

ADVENT



Family Devotional

INTRODUCTION

How to Use this Devotional

This devotional guide is intended as an aid to help families celebrate Advent intentionally. Every day includes a time for lighting the candles on an advent wreath. Any candle can work. However, an advent wreath encourages a growing sense of expectation since more candles are gradually lit every week. Additionally, this devotional guide is intended to be used with a Jesse Tree. Since there is no standardized list of ornaments for the Jesse Tree, the list used in this book has been chosen for catechetical purposes. This book can be used without the actual Jesse Tree ornaments, but we recommend that families pick an evening to make them together using the black symbols on each lesson page. Advent technically starts November 27th, but this devotional guide doesn't start until December 1st. We recommend families use the extra days to make Jesse Tree ornaments and take a family trip to get a small tree to place them on.

Each day, start with the collect for the week and the prayer for the lighting of the advent candle on the first page of the week. Then, read the lesson for the corresponding day, talk about the discussion question, and close with a concluding prayer. The seven days before Christmas Eve includes the "O Antiphons" as a concluding prayer, which are short prayers used on these days during advent.

Typology

Every book of scripture always has at least two authors. There is the human author, who writes what God inspires to a particular people in a particular situation. However, there is also a divine author, and this divine author knows what He is writing in Revelation when He is writing Genesis. The Christian tradition has always been attentive to these two different authors of scripture. However, around the 1800s biblical scholars began to emphasize the human author to the exclusion of the divine author. The focus on historical precision and careful study of individual books overshadowed the total divine cohesion of the whole Bible. Typology is a method of interpretation that is particularly attentive to the divine author's intention in the whole Bible, while not betraying the human author. Typology assumes that the Bible is one book and so any good interpretation must attend to the literary symbols and motifs of the whole. The lessons in this devotional use the typological method to showcase how the literary themes across the whole Bible bring out the theological and sacramental implications of the text.

ADVENT WEEK ONE



Collect for the Week

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when He shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through Him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Wreath

While lighting the first candle on the advent wreath, say the following prayer:

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.



12/1
The Lesson

Creation

Genesis 1 and 1 John 4:7-12

Before everything, before everyone, before the world was made, there was nothing but love. This love was God himself. He was called love because, even though He is one, He is also three. If God was just one, then there would be no one for God to love, but God is a community of loving persons. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the life that these three persons live is the life of the one God. God's life looks like three persons loving each other with such fervor that God's life is nothing but love. This life of love, God himself, created the world so that He could love the world, too. The whole world was created so that God could wrap all of it into his life of love. All of creation, but particularly every person, is loved by God and is supposed to return this love back to God. By loving God, we are wrapped into the life of God who is nothing but love. When God created the world, everything was perfect, and creation existed in a perfect life of love with God.

Question: How can we live our life so that we show that we love God?

Concluding Prayer





12/2

The Lesson



The Fall

Genesis 3

God made Adam and Eve as the first man and woman of the creation. They were in a perfect loving relationship with God who was nothing but love. But one day, a serpent came and lied to them. Because of this lie, Adam and Eve began to doubt God's love. This doubt led them to disobey God and to "take and eat" from the one tree from which He had forbidden them to eat. When they disobeyed God, they lost the life they had. They lost the perfect union of love with God. On that day, they were separated from God. This separation is called death. So even though they kept on living, they were dead.

It will take God coming to earth as a man in order for the phrase "take and eat" to be transformed into the path of life rather than the path of death. Only when Jesus Christ is hung on a wooden tree and becomes the fruit that we are to eat can the mistake of Adam and Eve be reversed. God's love for us would not be thwarted by the sin of Adam and Eve. He becomes the fruit, hung on a tree of death, that reverses death and gives life. But the body of Christ is no forbidden fruit. All are invited to feast on him. In the Eucharist, God rectifies the sin of humanity, restores us to the life of love, and clarifies that the life of love is a love feast. Question: What are some ways that we are tempted to disobey God? How does God welcome us back to communion with him?



Concluding Prayer



12/3 The Lesson

Noah's Ark Genesis 6-8

The majority of Adam and Eve's children embraced a life of death. They embraced a life separate from the love of God and replaced God's love with self-love. Eventually, the whole world was full of self-loving people who cared for no one but themselves. So God decided that He was going to cleanse the world with a flood. There was one man, Noah, that clung to the love of God. God told this man to build a big boat called an ark. Noah was placed in this boat, along with the animals of creation, while God cleansed the whole earth. He was safely brought through the waters of cleansing and was tasked with being a new Adam who would train his children and all of humanity following him to embrace the love of God.

