

Introduction

As we inaugurate another liturgical year, we begin with the season of Advent. To assist our spiritual engagement with the weeks of Advent and Christmas Day, we'll use a version of the 9th century Latin hymn, "Creator of the Stars of Night." The verses of this hymn will provide a focus for our prayerful meditations as we highlight a new verse each week and pair that with scripture and prompts for reflection.

This is a busy time of year for us all. May you embrace the freedom in letting go of any pressure or prescribed way to journey through Advent. Instead, commit to a consistent meeting with God as you consider, again, your greatest need and His response. Welcome the joy, wonder, and mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus as we hold suffering, promise, faith, and hope together.

May the Spirit of God guide you into a renewed and ever-deepening love for Jesus during these weeks.



Advent, Week 1 | Sharing our Suffering

Creator of the Stars of Night | Verse 1

*Creator of the stars of night,
your people's everlasting light,
O Christ, Redeemer of us all,
we pray you, hear us when we call.*

Advent is a season of subdued anticipation in which we quiet our spirits to reflect, again, on our lives and God's involvement in them. Indeed, our lives are difficult. It's been that way since sin entered this world through misplaced desire and disobedience. Yet rather than leaving us to ourselves, God chose to be with us. He has not left us alone. As Nicholas Wolterstorff said, "Instead of explaining our suffering God shares it." (*Lament for a Son*, p.81) So in our joys, trials, glad moments, and deepest longings we can converse with the God who is with us. He will listen and offer His comfort because He has chosen to willingly share in our suffering.



Psalm 86:6-7 (Contemporary English Version)

*"Please listen, Lord!
Answer my prayer for help.
When I am in trouble, I pray,
knowing you will listen."*

For Reflection:

- ~ What does it mean to you that God would share in your suffering? Have you experienced Him in your suffering? How?
- ~ Think about when you pray, how you pray, why you pray, what you feel and experience when you pray. How do your prayers reflect what you believe about God?
- ~ Describe your closeness to God. Is there anything you'd like to change?

Practice: This week, as we enter the Advent season, wait on God. Pray to Him. Listen for Him. Each day, express to Him your longings, joy, hope, and struggle. Invite Him into all of the moment-by-moment realities of your life.





Advent, Week 2 | Raising Dead People

Creator of the Stars of Night | Verse 2

*In sorrow that the ancient curse
should doom to death a universe,
you came to save a ruined race
with healing gifts of heav'nly grace.*

There isn't a single one of us who doesn't need help. An extra hand, some sage advice, a ride, a meal, an encouraging word. God knows our needs – the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual. And even better than just knowing, He responds. God helped us, saving us from the consequence of our worst choice and greatest need: "Christ was sent not to mend wounded people or wake sleepy people or advise confused people or inspire bored people or spur on lazy people or educate ignorant people, but to raise dead people." (Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, p.175) In this second week of Advent, reflect on God's invitation and opportunity to live a resurrected life because of His promise that came alive through the Incarnate Jesus.

Isaiah 12:2 (New International Reader's Version)

"God, you are the one who saves us.

We will trust in you.

Then we won't be afraid.

Lord, you are the one who gives us strength.

You are the one who keeps us safe.

Lord, you have saved us."

For Reflection:

- ~ Consider the needs most present to you today (physical, emotional, relational, spiritual). Invite God to meet you in those needs, asking for His comfort, counsel, and provision.
- ~ Ponder your awareness and response to the needs of others. Invite God to speak to you about your care for others. Does anything need to change?
- ~ If you're a person who has placed their faith in Jesus, what does it mean to you to be "raised from the dead?" How does this affect your behavior, priorities, and decisions?

Practice: This week, think about your need for help and God's response. Consider the humility of Jesus and the gift of life through his birth, death, and resurrection. Respond to Him in prayer or any other way you feel led (e.g. writing, art, music, silence, a walk, etc.)



Advent, Week 3 | The Book of Life

Creator of the Stars of Night | Verse 3

*When earth drew on to darkest night,
you came, but not in splendor bright,
not as a king, but the child
of Mary, virgin mother mild.*

It really is remarkable. Unfathomable. Mysterious. Wonderful! Our Creator came to dwell with us, in all our humanness, as a human. It was the fulfillment of a promise to bring light to the darkness that blankets our souls. An inextinguishable beam of grace and truth that illumines our eager faces that look to God with desperate longing for rescue and relief. Jesus was born into this world like everyone one of us, humbling himself to show us the way of a full and satisfying life. In the words of Thomas Merton, “Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the Book of Life in Whom we read God.” (*Thoughts in Solitude*, p.57)

John 1:1-5 (Contemporary English Version)

*“In the beginning was the one
who is called the Word.
The Word was with God
and was truly God.
From the very beginning
the Word was with God.
And with this Word,
God created all things.
Nothing was made
without the Word.
Everything that was created
received its life from him,
and his life gave light
to everyone.
The light keeps shining
in the dark,
and darkness has never
put it out.”*



For Reflection:

- ~ Think about who Jesus is. Consider writing a few sentences (or more) describing who He is and what He's done. Is there anything that stands out? Why?
- ~ Thinking more about who Jesus is and what He's done, what is your response? Specifically, how does the person of Jesus affect your day-to-day living?
- ~ Where do you need the light of Jesus – His grace and truth – to illuminate a dark, discouraging, or difficult circumstance?

Practice: Focus your Advent meditations, prayers, and responses this week on the life, behavior, instruction, and person of Jesus (consider John 1:1-5, Colossians 1:15-20, Matthew 5:1-10). Each day, invite Him into the places in your life, and the lives of others, that need illumination.



