAR
GOD'S CALL

| 2020 ADVENT RESOURCE FOR
RESHAPING CHURCH



ADVENT COUNTDOWN

WEEK 1: HOPE

- ☐ SUNDAY
- ☐ MONDAY
- ☐ TUESDAY
- ☐ WEDNESDAY
- ☐ THURSDAY
- ☐ FRIDAY
- ☐ SATURDAY

WEEK 2: PEACE

- ☐ SUNDAY
- ☐ MONDAY
- ☐ TUESDAY
- ☐ WEDNESDAY
- ☐ THURSDAY
- ☐ FRIDAY
- ☐ SATURDAY

WEEK 3: JOY

- ☐ SUNDAY
- ☐ MONDAY
- ☐ TUESDAY
- ☐ WEDNESDAY
- ☐ THURSDAY
- ☐ FRIDAY
- ☐ SATURDAY

WEEK 4: LOVE

- ☐ SUNDAY
- ☐ MONDAY
- ☐ TUESDAY
- ☐ WEDNESDAY
- ☐ THURSDAY
- ☐ FRIDAY
- ☐ SATURDAY

WEEK 5: CHRISTMAS TIDE

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ☐ SUNDAY | ☐ THURSDAY |
| ☐ MONDAY | ☐ FRIDAY |
| ☐ TUESDAY | ☐ SATURDAY |
| ☐ WEDNESDAY | |



*RESHAPING CHURCH is a Thriving
Congregations Initiative of Central Seminary in
partnership with Pinnacle Leadership Associates
and sponsored by Lilly Endowment Inc.*



INTRO

P

reparing,
anticipating,
and waiting
are all themes
of the Advent
season in
the Christian

rhythms of each year. Every year when Advent comes, we realize how much we need this season. It's like that vacation or weekend off that you didn't know you needed until you experienced it. Advent comes to us as Jesus the Christ came--just in time and on time.

Preparing.

Anticipating.

Waiting.

2020

A D V E N T R E S O U R C E :

PREPARING TO HEAR GOD'S CALL

Many of us are keenly aware of our need for spiritual engagement this Advent season. During volatile periods like 2020, our spiritual fuel is being burned to the maximum each day. We are stretched and challenged, needing God's sustaining power on a regular and consistent basis. Biblical accounts such as the Exodus take on new meaning because we know what it is like to pass through the wilderness. Perhaps more than ever, we need Advent this year.

We are delighted to offer this Advent devotional guide for your personal and communal use. We enjoyed crafting these devotionals and found the strength of the Lord seeping into our bones as we engaged scriptures, offered prayers, and put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard). We hope that our experience will be replicated many times over as you engage with this devotional guide during the Advent season.

There is another reason for your church to use this Advent devotional guide. In the new year, your church will engage the RESHAPING CHURCH: Thriving Congregations process designed to accelerate your progress toward living into God's calling

for your church. We trust that Advent and Christmas will spiritually prepare you and your faith community for the transformation opportunities coming your way.

Just as each devotional prepares us for the coming of Christ, so also do they prepare us for the RESHAPING CHURCH Process. Also, please note the resources in the Appendices for congregational worship gatherings. We pray the daily reflections and worship resources will enrich your spiritual journey as individuals and as faith communities over these weeks. We eagerly anticipate engaging with you and your church as we await Christ's appearing in ourselves and in our churches in 2021.

Blessings to you during this season of preparation, anticipation, and holy waiting.

Rev. Dr. Angela B. Jackson, Rev. Jessica C. Williams
Central Seminary

Rev. Mark Tidsworth, Rev. Dr. Ircel Harrison
Pinnacle Leadership Associates

OUR SPIRITUAL FUEL IS
BEING BURNED TO THE
MAXIMUM EACH DAY.

**PRE-ADVENT
PREPARATION**

*HOW MUCH DO WE
ACTIVELY TRUST GOD
TO SUPPLY ALL OUR
NEEDS?*

NOV 26 - 28

THURSDAY,
NOVEMBER 26TH, 2020

PSALM 80:1-7, 17-19; ZECHARIAH 13:1-9; REVELATION 14:6-13

REVELATION 14:6-13
HOPE EMPOWERS US TO PERSEVERE

"HERE IS A CALL FOR THE ENDURANCE OF THE SAINTS, THOSE WHO KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD AND HOLD FAST TO THE FAITH OF JESUS." 14:12

REFLECTION: Many of us find the poetic vision of John which became the book of Revelation challenging to comprehend. Since Revelation is apocryphal writing, we find ourselves intrigued yet perplexed, but in this passage, the meaning is more straightforward than in some others. The challenges of living on planet earth are clearly laid out for us, including turning government into an idol and expecting it to give us what it cannot give—ultimate security. God's people are equipped with what they need regardless of life's circumstances. God provides everything we need to face the living of our days. This doesn't mean everything will turn out like we want, yet God will see us through every life circumstance. Even when death comes our way, God is there, ushering us to God's full presence in due time. Advent is a time to prepare for the Christ's coming which in turn prepares us to live well in this world. Believe it or not, God has given us everything we need to live faithfully during these volatile days.

QUESTION:

How much do we actively trust God to supply all our needs; to give us what we need for the living of our days?

PRAYER:

○ God, though you love us fully as we are, we invite you to transform us into greater vessels of your grace and love during this Advent season.

PSALM 80:1-7, 17-19; ZECHARIAH 14:1-9; 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-18

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-18
GOD'S CHURCH IS MARKED BY LOVE

Between a paragraph on personal holiness and promises about Christ's return, this passage describes the Church at its best. When we are actively loving one another—that is when we know we are disciples of Jesus (See John 13). Stepping back a moment and observing our current cultural and social landscape where division, conflict, and tension are the norm, one might wonder how we could be such a church. Perhaps the greatest Christian witness opportunity we currently have is to demonstrate what it looks like to be a community of human beings who, though they disagree on significant issues, still remain in ongoing relationship, loving one another. Any church who could do this would demonstrate to our world something this world is sorely lacking. Any church who could do this would also be empowered by the Holy Spirit since we cannot do this kind of loving in our own power. Perhaps God is calling us to witness to the grace and love of God in these volatile days through how we love each other. May we become the Church God calls us to be in these days.

QUESTION:

How much do we actively trust God to supply all our needs; to give us what we need for the living of our days?

PRAYER:

O God, though you love us fully as we are, we invite you to transform us into greater vessels of your grace and love during this Advent season.