Peter claims that Noah's ark and the great flood were meant to show us what God does in Baptism (1 Peter 3:20-21). In Baptism, a cleansing flood washes over the person. Their sin is washed away. However, this flood threatens to drown them in God's judgment. But in Baptism, the infant becomes an ark. The child passes through the water and comes out the other side unscathed due to the love of God manifest in the priest who safely carries the infant through the watery chaos. Every baptized Christian is an ark and so the whole church as a collection of baptized people is an ark, a safe haven for all who deserve the judgment of God. Additionally, since the baptized come out the other side of the cleansing waters, they are called, like Noah, to be another Adam. Baptism is a recommissioning. It is a calling to be fruitful and multiply and to build the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Question: What does the story of Noah and the flood reveal about Baptism?

Concluding Prayer

DECEMBER
4-10

ADVENT WEEK TWO



Collect for the Week

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Wreath

While lighting the first candle on the advent wreath, say the following prayer:

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.



12/4
The Lesson
Abraham
Genesis 15:1-6

Even though Noah was called to be the father of a whole new human race who loved God, not all of his descendants were faithful to this renewed calling. So God appeared to Abraham, one of Noah's descendants, and decided that he would use Abraham's family to re-establish a human community that was totally devoted to sharing in God's life of love. God promised Abraham that if he had faith, then God would multiply his children like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore (Gen 15:5; 22:17). God also promised that Abraham's descendants would be the renewed human community that would spread blessing to the world through their life devoted to loving God. This new community would be so forceful in spreading their love that the gates of their enemies wouldn't be able to keep them out (Gen 22:17).

Paul tells us that all who have faith are the children of Abraham (Gal 3:29). Therefore, the offspring that God promises to Abraham is the church. The church is the renewed humanity that is called to bless the world through her life. The church's life of love is so powerful that God reaffirms the fact that the gates of hell can't keep out the church (Matt 16:18). And so the church extends throughout the whole world, fulfilling God's promise that Abraham's offspring would be numerous and would bless every nation. Question: How can the church bless people? How can we bless whole nations?

Concluding Prayer



12/5
The Lesson

Jacob
Genesis 28:10-22

Jacob was the grandson of Abraham. As a descendent of Abraham, he was supposed to live the life of love that blessed the nations. But he lived a hard life. During his travels, God gave him a dream to comfort him. In that dream, Jacob saw a ladder on earth extending into heaven. Angels were ascending and descending the ladder, and at the top, was God. God said that He would never leave Jacob, and He will be with him wherever Jacob goes (Gen 28:15). It was important that Jacob knew that he had access to God. Heaven and earth are not separated by an insurmountable chasm. God has made a way for heaven and earth, God and Man, to be united.

Jesus tells one of his disciples that He will see angels descending and ascending on the Son of Man (John 1:51). In this passage, Jesus claims that his cross is the ladder of Jacob's dream. When Jesus is lifted up on the cross, his cross becomes the bridge that unites heaven and earth, God and Man. Jesus can unite heaven and earth because He is from both. Angels can either ascend or descend and they nevertheless go to Him. As the angels descend to earth, they carry the blessings of God to the world. As the angels ascend to heaven, they carry with them the souls of those who have embraced God. To come to Christ is to approach heaven and ascend to God. But while we remain on earth, we are comforted as Jacob was when God affirms from the top of the ladder, "I will never leave you" (Heb 13:5). The ladder will not be taken up, because God himself is also from the earth in the man Jesus Christ. Question: What does Jacob's ladder tell us about Jesus?

Concluding Prayer



12/6

The Lesson

Joseph

Genesis 37, 39-41

Jacob had 12 sons that would eventually go on to form the 12 tribes of Israel. His favorite son was Joseph to whom he gave a coat of many colors. Joseph also was given dreams from God. His brothers grew jealous and angry until one day they sold him into slavery in Egypt. Even though this was terribly hard, he became a good servant. But one day, his master's wife accused him of doing something he did not do, and he was thrown into prison to die. God cared for him in prison and gave him the power to interpret dreams. Because of this power, Joseph was taken out of prison and raised to sit at the right hand of the most powerful man in the world. With this new authority, Joseph saved all the nations in the world from famine by giving grain to all (Gen 41:57).

Joseph's life foreshadows someone else. Someone else was betrayed by his brothers, falsely accused, thrown into the prison of death, raised by the power of God, and seated at the right hand of the most powerful one in the world. Jesus went through all of these things, except He went all the way into death and then raised up out of the grave to ascend all the way to the throne of God. From this throne, He saves the world by giving grain in the form of Eucharistic bread. The life of Joseph is really about the life of Christ. Joseph shows us that Abraham's offspring will indeed bless the world. At first, this blessing will be grain in the midst of famine, but then it will be Eucharistic bread in the midst of the pains of life. Question: What does the life of Joseph teach us about the life of Jesus?