Advent, Week 4 | Transforming

Creator of the Stars of Night | Verse 4

*At your great name, majestic now,
all knees must bend, all hearts must bow;
all things on earth with one accord
join those in heav'n to call you Lord.*

Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us – joining himself to us for the purpose of putting death to death. To set in motion the restoration of all that is good and beautiful. In response to His love and grace, we owe Him our allegiance. Our whole-hearted commitment to humbly and faithfully bring justice, mercy, and peace to all people. The baby born in Bethlehem is our Heavenly King, our Savior who invites us to join His mission of redemption and renewal. During this week that ushers us to Christmas Day, consider this exhortation from John Owen: “So when, by faith we behold the glory of Christ as we meditate on his divine-human person, we should not see him merely as glorious in himself. We must, rather, make every effort to let that glory so fill our hearts with love, admiration, adoration and praise to him that our souls will be transformed into his image.” (*The Glory of Christ*, p.37)

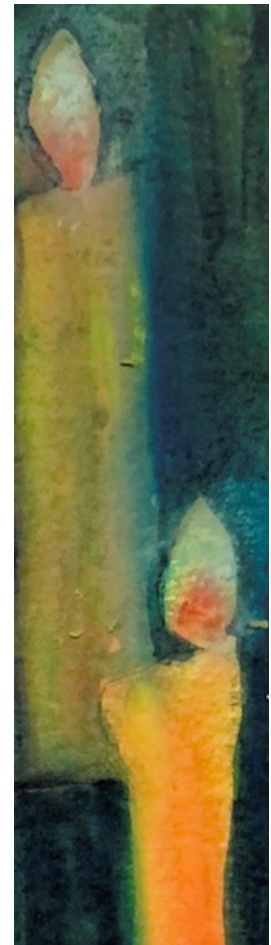
Ephesians 3:16-18 (New Living Translation)

“I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.”

For Reflection:

- ~ How has God transformed your life? Consider writing down specific ways the grace and truth of Jesus has changed your thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions.
- ~ Set aside time to ponder how you’ve experienced God’s presence and love over the past year. Thank Him for each instance that comes to mind.
- ~ What does it mean to bring justice, peace, and mercy to all people? How does this specifically play-out in your life? Is there anything you need to start, stop, or change?

Practice: This week, as you prepare for Christmas Day, ask the Spirit to enliven your heart and mind with gratitude. Each day, spend time reflecting on God’s goodness to you, asking Him to reveal to you more-and-more the expanse of His love and how you can share it with others.





Christmas Day | The Eternal Now

Creator of the Stars of Night | Verse 5

*To God the Father, God the Son,
and God the Spirit, Three in One,
praise, honor, might, and glory be
from age to age eternally.
Amen.*

The quiet contemplations of Advent now burst with praise for the birth of Jesus! As we wait for the return of Jesus Christ to set all things right, let's find encouragement in these words from Thomas R. Kelly: "Thus in faith we go forward, with breath-taking boldness, and in faith we stand still, unshaken, with amazing confidence. For the time-nows are rooted in the Eternal Now, which is a steadfast Presence, an infinite ocean of light and love which is flowing over the ocean of darkness and death." (*A Testament of Devotion*, p.80)

May your Christmas celebrations be filled with joy and laughter and a pervading sense of gratitude for Jesus!

Luke 2:8-15 (The Voice)

"Nearby, in the fields outside of Bethlehem, a group of shepherds were guarding their flocks from predators in the darkness of night. Suddenly a messenger of the Lord stood in front of them, and the darkness was replaced by a glorious light—the shining light of God's glory. They were terrified!

Messenger: *Don't be afraid! Listen! I bring good news, news of great joy, news that will affect all people everywhere. Today, in the city of David, a Liberator has been born for you! He is the promised Anointed One, the Supreme Authority! You will know you have found Him when you see a baby, wrapped in a blanket, lying in a feeding trough.*

At that moment, the first heavenly messenger was joined by thousands of other messengers—a vast heavenly choir. They praised God.

Heavenly Choir: *To the highest heights of the universe, glory to God!
And on earth, peace among all people who bring pleasure to God!*

As soon as the heavenly messengers disappeared into heaven, the shepherds were buzzing with conversation.

Shepherds: *Let's rush down to Bethlehem right now! Let's see what's happening! Let's experience what the Lord has told us about!"*



Isaiah 60:1 (NIV)

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.”*

Isaiah 25:1-2 (New Living Translation)

*“O Lord, I will honor and praise your name,
for you are my God.
You do such wonderful things!
You planned them long ago,
and now you have accomplished them.”*

*Merry
Christmas!*

Psalm 146 (New Living Translation)

“Praise the Lord!

*Let all that I am praise the Lord.
I will praise the Lord as long as I live.
I will sing praises to my God with my dying
breath.*

*Don't put your confidence in powerful people;
there is no help for you there.
When they breathe their last, they return to the
earth,
and all their plans die with them.
But joyful are those who have the God of Israel
as their helper,
whose hope is in the Lord their God.
He made heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them.
He keeps every promise forever.
He gives justice to the oppressed
and food to the hungry.*

*The Lord frees the prisoners.
The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are weighed down.
The Lord loves the godly.
The Lord protects the foreigners among us.
He cares for the orphans and widows,
but he frustrates the plans of the wicked.*

*The Lord will reign forever.
He will be your God, O Jerusalem, throughout
the generations.*

Praise the Lord!”