PSALM 80:1-7, 17-19; MICAH 2:1-13; MATTHEW 24:15-31

MICAH 2:1-13

**WHEN EVERYTHING APPEARS LOST,
GOD'S PEOPLE KNOW BETTER**

Cultural deformation and social deconstruction are not new. The ancient Hebrews, our spiritual ancestors, rode the waves of stability and instability throughout the pages of the Old Testament. At times they were riding high, enjoying prosperous seasons of stability and peace. Then they would drift into chaos and cultural deformation leading to deportation. Surely, they despaired in those times, believing all was lost. This is when the voice of the prophets was so encouraging. They called it as they saw it, describing the Hebrews' participation in their own demise. At the same time, they reminded the people that God was not finished with them yet. God was actively working in their circumstances toward redemption and renewal. One of the purposes of Advent is to prepare us for reshaping, for transformation toward the churches God wants us to be. We are invited to live into this Advent season with openness, looking for God's appearing right among us as individuals and congregations. May we imitate our spiritual kin of old, trusting God to redeem and renew even now.

QUESTION:

How much do we actively trust God to supply all our needs?

PRAYER:

O God, though you love us fully as we are, we invite you to transform us into greater vessels of your grace and love during this Advent season.



ADVENT

WEEK 1:

HOPE

WHAT DO WE NEED TO LAY
ASIDE TO LIVE INTO THE
HOPE AND TRANSFORMATION
WE FIND IN CHRIST?

NOV 29 - DEC 5

**1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
NOVEMBER 29TH, 2020**

PSALM 80:1-7, 17-19; ZECHARIAH 13:1-9; REVELATION 14:6-13

**MARK 13:24-37 (NRSV)
RESHAPE THEME – THE CHURCH: EXPECTANT BODY OF CHRIST**

"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'"

REFLECTION: After reading this passage, I wish the writer would have written this strong exclamation in all caps for readers, "KEEP AWAKE!" In other words, this passage is telling readers (including us) to stay alert since the risen Christ may return anytime—probably when we least expect him. Just like Jesus' first advent into human time described in the birth narrative, the second advent will be unexpected as well. In the meantime, we are called to engage in God's mission of bringing the Reign of God to earth as it is in heaven. We are called to live as if Jesus could show up any moment, bringing the second and ultimate advent. Given this, what is it that keeps you awake at night? During volatile times, many of us experience interrupted sleep patterns. Our unconscious minds won't stop, with neurons firing furiously in our brains even when it's time for resting. Typically, this is an unpleasant wakefulness that plagues us during plagues. But in this passage, we are encouraged to be wakeful due to our expectations of something really good coming our way. Like young children on Christmas Eve, our expectation gives us exceptional energy, anticipating God's intervention in time and space. Sometimes interrupted sleep is a most invigorating experience.

QUESTION: What do we need to lay aside to live into the hope and transformation we find in Christ?

PRAYER CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK :

○ God, help us to have the eyes to see and ears to hear, perceiving your ongoing transformation of ourselves and our churches.

PSALM 79; MICAH 4:1-5; REVELATION 15:1-8

PSALM 79
**GOD'S CHURCH
LIVES WITH HOPE**

REFLECTION:

Don't you love the Psalms? This is one place in the Bible where humanity is on full display. The Psalmists just lay it out there, describing life as they experienced it. Psalm 79 is like a modern-day rant on social media. First there is complaining about how bad things are, followed by turning to God and demanding results: "How long do we have to put up with this, God?" The Psalmist is throwing a spiritual temper-tantrum, demanding God do something to clear up these problems! I can relate. I've had about enough of COVID-19. I find myself with a short fuse, just ready to blast somebody. Like the Psalmist, sometimes I want to blame God. After we rant and rave, our emotions settle and we get back in our right minds. God patiently waits until the temper-tantrums are done and then invites us into hope. COVID-19 cannot ultimately destroy us or God's Church. Circumstances are irritating and frustrating, yet it is also temporary. God's hope, injected deep into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, sustains and empowers us to take the long look, living for today and the future.

QUESTION:

What do we need to lay aside to live into the hope and transformation we find in Christ?

PRAYER:

O God, help us to have the eyes to see and ears to hear, perceiving your ongoing transformation of ourselves and our churches.

TUESDAY,
DECEMBER 1ST, 2020

HOPE

PSALM 79; MICAH 4:6-13; REVELATION 18:1-10

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-18 GOD'S CHURCH IS MARKED BY LOVE

REFLECTION:

God loves us totally, completely, and unconditionally just as we are. God also loves us too much to leave us just as we are. Instead, God invites us into God's mission of bringing the kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. Ultimately, God will recreate our world into a new earth that reflects God's original intent of something good. In the meantime, we are in the process of becoming the people who will be the citizens of that new commonwealth. This is the work of spiritual transformation. When we understand this spiritual dynamic, then we are more accepting of the refining process as it happens. Sometimes following Jesus makes us very uncomfortable and for very good reasons. Sometimes our churches need to let go of certain ways of being church, transforming into greater expressions of the body of Christ. When this kind of discomfort comes our way, then we can rejoice, knowing we are being reshaped toward the image of God within ourselves and our churches. Hope gifts us with sustaining power while the reshaping is in progress. Thanks be to God.

QUESTION:

What do we need to lay aside to live into the hope and transformation we find in Christ?

PRAYER:

O God, help us to have the eyes to see and ears to hear, perceiving your ongoing transformation of ourselves and our churches.

PSALM 79; MICAH 5:1-5A; LUKE 21:34-38

LUKE 21:34-38
**HOPE PREPARES US
FOR THE FUTURE****REFLECTION:**

I've had an ambivalent relationship with daily spiritual disciplines. I was taught to engage in Bible reading and prayer every day as my "Quiet Time" spiritual practice. Sometimes I would check it off on my calendar: Quiet Time accomplished today. Through experience and practice, I became much less structured and regimented in my approach but found that early training in spiritual disciplines remains part of my spiritual rhythm. I'm grateful for parents and churches who taught and encouraged my younger self to "get up early in the morning and listen to him in the temple." How about you? Some became involved in this Christian movement later in life, after habits and rhythms were formed. Others may not have been exposed to the idea of daily devotionals, discovering this for the first time through this Advent devotional guide. No matter how we come to these days, preparing ourselves for reshaping includes identifying and practicing spiritual disciplines which make room for God in our lives. Given our busyness and tendencies toward distraction, we must give ourselves to focused time with God in order to "listen to him in the temple," even when it means getting up early to do so.

QUESTION:

What do we need to lay aside to live into the hope and transformation we find in Christ?

PRAYER:

O God, help us to have the eyes to see and ears to hear, perceiving your ongoing transformation of ourselves and our churches.

THURSDAY,
DECEMBER 3RD, 2020

HOPE

PSALM 85:1-2, 8-13; HOSEA 6:1-6; THESSALONIANS 1:2-10

PSALM 85:1-2, 8-13 PEOPLE OF HOPE KNOW HOW TO WAIT

REFLECTION:

"People who wait have received a promise that allows them to wait."
--Henri Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope*.