Concluding Prayer





12/7



The Lesson

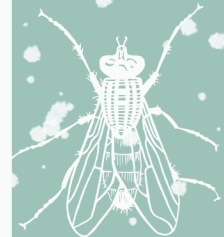
The Exodus

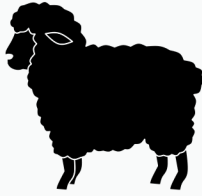
Exodus (7-10) 14-15

Eventually, the children of Abraham, the community that is meant to bless the world through their life, became enslaved to the people of Egypt. This enslavement meant that they were trapped by false gods and forced to serve the purposes of sin. But God would not forsake them. He sent terrible plagues on Egypt that mocked the false gods until Pharaoh let Israel go to the land that God had promised to give them. As the people were leaving, Pharaoh changed his mind and began to chase after them. Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt trapped Israel against the Red Sea. So God caused the sea to part so that his people could pass through the water on dry ground. When Pharaoh and his army tried to pursue Israel, God removed his hand from the waters and drowned them. Israel was safe on the other side of the Red Sea.

The whole human race was enslaved to sin, death, and the leader of darkness. But God, in his love would not tolerate this enslavement. The exodus from Egypt pictures the exodus of the church. God leads his people safely through the Red Sea of Baptism. In those same waters, He drowns the devil, our Pharaoh, and breaks the bonds of sin that enslaved us to our former master. Question: What does the exodus teach us about Baptism? If baptism is an exodus, how can we live up to our Baptisms?

Concluding Prayer





12/8

The Lesson

Passover

Exodus 12

Before the people left Egypt, God sent plagues upon Egypt. During the final plague, God sent the Angel of Death to every house to take away the firstborn son. However, God promised that the angel would “pass over” every house that had slain a lamb, smeared the blood on the doorpost, and eaten it. The Feast of the Passover lamb provided a doorway through death, symbolized by blood on the doorposts that they passed through on the way out of Egypt. This meal became one of the largest feasts that Israel would celebrate every year. In this meal, they would celebrate that they “passed over” from death into life, from slavery into life with God.

Paul says that Christ is that Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7). Additionally, the gospel accounts make it clear that Christ was slain during the Passover festival and that He instituted the Eucharistic meal during this same festival at the last supper. Christ is the true Passover lamb. When we feast on him, we “pass over” from death to life. His death becomes the doorway to our life. To feast on the Eucharist is the begin the exodus, again. It is to walk away from slavery, again. It is to pass over into life, again. Every week we celebrate the Passover and so every week we are led to new life. Question: What does the Passover teach us about the Eucharist? How does the Passover help us celebrate the Eucharist?

Concluding Prayer



12/9

The Lesson

Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1-21

God brought his people out of Egypt and to Mount Sinai. There He gave to them a law. The law was written on tablets of stone that Moses brought down from the mountain to give to Israel. It was supposed to help them live the life that would bring blessings to the nations, as God had promised Abraham that his descendants would do. The law was intended to show Israel how to live so that their life was an offering back to God. Only a life given over to God can bring a blessing to the nations.

These tablets were written in stone, but God also promised to write these laws on the hearts of his people (Jer 31:33). When the law is written on the heart, then God's people will naturally live the life that the law intends. When the law is on the heart, the law is inside and no longer external imposition. Hebrews says that the law becomes inscribed on our hearts when we are united to Christ in his offering himself to God as a sacrifice (Heb 10:11-17). When we are united to Christ, his life becomes our life and his life perfectly conforms to the law, and is thus, a perfect sacrificial gift to the Father. When the law is written on our hearts, we become a "living sacrifice," offering our life to God in order that He may use it to bring his blessing to the world (Rom 12:1). Question: How can we make sure the law is written on our hearts? If we live out the law by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice, how do we do that?

Concluding Prayer



12/10
The Lesson

Wilderness Wandering
Exodus 13:17-22 and 16:1-17:7

After God brought Israel out of Egypt, the people found themselves in the wilderness. They were on their way to the promised land, but it would be 40 years until they got there. As they traveled in the wilderness, God led them by a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. He also provided for them through a rock, which was struck to provide water, and through bread that fell from heaven. Even though Israel was in the wilderness, God remained with them and led them.

Just like with Israel, Jesus's Baptism was immediately followed by 40 days of temptation in the wilderness (Mark 1:9-13). God does not call his people to a life that He does not live himself. Jesus lives Israel's wandering in the wilderness of temptation in order to show that the path of faithfulness includes the wilderness. In fact, to be the church is always to be a people "on the way." The church is stretched between her Baptism and final entrance into the heavenly kingdom. The church is always in the wilderness. But in the wilderness of life, where we face the temptations of this world, Paul says that we partake of the same spiritual food and the same spiritual drink of which Israel partook (1 Cor 10:1-4). In other words, in the Eucharist, we eat the bread from heaven (John 6) and we drink the elixir of salvation from the rock that was struck. It is a meal for those who are tired and tested, a meal for those in the midst of temptation, and a meal that will get you home to glory. Life with God looks like feasting on the way to the promised land.

Question: What are some times when you have been tempted? Where should you go when you are being tempted?

Concluding Prayer

ADVENT WEEK THREE

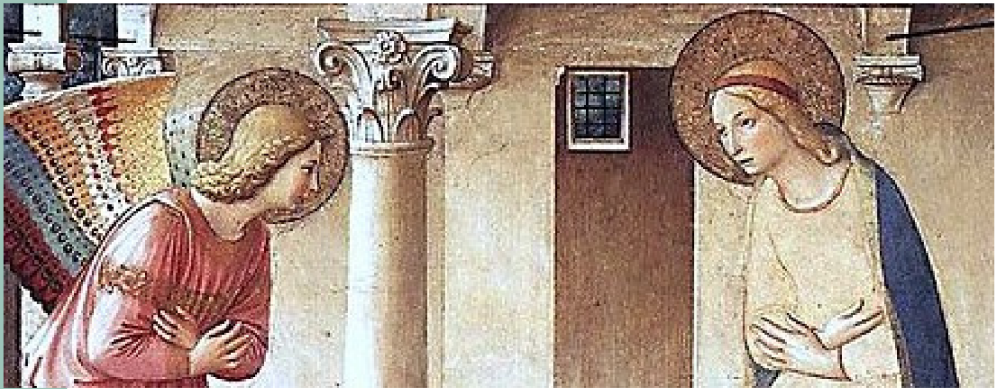
Collect for the Week

O LORD Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Wreath

While lighting the first three candles on the advent wreath, say the following prayer:

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen





12/11

The Lesson

Joshua and the Conquest
Joshua 1 and 3

When Israel finally arrived at the promised land, it was full of the enemies of God. So God commissioned Joshua to lead Israel in conquering the land. Before they began to take back the land, the people experienced another exodus. God parted the waters of the Jordan River like He did with the Red Sea and allowed them to cross into the land (Josh 3). The people viewed this crossing as another exodus because they celebrated the Passover right after they crossed. They celebrated this Passover meal in the very presence of their enemies at Jericho (Josh 5:10). This exodus was not just a salvation from the wilderness like the last one was a salvation from Pharaoh, but this exodus was also a commissioning for conquest. After their Passover meal, they conquered Jericho (Josh 6).

Before Jesus starts his ministry of defeating the demons that have taken over the land, He is baptized in the Jordan River. He shows that the story of Israel's conquest is his own story of taking back the world that has been overtaken by sin and the devil. In the first exodus from Egypt, we learn that Baptism is salvation from sin and the devil. But in this second exodus, we learn that Baptism into Christ is also a commissioning to fight against sin and the devil. To be baptized is to be commissioned to turn the whole world into the kingdom of heaven. And like Israel celebrated the Passover feast in the presence of their enemies, the church also feasts in the presence of her enemies. When the church is surrounded, the only thing to do is celebrate with a feast (Psalm 23:5). Question: What does the conquest of Jericho teach us about Baptism?

Concluding Prayer





12/12 The Lesson

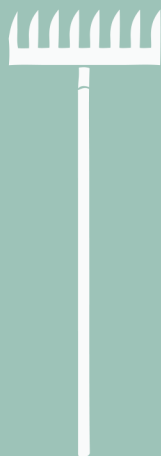
Ruth
Ruth 3

When Israel came into the land, there was a woman named Ruth who was outside the people of God. However, she became an Israelite through marriage, and even when her husband died, she clung to the God of Israel rather than returning to her false gods (Ruth 1:16). However, she was still a poor widow struggling to have enough food to eat. In her poverty, a man named Boaz fell in love with her. At the climax of their love story, Ruth's mother-in-law tells her to wash, anoint herself with oil, and secretly meet with Boaz to ask him to marry her. Boaz agrees. He marries her and redeems her from her poverty.

Everyone who meets with God in the temple washes and anoints themselves, like Ruth does to meet Boaz. (1 Sam 12:20). This is also what priests do when they are preparing for temple service (Exod 40:12-13). Ruth is symbolically becoming a priest and preparing to meet God. But the one she meets with is also the redeemer that saves her from a life of destitution and brings her into a life of abundance and love. To meet with God is also to meet with the one who has fallen in love with us and who wishes to be united with us so that He may redeem us. God does all of this in the washing of Baptism. In the Baptismal liturgy, we are baptized and anointed with oil in order to prepare us for meeting our God and our lover. Baptism brings us into the church where we are united with God as He enters our body in the form of Eucharistic food. Through this embrace, we find our redemption in finding our bridegroom.