Some Psalms are complaints or laments, while others are beacons pointing the way toward a better future. Psalm 85 paints a picture of a future time when God's people are restored. They will again be in close communion with their Maker, living in the flow of God's presence and power. This is what hope does; it empowers us to live in the present because we have hope for the future. Ultimately Christian hope tells us that God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. Therefore, we can live with ambiguity, ambivalence, and challenge in the present because of God's promises. Given this, how real and active is Christian hope in our lives? How often is our despair over the state of this world fended off because of the hope we have in Christ? Perhaps this Advent season is a time to allow hope to move from an intellectual concept to a lived spiritual reality.

QUESTION:

What do we need to lay aside to live into the hope and transformation we find in Christ?

PRAYER:

O God, help us to have the eyes to see and ears to hear,
perceiving your ongoing transformation of ourselves and our churches.

PSALM 85:1-2, 8-13; JEREMIAH 1:4-10; ACTS 11:19-26

ACTS 11:19-26
**HOPE TRANSFORMS US INTO
REFLECTIONS OF CHRIST****REFLECTION:**

What happens when hope permeates one's spirit? Well, a Barnabas is formed. Originally named Joseph, his actions were so encouraging that he was renamed Barnabas meaning "Son of Encouragement." The Jerusalem church (mainly Jews) were suspicious of what was happening in the Antioch church (mostly Gentiles) so they sent someone they trusted to check things out. Barnabas observed the grace of God active among them and rejoices. He taught them to be faithful to God and then went to Tarsus and retrieved Saul to join what was happening in Antioch. Believers lived their faith in such a way that they were called Christians--"little Christs." If ever our world needed such people of hope, it is now. During large-scale volatility, everyone is disoriented and upset. Distress is high and there is a distinct longing for the familiar even if it can't be found. When people like Barnabas come our way, we are encouraged. God is calling many of us to embody hope in this broken and hurting world this very day. Through the grace and empowerment of God, let's answer that call today.

QUESTION:

What do we need to lay aside to live into the hope and transformation we find in Christ?

PRAYER:

○ God, help us to have the eyes to see and ears to hear, perceiving your ongoing transformation of ourselves and our churches.

SATURDAY,
DECEMBER 5TH, 2020

HOPE

PSALM 85:1-2, 8-13; EZEKIEL 36:24-28; MARK 11:27-33

EZEKIEL 36:24-28 WE DON'T HAVE TO WORK UP HOPE

REFLECTION:

"Put on your game face." There are times when we have to present ourselves in a way which does not match our internal state. We have to show up for work or care for struggling or sick family members, though we would rather be doing something else. Sometimes people will tell us to "fake it until you make it," pretending to be what we are not until we live into our intentions. Although there is some truth in this approach, when it comes to hope, we don't have to work it up. We cannot manufacture real hope on our own. Hope for Christ-followers is a gift from God. We have to cooperate and participate with God to receive and live into this gift. Our role is not to create but to receive hope. If you are working to produce hope, just stop. Open yourself to God's good gifts, trusting God to give you hope as you need it. Let us trust the promise of God from prophet Ezekiel: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (v. 26)

QUESTION:

What do we need to lay aside to live into the hope and transformation we find in Christ?

PRAYER:

O God, help us to have the eyes to see and ears to hear, perceiving your ongoing transformation of ourselves and our churches.



ADVENT

WEEK 2:

PEACE

WHAT DOES AN
EMPOWERED PEACE
LOOK LIKE?

DEC 6 - 12



**2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
DECEMBER 6TH, 2020**

PSALM 80:1-7, 17-19; ZECHARIAH 13:1-9; REVELATION 14:6-13

MARK 1:1-8 (NRSV)

RESHAPE THEME:

THE CHURCH: EMPOWERED BODY OF CHRIST

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

*"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:*

'Prepare the way of the Lord make his paths straight,'"

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

REFLECTION: Beginning today, we consider the paradoxical tension between peace and power. John the Baptist appeared not whispering quietly but crying out in what we assume was a loud shout. His cries no doubt disrupted the lives of people in both the rural areas and the cities. Seemingly, his voice and his message were powerful enough to draw people away from their everyday routines and down to the riverside. He proclaimed with power and pointed toward the One who was even more powerful – One we would come to know as the Prince of Peace. Consider the paradox in these phrases: powerful peace and peaceful power. What images and emotions surface as you reflect on these ideas? How can the power of God's peace transform our individual lives, our church, and our community?

QUESTION: What does an empowered peace look like?

PRAYER CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK:

God, nurture the power of peace in my life today so that my church
and my community might be places of peace.

PSALM 27; ISAIAH 26:7-15; ACTS 2:37-42

PSALM 27
EMPOWERMENT
OVERCOMES FEAR

REFLECTION:

If ever we could use some peace, now is the time. When this year dawned, we never imagined being held hostage by a virus. An invisible enemy capable of infecting and killing millions is the stuff of science fiction not reality, or so we thought. Seeing cities and hospitals under siege, watching our loved ones grow ill and die, sheltering in our homes for months, struggling for connection without physical proximity, and fighting over which policies and preventions are efficacious have left us anxious and depressed. According to the CDC COVID-19 National Health Survey, anxiety and depressive disorder symptoms are being reported at three times the level of 2019's survey. While it would be easy to give in to our fears, the Psalmist's declaration can be ours in these uncertain days. The Lord is our Light and our Salvation. The Lord is the Stronghold of our lives. Whom shall we fear, indeed? We become an empowered people of peace by trusting implicitly in the strength of the Lord.

QUESTION:

What does an empowered peace look like?

PRAYER:

God, nurture the power of peace in my life today so that my church and my community might be places of peace.

TUESDAY,
DECEMBER 8TH, 2020

PEACE

PSALM 27; ISAIAH 4:2-6; ACTS 11:1-18

PSALM 27
**EMPOWERMENT
OFFERS ASSURANCE**

REFLECTION:

In turbulent times the Psalms can be a source of great comfort and assurance. Where else in all of scripture's witness can we find the depth and breadth of the human experience? The ancient writers somehow grasp our anxieties and express our emotions. What a gift to know that we are not alone and that others before us have known trouble, distress, and loneliness. Not only do we find human companionship here, but we are also reassured of God's nearness. When we seek the divine presence and gaze on the divine beauty, we find that in days of trouble there is a place of safety and shelter. No matter what swirls around us, makes the news cycle, or impacts us personally, we can be confident that the Lord will receive us. Such confidence is a living witness to the power of peace. We become an empowered people of peace by faithfully seeking and dwelling in the Lord's presence.

QUESTION:

What does an empowered peace look like?

PRAYER:

God, nurture the power of peace in my life today so that my church and my community might be places of peace.