Question: What does the story of Ruth teach us about God and about the Sacraments?

Concluding Prayer





12/13
The Lesson

David

2 Samuel 7:1-7 and Psalm 45

One of Ruth's descendants was David, who eventually became the king of Israel. Before he took the throne, he slew a giant warrior who was oppressing God's people using nothing but a sling and a small stone. He also gained prestige by fighting off the enemies of God's people. His fame made the current king, Saul, so jealous that Saul tried to kill David. So David spent much of his life running away from Saul. Finally, he was crowned king, and although he made mistakes, he was a mighty man for God. Throughout his life, he wrote psalms that the people could use to sing in their worship of God showing that his primary concern was always that the people of God were worshipping God.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David, in order to show that the ministry of Jesus will look like David's. On the way to his enthronement in heaven, Jesus was chased by the temporary ruler of this world. Before Jesus ascended to his throne, He had to defeat the giant enemy that has always oppressed God's people. He had to defeat death itself. Throughout his ministry, but particularly on the cross, He quoted the Psalms, showing that, like David, He conquers his foes while singing (Psalm 22:1; 31:5). As we follow Christ in his Davidic ministry, we are called to fight the enemies of God like He did, by giving ourselves for them. Like David and Jesus, we are also to do battle through singing since God is enthroned in the worship of his people (Psalm 22:3). God conquers his enemies through the worship of his people (2 Chron 20:21-22).

Question: Why is worship important for the mission of the church and for God's purpose for the world?

Concluding Prayer



12/14 The Lesson

Solomon

1 King 3:1-15 and Song of Solomon 8:6-7

David's son was Solomon, and under Solomon's rule Israel flourished. God granted Solomon wisdom that was greater than any person that would ever live. His wisdom was so well known that rulers from other nations came to him for advice (1 Kings 10:1). God inspired him to record his wisdom in several books. His most famous book is called the Song of Solomon. In this book, the wisest man on earth tells a love story. That the wisest man to have ever lived would spend time writing about love shows that love must be central to human life.

John tells us that "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God" (1 John 4:16). To be in love is to be in God. This is the mystery that Solomon tried to write about. It is a mystery that returns us to the whole purpose of creation. God created the world in order to have a people that He could enfold into his life of love. And it is fitting that the wise dwell on this loving purpose for creation because the Bible says that Wisdom herself was there at the beginning creating with God (Prov 8:22-31). Wisdom seems to be another person within God that creates the earth in order that humanity may fall in love with her. Some church fathers identified her with the Son within the Trinity. Both Wisdom and Folly attempt to seduce humanity (Prov 9), but Solomon pleads with us to fall in love with Wisdom (Prov 4:6). To fall in love with Wisdom is to fall in love with Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God who created the world in order to be in a relationship of love with humanity.

Question: How can we seek wisdom?

Concluding Prayer



12/15
The Lesson

Elijah
1 Kings 18:20-40

Most of the kings of Israel led the people towards false gods. So God sent the prophet Elijah to bring the people of Israel back to him. Elijah challenged the prophets of the false god, Baal, to a duel. The false prophets and Elijah each built an altar, placed a bull on it, and prayed that their god would send fire from heaven to light the altar. The prophets of Baal received no answer. But when Elijah prayed, God rained down fire from heaven and consumed the whole altar. When Israel saw this power, they turned back to God and began to serve Him again.

Elijah used 12 stones to build his altar in order to symbolize the 12 tribes of Israel. He even named the altar "Israel" to communicate that Israel should be a place where people offered themselves up to God (1 Kings 18:31). Israel was supposed to be an altar set aflame by love. The fire of their love was to consume them so that they ascended to heaven like the smoke of the offering. When Jesus came, He called 12 apostles to symbolize that the church is a new Israel. The church is now the altar where the fire of love consumes us and we ascend to God like the incense of the liturgy. It was only after Elijah doused the altar in water, that God sent the fire that would consume it (1 King 18:33-35). Likewise, God douses us in the water of Baptism and sends the fire of the Holy Spirit in those same waters. The baptized church is the altar of God, where we become "living sacrifices" ascending to God in the flames of love (Rom 12:1). Question: What does it look like to offer our lives up as a sacrifice to God?

Concluding Prayer



12/16



The Lesson

Jonah
Jonah 2

Some of God's prophets were sent to other nations to fulfill the promise that God made to Abraham that his descendants would bless the nations. However, when God called Jonah the prophet to go to Nineveh in order to spread the love of God, Jonah was too afraid to go. So he tried to flee across the sea in a ship. But God sent such a great storm that Jonah was thrown off the ship and eaten by a big fish. For three days and three nights, Jonah was in the belly of the fish praying that God would deliver him. After three days, the fish spat him up on the shore. Finally, he went to Nineveh and led them to a life of love with God.

Jesus says that just like Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, so He would be in the belly of the grave for three days before the grave spat Him out (Matt 12:40). Jonah himself saw that his sojourn in the fish was really a sojourn in the grave, called Sheol (Jonah 2:2). Like elsewhere in the Bible, the passing through death is also a passing through waters (Jonah 2:3, 5). The passage through death is always a Baptism. Paul makes it clear that our Baptism joins us to the death of Christ as He goes down into the grave (Rom 6:3). But Baptism also joins us to the resurrection of Christ as He comes out of the grave (Rom 6:4). Being raised from the dead through Baptism means that we are called to fulfill the mission God gave to Jonah. We are called to bless the nations by preaching the good news of the gospel and by "walking in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). Question: What does the story of Jonah teach us about Baptism and our calling as Christians?

Concluding Prayer





12/17
The Lesson

Exile

2 Chronicles 36:15-21

One day, a mighty nation called Babylon besieged Israel and destroyed the blessed city of Jerusalem. They also destroyed the temple that Solomon had built so that the people could worship God. After all that the people of God had built was smashed into the ground, Babylon took God's people captive and brought them into exile far away from their home (2 Chron 36:20). God told his people through the prophet Jeremiah that although they were exiles in a foreign land, they were still called to be a blessing to the nations. So they were supposed to live in such a way that their captors were blessed (Jer 29:7), but they could only do this if they built a God-loving culture within the pagan culture of Babylon (Jer 29:5-7).

God's people are always called to be a city within a city. The church is meant to be a city that seeks to bless the pagan city in which it resides. The home of every Christian is with God. So every Christian is in exile. This is why Peter, when writing to the church, says that he is writing to the exiles (1 Peter 1:1). Every Christian is a foreigner in their own country. Every Christian is just a sojourner passing through. Everything from the political and social identities to the economic structures should be foreign to the Christian whose primary allegiance is to the city of God, the church. Peter pleads with the church to act like exiles (1 Peter 2:11) so that the Gentiles, who symbolize the nations, would learn to glorify God. As exiles, the church is called to bless the nation in which it resides and to teach it to love God. Question: How can we bless the nation in which we live (or maybe just our neighborhood)?

Concluding Prayer

O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!

DECEMBER
18-24

ADVENT WEEK FOUR

Collect for the Week

O LORD, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and 'deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Wreath

While lighting the four candles on the advent wreath, say the following prayer:

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.





12/18 The Lesson

Esther

Esther 4:13-5:3

While God's people were in exile, there was a Jewish woman named Esther who was so beautiful that the pagan king took her to be his wife. While she was queen, she found out about a plot to kill the Jews. She knew she must go to the king and intercede on behalf of God's people. But this was a dangerous thing for her to do because everyone who went to the king uninvited was immediately put to death unless the King lifted his scepter to greet them. So Esther and all the Jews fasted for three days as the shadow of death hung over them all. After those days of darkness, Esther went before the king to plead for God's people to be saved. The king lifted his scepter to greet her, and with that motion, the king's hand was lifted in favor of all the Jews.

Esther was only able to intercede for her people because she had two identities. She was Jewish and she was royalty. Likewise, Jesus Christ is only able to intercede for his people because He is fully man and fully God. He embraced the poverty of human flesh while possessing the fullness of divine sovereignty. But Esther's royalty and Jesus's divinity did not save them from the death that haunted the Jews and still haunts every human being. Both endured three days in the grip of death, but in so doing, both won the favor of the ruler of the universe. As the hand of the king was lifted to save the Jews, the mighty right hand of God was lifted to save us from death.

Question: What does the story of Esther teach us about Jesus?

Concluding Prayer

O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai: come to rescue us with your mighty power!