PSALM 27; MALACHI 2:10-3:1; LUKE 1:5-17

MALACHI 2:10-3:1 EMPOWERMENT CREATES CLARITY

REFLECTION:

Being a prophet of God was no easy gig, and we get a sense of this challenging vocation reading the words of Malachi today. Imagine for a moment that you have the gift of insight into a particular situation or conflict in your community, that you have heard God's whisper in your heart to speak wisdom into that situation, and that by speaking you would undoubtedly lose friends and family members who are affected. The gift of prophecy – not the ability to predict the future but the gift of insight and wisdom into current events – is crucial in churches and in communities. Very often we don't like what we hear – consider the message Malachi relayed to Judah, but we need to listen. God is still speaking through prophets, individuals courageous enough call out our collective sinfulness and beckon us to return to God's ways, if we have ears to hear. We become an empowered people of peace by hearing and listening to the challenging voices of God's prophets in our midst.

QUESTION:

What does an empowered peace look like?

PRAYER:

God, nurture the power of peace in my life today so that my church and my community might be places of peace.

THURSDAY,
DECEMBER 10TH, 2020

PEACE

PSALM 126; HABAKKUK 2:1-5; PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11 EMPOWERMENT FOSTERS PERSEVERANCE

REFLECTION:

Paul's letter to the Philippians references peace elsewhere but not in today's text selection. So, we must dig a little deeper and not simply be content to scratch the surface or settle for a plain reading. This passage insists that the only thing worth having, knowing, and gaining is Christ. All else is loss or even garbage. To have, know, and gain the Prince of Peace and be found in him necessitates participation in his sufferings and becoming like him in his death. It is so unnatural for us to think this way, yet we must. The only way to sure and true peace is through suffering. Avoiding anguish will never bring us the peace that surpasses understanding because it does not unite us with Christ. Instead of avoidance, let us press on even in suffering toward the goal of attaining Christ. We become an empowered people of peace by participating in Christ's sufferings, especially in identifying with the marginalized, so that we might know the power of his resurrection.

QUESTION:

What does an empowered peace look like?

PRAYER:

God, nurture the power of peace in my life today so that my church and my community might be places of peace.

PSALM 126; HABAKKUK 3:2-6; PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16

PHILIPPIANS 4:12-16
EMPOWERMENT
GIVES HOPE**REFLECTION:**

Again, Paul does not reference peace in today's short selection from Philippians. However, he does articulate very clearly what is necessary for attaining the surpassing peace of Christ. To know this kind of deep and abiding peace, we must not dwell in the past. Some of us are exceedingly good at replaying yesterday's failures and rehashing last year's mistakes. Such rumination robs today of its opportunities and tomorrow of its possibilities. Reliving the past, especially focused on our shortcomings, will not create a new and different future. There is a saying that goes, "Your car's windshield is larger than the rearview mirror for a reason." To arrive at the goal of obtaining Christ, we strain forward rather than look back. We become an empowered people of peace by forgetting that which has passed and pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God is calling us heavenward in Christ Jesus.

QUESTION:

What does an empowered peace look like?

PRAYER:

God, nurture the power of peace in my life today so that my church and my community might be places of peace.

SATURDAY,
DECEMBER 12TH, 2020

PEACE

PSALM 126; HABAKKUK 3:13-19; MATTHEW 21:28-32

PSALM 126
**EMPOWERMENT
GIVES BIRTH TO JOY**

REFLECTION:

The Psalmist is familiar with our topics of the last couple days. S/he doesn't specifically mention peace but certainly implies it even as we begin to transition into the joy of next week. The language of the song does not speak of suffering necessarily or even the human tendency to dwell on the past. But we can infer that a people asking the Lord for their fortunes to be restored has been decimated and defeated. They know what it means to suffer and weep. Though they go out with tears, they return with songs of joy. This is a song of a people that have participated in God's suffering and experienced the kind of resurrection that only God brings. No wonder they're joyful. They've been raised from the dead, and that kind of boundless joy brings with its deep peace. We become an empowered people of peace by acknowledging the Lord as the ultimate source of life and joy.

QUESTION:

What does an empowered peace look like?

PRAYER:

God, nurture the power of peace in my life today so that my church and my community might be places of peace.



ADVENT

WEEK 3:

JOY

WHERE DO YOU
FIND JOY IN YOUR LIFE
IN SERVING OTHERS?

DEC 13 - 19

**3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
DECEMBER 13TH, 2020**

PSALM 80:1-7, 17-19; ZECHARIAH 13:1-9; REVELATION 14:6-13

JOHN 1:6-8, JOHN 1:19-28 (NRSV)

RESHAPE THEME:

THE CHURCH: SERVANT BODY OF CHRIST

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light."

"This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'"

He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them,

"I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

REFLECTION: Beginning today, we see how God has provided servant leaders who joyfully prepared the way for Christ. When John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness with his joyous message, the people immediately thought of those identified in the Hebrew Bible who were expected to prepare the way for Messiah's coming. John was only one of the servants that God provided in the past. How can we learn from those servants such as Moses, Elijah, and others to be a servant people today?

QUESTION: Where do you find joy in your life in serving others?

PRAYER CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK:

God, help me to find a way to bring joy to another person today.

PSALM 125; KINGS 18:1-18; EPHESIANS 6:10-17

EPHESIANS 6:10-17
**A SERVANT CHURCH
FINDS JOY IN GOD'S PROTECTION**

REFLECTION:

The depiction of a warrior's armor may seem a bit archaic to us today. Undoubtedly, the writer of the epistle was encouraging hearers to take every opportunity to prepare themselves for the challenges that come in a volatile world. When we think of the Christ child, we must remember his vulnerability. This hope for the world was embedded in a tiny, easily harmed human being. In God's wisdom, however, protection had been provided for him through Mary and Joseph--a woman and man who were willing to risk all because they believed that God was at work. They found joy in bearing and nurturing Jesus. They provided the protection and guidance he needed. How do you see God at work today in your life? Is God calling you to serve the vulnerable, the marginalized? How do you see God at work in the life of your church? Who are the vulnerable and marginalized in your community that you as a fellowship might serve? Pray for God's protection during these days of challenge.

QUESTION:

Where do you find joy in your life in serving others?

PRAYER:

God, help me to find a way to bring joy to another person today.

TUESDAY,
DECEMBER 15TH, 2020

JOY

PSALM 125; 2 KINGS 2:9-22; ACTS 3:17-4:4

ACTS 3:17-4:4
**A SERVANT CHURCH
FINDS JOY IN GOD'S PERSISTENCE**

REFLECTION:

The people of Israel were given a gift, but it was not one they were to keep to themselves but something to share with all people. This is the call and challenge of God: "He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'" Even so, descendants of Abraham did not always see themselves as those called to serve. They often fell into the default position of simply defending and protecting what God have given them. Even so, God did not give up on them but continued to call out a people who would bless the entire world. The church today is called to fulfill that mission given to the people of Abraham, to be a missionary people of a missional God. Our banner is the servant's towel, and tool is the wash basin. These are the instruments of true joy. How might you yield to God's leadership today in order to serve others? How might your church yield itself to this high calling?

QUESTION:

Where do you find joy in your life in serving others?

PRAYER:

God, help me to find a way to bring joy to another person today.

PSALM 125; MALACHI 3:16-4:6; MARK 9:9-13

MARK 9:9-13
**A SERVANT CHURCH
FINDS JOY IN GOD'S PREPARATION**

REFLECTION:

When we were children, it often seemed that Christmas would never come. As adults, it seems to come around too quickly. I find myself relishing each day of Advent because I understand it is a time of preparation and anticipation. These are days of celebrating each Sunday in worship, preparing to host guests in our home, and selecting just the right gifts for family and friends. Israel had long been involved in a process of preparation, but many in their number had overlooked the signposts along the way, the events anticipating the coming of Messiah. In so doing, they missed the joy of anticipation and service. As part of the Body of Christ, we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Messiah who has come, but we also prepare for the emergence of the Reign of God. What is our role in this preparation for celebrating the coming of Messiah? How do we focus our servanthood to bring in God's Reign? Where do you find joy in anticipating God's love being expressed in today's world?

QUESTION:

Where do you find joy in your life in serving others?

PRAYER:

God, help me to find a way to bring joy to another person today.

THURSDAY,
DECEMBER 17TH, 2020

JOY

PSALM 89:1-4, 2 SAMUEL 6:1-11; HEBREWS 1:1-4

HEBREWS 1:1-4
**A SERVANT CHURCH
FINDS JOY IN GOD'S PROVISION**

REFLECTION:

At this time of the year, we often work off checklists. Some of those are lists of gifts to buy or things to bake. It may be a list of people to visit or events to attend. Although it may once have been a Christmas card list, today it might be an e-mail list of those to whom we send greetings. We use such lists because we want to make sure that we don't forget anything important. We want to make sure that we have adequately provided for family, friends, and colleagues. We don't want to be caught short but to make sure everyone has proper provision. In anticipation of the coming of Messiah, God made provision so that, at just the right time, Christ might be born. God's ultimate provision is that we might renew our fellowship with God through the Son. Given God's abundant provision, how do we provide for the ministries of the church? Do we invest our time, talents, and finances grudgingly or generously? As we look toward a new year, what changes might be in order?

QUESTION:

Where do you find joy in your life in serving others?

PRAYER:

God, help me to find a way to bring joy to another person today.

PSALM 89:1-4, 2 SAMUEL 6:12-19; HEBREWS 1:5-14

HEBREWS 1:5-14

A SERVANT CHURCH FINDS JOY IN GOD'S PRESENCE

REFLECTION:

In the middle of Advent and preparation for Messiah's birth, we think back to previous years and of those with whom we have celebrated this time. This is a time we spend with family, reconnect with old friends, and worship with fellow Christians. As we reflect on the past, however, we remember those who are no longer with us--parents, siblings, children and friends. Perhaps this is your first year without a particular loved one at your table. In this passage, a key phrase is "those who will inherit salvation." The phrase speaks to us of God's presence both with those who today are heirs of God's salvation but also of those who have gone from our midst who were and are heirs of that same salvation. As heirs, all of us are in the presence of God and share a mutual blessing. God is ever present and sustaining. When we as individuals and as part of the church step up and serve, God is present with us as well. Being an heir is both a blessing and a responsibility. We labor not only in our own strength but in that of the One who has provided our salvation. If this is true, what fears can we set aside today as we dwell in the presence of the God of our salvation?

QUESTION:

Where do you find joy in your life in serving others?

PRAYER:

God, help me to find a way to bring joy to another person today.

SATURDAY,
DECEMBER 19TH, 2020

JOY

PSALM 89:1-4, 19-26; JUDGES 13:2-24; JOHN 7:40-52

JOHN 7:40-52
**A SERVANT CHURCH
FINDS JOY IN GOD'S PERSPECTIVE**

REFLECTION:

Sometimes we fail to see what is right in front of us. Our eyes are blind to the reality before us. After years of anticipation, God had delivered on God's promise and sent the Messiah, but he did not fit the expectations of many. He did the works of proclamation, healing, encouraging, and loving, but this was not sufficient for some. Their eyes had been blinded by other presuppositions, so they just could not see the truth. In so doing, they missed the joy provided for them. As the servant people of God, the church is challenged to give up its expectations and adopt those of God. What God sees as qualifications for success is very different from the measures we have acquired over the years. If we are to find true joy in serving God, we must take on the perspective of God, trying to see the world and those in it with God's eyes. Jesus did this. He saw need, and he met it. He saw hurt, and he healed. He saw loneliness, and he responded in love. There is so much left undone, but we fail to see it. Are you ready to find joy in service? Then you must take on the perspective of God. Pray for new eyes to see as well as hands and heart to respond.

QUESTION:

Where do you find joy in your life in serving others?

PRAYER:

God, help me to find a way to bring joy to another person today.



ADVENT

WEEK 4:

LOVE

WHAT DOES IT
MEAN TO BE
BELOVED?

DEC 20 - 26

**4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
DECEMBER 20TH, 2020**

LUKE 1:26-38 (NRSV)

RESHAPE THEME:

: THE CHURCH: BELOVED BODY OF CHRIST

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her."

REFLECTION: Seemingly, Mary wasn't anybody special – just an ordinary young woman. She wasn't rich or famous or royal. And yet, the angel greets her with news that she is favored by God. In other words, she is beloved. Of all the people in the world, Mary received this amazing message not simply as a matter of abstract religious teaching; that is, she didn't just learn it in Hebrew School. She learned this good news experientially and heard it voiced by another. Within these verses we witness the angel noticing Mary, calling her by name, and nurturing her belovedness. Likely, this experience gave her the confidence, courage, and faith to trust in the impossible. Something profound happens in being noticed, named, and nurtured ourselves and in offering it to others. Suddenly, everything seems more possible and more hopeful and more loving. How can you begin to notice, name, and nurture the belovedness of others? How might your own circles of influence become increasingly hopeful and loving through this practice?

QUESTION: What does it mean to be beloved?

PRAYER CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK:

God, root me deeply in your love that I may bear the good news of belovedness to others in my church and my community.