12/19



The Lesson

Stump of Jesse

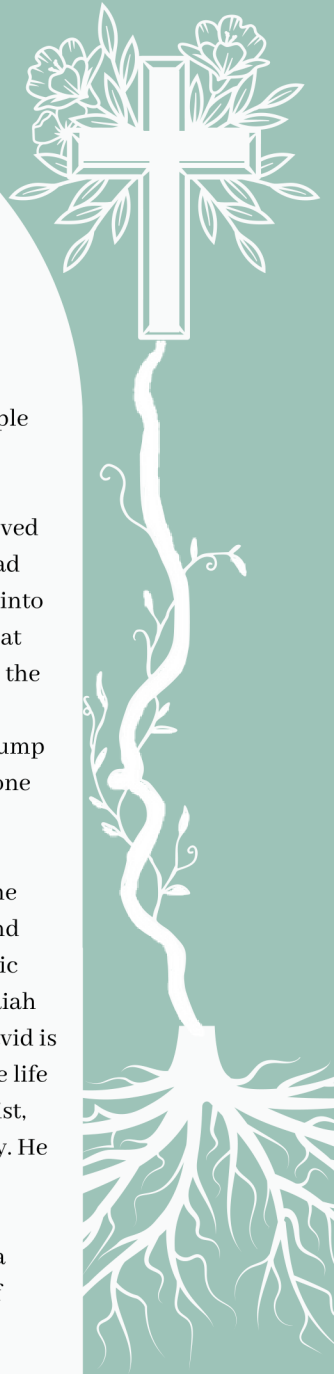
Isaiah II

The prophet Isaiah saw into the future and told the people that although they were going to go into exile, they would nevertheless have a king. From the stump of Jesse, a shoot would emerge (Isaiah 11:1). Jesse was the father of the beloved King David who had died long ago. The Davidic dynasty had been cut down and done away with when the people went into exile. This is why Isaiah refers to it as a stump, which is what remains when a tree has been cut down. God says through the prophet Isaiah that David's lineage will not be completely wiped out, but there will emerge a new growth from the stump of Jesse. A future king in the line of David will take his throne and save his people as David did.

When Paul preaches at Antioch, he recounts the whole history of Israel (Acts 13:16-22). To listen to his retelling, the history of Israel leads all the way up to David's kingship and then seamlessly right to Jesus as the true heir of the Davidic throne (Acts 13:23). By referring to the stump of "Jesse", Isaiah seems to suggest that David will come back to life since David is the one who comes after Jesse. David's life foreshadows the life of Jesus, and so in one sense, David is coming back. In Christ, we have a new and better David, who rules in a unique way. He destroys his enemies by dying for them. He establishes a kingdom of servants. He teaches us that our glory is in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9). The glory of his kingdom is seen in a man dying on a cross. Question: What does the kingship of Jesus look like? What does his kingdom look like?

Concluding Prayer

O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all his people:
come to save us without delay!





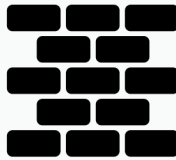
12/20
The Lesson
Exiles Return
Jeremiah 32:37-41

God sent Jeremiah to be a prophet to his people. His ministry stretches into the time of exile when Babylon took God's people away from their homeland. God promises his people through the prophet Jeremiah that He would not leave them nor forsake them in exile. Rather, He is going to bring them all back home again (Jer 23:3; 32:37).

When God's people are brought home from exile, God promises that they would be fruitful and multiply (Jer 23:3), which is a direct quote from the creation mandate given to Adam and Eve (Gen 1:28). When God calls his people out of exile, He calls them to a life of faithfulness. As John beholds the evil city of Babylon in Revelation, he sees that the church is called out of Babylon in order to be set free from the bondage of sin (Rev 18:4). The church is comprised of exiles who have been called home. Jesus even says that when He ascends to his Father, then He will send his angels to gather the exiles from all over the world (Matt 24:31). To be saved obviously includes forgiveness of sins, but it also includes coming home after being trapped in the kingdom of darkness. When we enter the church, we should feel like we just arrived home, perhaps for the first time. To come to church is to enter the place where the creation mandate can be fulfilled, where our works can be fruitful and our Christian children multiplied. Question: How can we live as people in the world, but also as people called to come out of the world?

Concluding Prayer

O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom:
come and free the prisoners of darkness!



12/21 The Lesson

Nehemiah and Ezra
Neh 6:15 7:4 and Ezra 3:8-13

Eventually, the Jews are permitted to return from exile. When they return to Israel, they see that Jerusalem, the beloved city of God, is still in ruins. So, they begin to rebuild. The nations that surround Jerusalem are not happy about this, but despite many challenges, the Jews rebuild the walls that surround the city under the guidance of Nehemiah. They also rebuild a new temple, and under the direction of Ezra, they reinstitute temple worship.

The mission of God's people has always been to build the city of God here on earth. In Revelation, God shows John a picture of the church. John sees the bride of Christ coming down from heaven as the holy city of Jerusalem (Rev 21:9-10). The walls of the city have the names of the 12 apostles inscribed upon them symbolizing the whole of the church built upon the apostles' teaching (Rev 21:14). When John sees this vision, the city is still descending, meaning that the church is not yet completed. The heavenly city continues to arrive from heaven as we build it here on earth. This city is also a temple. Every Christian is a "living stone" of the temple of God (1 Peter 2:5). To be a Christian is to be involved in building the heavenly Jerusalem. Every Christian is called to do the work of Nehemiah and Ezra. Question: What does it mean to build the heavenly Jerusalem here on earth? How can we get involved in building it?