LUKE 1:46B-55; 1 SAMUEL 1:1-18; HEBREWS 9:1-14**LUKE 1:46B-55
LOVE REJOICES****REFLECTION:**

Mary may not have been noticed by anyone except God, but we can't help marveling at her year after year as we read the story of her disrupted life and unplanned pregnancy. Her responses seem superhuman and altogether beyond our faith's capacity. Surely, the gospel has been sanitized, and she actually got scared or angry. Surely, she cried or hesitated. Maybe what we read is the whole story. Or maybe some of the factual details were not recorded. Either way, what we read is the truest truth. Whether our lives are going as we hoped, or we face difficulties beyond our imaginations, the surest way through every circumstance is by basking in God's love and returning that love in praise. Mary's song may, in fact, be her expression of deep, unwavering faith, or it may reflect her clinging in desperation to the little faith she has left. We have a role model in any case, and like her we can praise God when our own faith is both big and small. We become the beloved Body of Christ as we love God in return – glorifying and rejoicing in God.

QUESTION:

What does it mean to be beloved?

PRAYER:

God, root me deeply in your love that I may bear the good news of belovedness to others in my church and my community.

TUESDAY,
DECEMBER 22ND, 2020

LOVE

LUKE 1:46B-55; 1 SAMUEL 1:19-28; HEBREWS 8:1-13

LUKE 1:46B-55 LOVE GIVES THANKS

REFLECTION:

Mary is still singing today. She acknowledges that God has done great things for her. It is a good reminder to count our blessings. Let's take a moment in these last few days before Christmas to pause for a gratitude break. 2020 has been an unprecedented year. We have lost so much and so many. Our lives have changed in drastic ways that we may not appreciate. All true. However, much remains. In what ways have you experienced God's mercy over the last year? Close your eyes for a moment and consider some of the good gifts that this strange season has afforded. Mary's song proclaims that God's mercy extends from generation to generation and that God performs mighty deeds. These truths remain today. God is still merciful. God is still performing mighty deeds. God is still God. Mary sang in an unprecedented season of her life, and we can sing this year, too. We become the beloved Body of Christ as we respond to God's mercy and acknowledge God's good gifts.

QUESTION:

What does it mean to be beloved?

PRAYER:

God, root me deeply in your love that I may bear the good news of belovedness to others in my church and my community.

LUKE 1:46B-55; 1 SAMUEL 2:1-10; MARK 11:1-11

LUKE 1:46B-55 LOVE IS COMPASSIONATE

REFLECTION:

Today we reflect on Mary's song for one last time. In the latter verses she paints a picture of God's justice and an upside-down world. We see the proud scattered. We read of rulers brought down from their thrones and the humble being lifted up. We find the hungry filled with good things and the rich sent away empty. Mary previews the ministry of Jesus even as she points backward to the ancient prophets. Her prophetic song makes clear the priorities of God and the mission of God. If showing mercy, lifting the humble, and filling the hungry are important to God, then they must also be important to us. To whom are we being called to show greater mercy? Who are we being called to lift up? Who are we being called to nourish and nurture? We become the beloved Body of Christ as we prioritize God's priorities and mission in our own lives of faith and service.

QUESTION:

What does it mean to be beloved?

PRAYER:

God, root me deeply in your love that I may bear the good news of belovedness to others in my church and my community.

THURSDAY,
DECEMBER 24TH, 2020

LOVE

CHRISTMAS EVE

LUKE 2:1-14, 15-20
LOVE SACRIFICES

REFLECTION:

And the time came for her to deliver the child. Without the text going into detail, we know that birth is messy, painful, hard work. At the same time, birth is miraculous, beautiful, and wonderful. Between the mess and the miracle, new life emerges – sometimes quickly sometimes slowly. Whether fast or slow, birthing is intense and requires mother and baby to labor together. This is an apt metaphor for reflecting on our spiritual growth as we are born again into God's realm. For us to grow in Christlikeness we must cooperate with God in the messy, painful work of transformation, and we can trust that God will make something beautiful of us and our lives in due time. That any of us might grow to resemble Christ is indeed a wonder, a miracle, and a gift of God. We become the beloved Body of Christ by enduring the birth pains and welcoming the transformation as Christ is born into our lives.

QUESTION:

What does it mean to be beloved?

PRAYER:

God, root me deeply in your love that I may bear the good news of belovedness to others in my church and my community.

CHRISTMAS DAY**LUKE 2:1-7, 8-20
LOVE EMBRACES****REFLECTION:**

After the birth of baby Jesus, we read of the first witnesses. The most unlikely recipients of the good news were dirty, smelly shepherds living out among their sheep. Can anyone say, "hand sanitizer"? Seriously, though, these were individuals with no social status and no respect in the community. They are a perfect example of "lifting up the humble" in Mary's song, and they remind us of God's priorities. The good news of God's love and God's willingness to "put on flesh and dwell among us" was not delivered to the educated, the powerful, the wealthy, the elected, the documented, the religious, or the influencers. The gift of witnessing God's arrival in the world was given to those on the margins, and their lives became testimonies to the good news. They were changed by what they received, and they shared it with others. We become the beloved Body of Christ by living as witnesses and recipients of God's good news of peace and joy.

QUESTION:

What does it mean to be beloved?

PRAYER:

God, root me deeply in your love that I may bear the good news of belovedness to others in my church and my community.

PSALM 148; JEREMIAH 26:1-9, 12-15; ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60

JEREMIAH 26:1-9; ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60
LOVE CONFRONTS

REFLECTION:

Today's readings from Jeremiah and Acts offer another perspective of witness, and the images in these texts are unsettling to say the least. One possible outcome of testifying to our own experience with God is death. There must be a mistake. Why are these texts part of the Christmas story? That is a hard question to answer, but we've gotten one clue from John who told us, "the Light came into the world but the world received him not." The good news of Jesus Christ will not be received as good news by everyone to whom we testify. We know this to be true, so we can take a lesson from Mary's example and from the Psalmist. Beyond that which is right in front of our faces lies the truest reality. The entire universe praises God. At God's command everything has been created and established. Let God be exalted by all creatures and humanity. God's splendor is above the earth and heavens. No matter how our witness is received or what happens to us, these are eternal truths that will outlive our mortal bodies and our testimony. We become the beloved Body of Christ as we learn to see beyond the visible realities of this world and into the eternal truths of God.

QUESTION:

What does it mean to be beloved?

PRAYER:

God, root me deeply in your love that I may bear the good news of belovedness to others in my church and my community.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey knit beanie, a dark blue parka, and a backpack, stands in a snowy forest. She is looking upwards and to the right. A white dog, possibly a husky, stands next to her, also looking in the same direction. The background is filled with snow-covered evergreen trees. In the top right corner, there is a circular graphic containing five yellow candles of varying heights on blue bases.

CHRISTMASTIDE

HOW DOES YOUR
FAITH
EMPOWER YOU TO
ACT?

DEC 27 - JAN 2

WEEK 5
DECEMBER 27TH, 2020

LUKE 2:1-14 (NRSV)

RESHAPE THEME:

THE CHURCH: BLESSED COMMUNITY

"In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

REFLECTION: It is not over but just beginning. God became part of our community through God's Son and continues to abide with us through the Holy Spirit. In so doing, God empowers us to do new and exciting things.

QUESTION: How does your faith empower you to act?

PRAYER CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK:

God, empower me to act and to encourage others to act faithfully.

PSALM 148; JEREMIAH 31:15-17; MATTHEW 2:13-18

MATTHEW 2:13-18 EMPOWERED TO ACT

REFLECTION:

From the joy of Christmas we are plunged into tragedy. Out of fear, Herod ordered the deaths of many young children--a mindless, cruel act. Joseph, however, has been warned to protect his family and flee to Egypt. In volatile times, we can act out of fear or faith. Herod chose the way of fear because he risked losing his position and status. His paranoia overcame his rationality. Joseph chose faith, becoming the servant and protector of the Messiah. When uncertain times come upon us, how do we respond? Certainly, there is much to fear, but fear drags us into a downward spiral that only ends in despair. God's way is one of faith, calling God's people to trust, obey, and serve. This is the way of hope and trust. How do you respond to times of stress? How is your church responding to the challenges of a volatile world?

QUESTION:

How does your faith empower you to act?

PRAYER:

God, empower me to act and to encourage others to act faithfully.

TUESDAY,
DECEMBER 29TH, 2020

CHRISTMASTIDE

PSALM 148; ISAIAH 49:5-15; MATTHEW 12:46-50

MATTHEW 12:46-50
EMPOWERED TO LOVE

REFLECTION:

This is a difficult passage for many of us to follow. At first reading, Jesus' statement seems rather abrupt. Is Jesus turning his back on his family? The truth goes much deeper. In this teaching, Jesus is pointing out that he is doing something new. He is creating a new family, one based on faith. He says, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (v. 50) We are born into a biological family, and we are always part of them. In some cases, we chose to become part of another family through association or marriage or we are chosen through adoption. The assertion of Jesus here is that he is instituting a new family--what we call the church--based on association and choice and motivated by faith. Just as all families should be, this new family is moved by love that empowers and strengthens us.

QUESTION:

How does your faith empower you to act?

PRAYER:

God, empower me to act and to encourage others to act faithfully.

PSALM 148; PROVERBS 9:1-12; 2 PETER 3:8-13

2 PETER 3:8-13 EMPOWERED TO LIVE

REFLECTION:

The writer does not sugarcoat his declaration that our present world will end at some point. It will be a cataclysmic event. The writer's warning about the end times could be upsetting, but his point is to encourage believers. He asks the question, "What kind of people ought you to be?" (v. 11). Rather than something to be dreaded, he calls his hearers to make the most of each day. How would you respond if someone were to ask you, "If you knew this were the last day of your life, how would you live it?" What is to keep us from living each day in such a way as to affirm our core beliefs and values? We are empowered to make the most of each day, loving God and our neighbor. This is living life to its fullest.

QUESTION:

How does your faith empower you to act?

PRAYER:

God, empower me to act and to encourage others to act faithfully

THURSDAY,
DECEMBER 31ST, 2020

CHRISTMASTIDE

PSALM 148; 1 KINGS 3:5-14; JOHN 8:12-19

JOHN 8:12-19
EMPOWERED TO WITNESS

REFLECTION:

Christian writer Leonard Ravenhill said, "A person with an experience is never at the mercy of a person with an argument." As a believer in Christ, you have your own unique story to tell. You know how God has worked in your own life, and it is a story only you can tell. We are inspired and encouraged when we share with one another our experiences with God. Your testimony may not be earthshaking, but it is yours. Jesus shared out of who he was and sets the example for us. How can you find ways to share your own story with others? This is your witness.

QUESTION:

How does your faith empower you to act?

PRAYER:

God, empower me to act and to encourage others to act faithfully.

NEW YEAR'S DAY**MATTHEW 25:31-46
EMPOWERED TO CARE****REFLECTION:**

What a wonderful passage to challenge us as we begin a new year! "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" (v. 40) This teaching of Jesus provides a mandate for us to reassess our priorities and to especially consider our care for the marginalized around us. We act on this mandate from personal, contextual, and communal perspectives. First, consider what has God particularly gifted you to do? What experiences, gifts, and passion do you bring to caring for the marginalized? Second, who are the marginalized in your community? What group outside your church is most in need of your help? Third, who can partner with you in ministry--family, fellow church members, friends?

QUESTION:

How does your faith empower you to act?

PRAYER:

God, empower me to act and to encourage others to act faithfully.

SATURDAY,
JANUARY 2ND, 2021

CHRISTMASTIDE

LUKE 1:46B-55; 1 SAMUEL 1:19-28; HEBREWS 8:1-13

JAMES 3:13-8
EMPOWERED WITH WISDOM

REFLECTION:

Does it surprise you that not all acts of service are motivated by love? Certainly, it is laudatory to "do the right thing" but is it done for right reason? Not all acts of service have the proper motivation at their foundation. James states clearly that there are two types of wisdom or motivation behind our service, but only one provides blessing and results in long term results. He encourages us to pursue "deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." (v. 13) During his ministry, Jesus often confronted those who did good works just to be seen and praised by others (Matthew 23:5) and condemned their hypocrisy. The wisdom or motivation "that comes from above" (v. 17) is joyful and produces peace, a peace that endures.

QUESTION:

How does your faith empower you to act?

PRAYER:

God, empower me to act and to encourage others to act faithfully.

2ND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY
JANUARY 3RD, 2021

JOHN 1:10-18 (NRSV)

"He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

REFLECTION: Through Christ, we have been called into a new community, one that continues and builds upon His ministry. He walks with us in the daily race of life.



AUTHOR BIOS



Irrel Harrison is Coaching Coordinator for Pinnacle Leadership Associates that recently launched Summit Coach Training and also Supplemental Associate Professor of Missional Theology at Central Seminary, Shawnee, Kansas. He is the author of *For Such a Time as This* and *The Coaching Leader: Coaching Groups and Teams* as well as co-author of *Disciple Development Coaching* and *Creating a Rule of Life*. He and his wife, Rita, live in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where they are active members of First Baptist Church.



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Mark Tidsworth curiously explores the intersection of faith, church, and 21st century living having served over the years as a pastor, new church developer, interim pastor, renewal pastor, therapist, nonprofit director, business owner, leadership coach, congregational consultant, leadership trainer, author, and founder of Pinnacle Leadership Associates. He is an ecumenical Christian minister ordained in the Baptist tradition and a frequent presenter in lay leadership team retreats, clergy gatherings, and denominational gatherings.