Concluding Prayer

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:
come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the
shadow of death.



12/22



The Lesson

John the Baptist

Matthew 3

John the Baptist appears out of nowhere and begins to herald the coming of the promised Messiah, the true Son of Abraham who would bless the nations, the true heir of David's throne who would rule the nations, the one who would trample underfoot the serpent that deceived humanity in the very beginning. John the Baptist comes to prepare people for the coming of Jesus (Mark 1:3). He preached a gospel of repentance and all of Judea and Jerusalem came to him in order to be made ready for the coming of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:5). John is given the ministry of preparation.

The church is given this same ministry. Although Christ has come, He will nevertheless come again. The church is meant to be another John the Baptist. We also preach a gospel of repentance, and we also baptize people to forgive their sins (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38). By helping the world deal with their sins, we remove obstacles for Jesus, and we "make straight" his way (Mark 1:3). As Handel's Messiah famously says, "Every valley shall be exalted... And every mountain and hill made low... And the rough places plain [and] the crooked straight." The church, like John the Baptist, prepares the way for the coming of the Lord. During Advent, we don't just celebrate that Christ has come, but we long for the day when He comes again and we make preparations for his coming. This is why Advent is a penitential season. Our crooked hearts must be made straight.

Question: How can we prepare ourselves for Christ's coming? How can we help others prepare?

Concluding Prayer

O King of all nations and keystone of the Church: come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!



12/23

 The Lesson 

Mary

Luke 1:26-38

An angel appeared to a young Jewish girl named Mary and told her that God has chosen her to bear the Son of God. She was so full of trust that her response was “I am the handmaiden of the Lord, I give myself over to the will of God” (Luke 1:38). With that, the Holy Spirit came upon her and she conceived a child. When she submitted to God’s will, she submitted to the pain of childbirth. She endured the pain of childbirth so that Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, could come to save us all.

Mary is the model of Christian faithfulness, and her ministry is the ministry of the church. Christ grows within our hearts so that one day He will be born to those we meet. As Mary endured the hardships of childbearing so that Christ could come into the world, we are called to bear Christ to the world in the midst of hardships and suffering. Mary’s response of submission to God also foreshadows Christ’s submission to the Father when He says, “not my will but thine be done.” In both cases, their submission brings about the salvation of the world. Christ also submits to the Father, like Mary, as He is considering the prospect of great suffering, and He even compares his suffering on the cross to childbirth (John 16:21). So the call to take up your cross and follow Christ is also a call to be like Mary (Matt 16:24). For the sake of the world, we embrace God’s call to suffering and deliver Christ to those we meet. Question: What does Mary teach us about what it means to be a Christian?

Concluding Prayer

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law: come to save us,
Lord our God!



12/24
The Lesson

When it was time to give birth, there was no room in the inns of Bethlehem to house Mary and Joseph. So Jesus was born in a stable among the animals. Bethlehem means “house of bread,” and here, the body of Christ, the bread of heaven, descends from heaven through the virgin’s womb. Bethlehem finally lives up to its name when Jesus arrives. Because they were in a stable, the bread of heaven was laid in a manger where animals eat their meals. But it is no accident that the first people that saw Jesus and began to spread the word about Him were shepherds (Luke 2:20). Through their testimony, they led the people like sheep to come and feast on the heavenly bread that was in the manger. We are all sheep who have wandered astray in sin (Isaiah 53:6). We are lost and desperate for sustenance. Our hungry souls yearn for the food that would give eternal life. So the good shepherd comes to us and gives his very self to us as food. The one we spurned as we wandered away now gives himself for the satiation of our souls. To feast on the bread of heaven in the Eucharist is to be joined to this original moment of incarnation, where God and humanity mingle in Jesus laid in a manger. Question: What does the story of Jesus’s birth teach us about the Eucharist? What does the incarnation teach us about the Eucharist?

Concluding Prayer



Collect for the Day



ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only, begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy holy† Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

12/25



The Lesson

The Light of the World
John 1:1-18



Jesus Christ the light of the world has come. To all who are trapped in darkness, light has come to lead them out (Matt 4:16, Isa 9:2; Isa 42:7). All who are held captive and bewitched by the shadows of death have been given a beam of hope. All those committed to the “unfruitful works of darkness” are no longer bound to spiritual death (Eph 5:11). So the church proclaims with Paul, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph 5:14). On the one hand, Jesus says that He is the light of the world (John 8:12). But on the other hand, He claims that the church is the light of the world (Matt 5:14). All who are united to Christ become the body of Christ, and so we take up the identity of Christ. He is the light of the world, and we are the light of the world because we are united to Him in Baptism and faith. The church, then, has the same ministry as Jesus Christ. We are called to shine light to those in darkness.



Concluding Prayer



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