Jessica Chadwick Williams is an American Baptist minister currently serving as Registrar, International Student Officer, & Retention Coordinator, as well as the Data Analyst at Central Seminary. She is pursuing a PhD in Adult Learning and Leadership with emphases in Social Justice Education and Qualitative Research Methods through Kansas State University. Additionally, she is a leader with the Kansas Poor People's Campaign, the Reading the Bible with the Poor Collective, and Freedom Church of the Poor.

INTRODUCTION TO WORSHIP RESOURCES

These resources for Advent worship planning are designed to assist pastors and worship leaders in designing Advent worship in connection to the theme of RESHAPING CHURCH. In this season we wait in hopeful expectation, and we act in prayerful preparation for the birth of the Christ-child who incarnates hope, peace, joy, and love. And so, we pray that over these weeks your congregation might wait in hopeful expectation and act in prayerful preparation for the season of new birth, of reshaping, that is emerging.

The resources that follow are suggestions to incorporate RESHAPING CHURCH into your congregation's Advent worship experiences. Knowing that each church context is different, in style, in denomination, and in how worship looks in these days, we offer suggestions in these Appendices which can be adapted as needed for your congregation's worship experience. Each of the prayer suggestions integrate the weekly Advent and RESHAPING CHURCH themes. The other offerings provided for each week are a compilation of readings and musical selections that complement the Advent and RESHAPING CHURCH themes.

Finally, additional resources may be found as follows: [The Work of the People](#) (worship videos), [Revised Common Lectionary](#) (artwork, prayers, worship slides), and [Re:worship](#) (prayers). All music is subject to copyright; to publish the lyrics or to use them in an online worship setting, churches must pursue licenses (CCLI or [Onelicense.net](#)) or request permission from the publishers. Litanies and prayers unattributed to other works or authors were written by Jessica C. Williams; permission is hereby granted for congregational use.

ADVENT 1: NOVEMBER 29, 2020 - HOPE

RESHAPE THEME: THE CHURCH--EXPECTANT BODY OF CHRIST

Gospel readings: Mark 13:24-37 (NRSV)

Even in the most volatile times, we anticipate God's provision for us.

• Prayer Suggestions

• Call to Worship

One: Even in the most volatile times,

Many: we anticipate God's provision for us.

One: While there is much we do not know,

Many: and much we do not understand,

One: we trust and hope in the promises

Many: that God will never leave us or forsake us

One: and we wait in prayerful expectation,

All: as we worship the One who is, was, and is to come!

• Advent Candle Lighting

• Read Isaiah 64:1-9

• Say: Today we light the candle of hope. (light purple candle)

• Sing verse 1 and refrain of O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

• Benediction – Adapted from the prayers of Thomas Merton

• Our Lord God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead. We can not know for certain where it will end. Yet you remind us that we do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. So help us to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them, as the expectant body of Christ, with hope. Amen.

• Music Suggestions

• [In the Bleak Midwinter](#)

• [God, You Alone Know What You Planned](#)

• Tune: It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

• Lyrics: © 2009 Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

• [Hope for Everyone](#) by Matt Maher

• [Help from Heaven](#) by Matt Redman

• Other Reading Suggestions

• "[Blessing for Hope](#)" from [The Care for Sorrow](#) © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com.

ADVENT 2: DECEMBER 6, 2020 - PEACE

RESHAPE THEME: THE CHURCH - EMPOWERED BODY OF CHRIST

Gospel reading: Mark 1:1-8 (NRSV)

God provides a way forward for God's people.

• Prayer Suggestions

• Call to Worship

One: In this volatile world of violence, injustice, and pandemic,

Many: it can be difficult to find peace.

One: Yet we trust in the promise

Many: That God provides a way forward for God's people.

One: In that promise we find the peace that passes all understanding.

All: Let us worship the Prince of Peace!

• Advent Candle Lighting

• Read Isaiah 40:1-11

• Say: Today we light the candle of peace. (light purple candle)

• Say: Sing verse 2 and refrain of O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

• Benediction - Adapted from the prayers of Thomas Merton

• Our Lord God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Yet you remind us that we do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. So help us to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them, as the empowered body of Christ, with peace. Amen.

• Music Suggestions

• [When John the Baptist Preached](#)

• Tune: The Snow Lay on the Ground

• Lyrics: © 2010 Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

• [Peace Has Come](#) by Hillsong

• Other Reading Suggestions

• [Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem](#) by Maya Angelou

ADVENT 3: DECEMBER 13, 2020 - JOY

RESHAPE THEME: THE CHURCH - SERVANT BODY OF CHRIST

Gospel readings: John 1:6-8, John 1:19-28 (NRSV)

We serve by understanding and responding to God's call.

• **Prayer Suggestions**

• Call to Worship

One: It is during times of volatility and strife

Many: that the world most needs the love of God.

One: As the body of Christ we are called to be a light in the world.

Many: We serve by understanding and responding to God's call.

One: Let us worship the One who calls us to serve!

All: With joy, we worship our God!

• Advent Candle Lighting

• Read Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

• Say: Today we light the candle of joy. (light pink candle)

• Sing verse 3 and refrain of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

• Benediction - Adapted from the prayers of Thomas Merton

• Our Lord God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Yet you remind us that we do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. So help us to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them, as the servant body of Christ, with joy. Amen.

• **Music Suggestions**

• [Come Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)

• [We Can't Sit on Fences](#)

• Tune: Let All Things Now Living

• Lyrics: © 2017 Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

• **Other Reading Suggestions**

• [For Joy](#) © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com.

ADVENT 4: DECEMBER 20, 2020 - LOVE

RESHAPE THEME: THE CHURCH - BELOVED BODY OF CHRIST

Gospel reading: Luke 1:26-38 (NRSV)

We are motivated by love of God to respond to God's call.

- **Prayer Suggestions**

- Call to Worship

One: With great longing and expectation,

Many: We wait for coming celebration of the birth of Jesus,

One: Our Savior who incarnated the ultimate love of God.

Many: As the Beloved Body of Christ,

One: we, too, embody the love of God.

Many: We are motivated by love of God to respond to God's call.

One: Let us worship our God,

All: with hope, peace, joy, and love!

- Advent Candle Lighting

- Read Luke 1:47-55

- Say: Today we light the candle of love. (light last purple candle)

- Sing verse 4 and refrain of O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

- Benediction - Adapted from the prayers of Thomas Merton

- Our Lord God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Yet you remind us that we do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. So help us to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them, as the beloved body of Christ, with love. Amen.

- **Music Suggestions**

- [Love Divine, All Loves Excelling](#)

- [O Come, O Come Emmanuel](#)

- [Love Came Down](#) by Kim Walker-Smith

- **Other Reading Suggestions**

- [Earth Quote](#) by John Soos

