



ADVENT 2025

Wait... What?

THE UNEXPECTED DELIGHTS OF
THE CHRISTMAS STORY

ADVENT - CHRISTMAS - EPIPHANY
DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

THE VINE UMC
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Welcome!

Advent invites us into a season of holy surprise. Long before angels sang in the night sky or shepherds ran breathless toward a stable, God began weaving a story full of twists, turns, and unexpected visitors. That's amazing! God delights in showing up in places we overlook, through people we underestimate, and in moments we least expect.

Each day introduces a companion, one you may not have noticed in scripture or one you may not know from history. Each life echoes God's Advent hope, peace, joy, and love.

You'll find a scripture passage for each day and something to anchor your reflection. Each entry includes two practices, one to try inside your home and one that invites you to step beyond it. These practices are meant to offer a gentle way to live into the surprising story of Christmas.

May this Advent season help you notice God in unexpected places and may it remind you that the same God who chose young Mary, ordinary Joseph, migrant shepherds, resistant prophets, and surprising saints also chooses you.

Let's be surprised together.

Love,
Pastor Caroline



Tips for your Advent practice:

Go slow and stay open. Advent isn't a race. Allow space for wonder and curiosity. If something surprises you, pause for holy interruption.

Keep this booklet within reach. Seeing it will help you return to it.

Choose a consistent rhythm. Pick a time of day that makes sense for your household.

Don't feel pressure to do everything. There are two practices for every day but you don't have to do them all at once.

Let children lead when they want to. Their insights might become the holiest "Wait...what?" moments of all.

Hold the theme close. Return to this question: "Where did God surprise me today?" You may be amazed how often the answer is: everywhere.

Carry your surprise into the Twelve Days of Christmas. The story keeps unfolding after December 25 and to Epiphany.

Share the journey. We are not meant to do this life alone.

Let God delight you. Expect joy. Expect tenderness. Wonder with God.



HOPE

NOVEMBER 30

...they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks...

Read Isaiah 2:1-5.

Hope begins by imagining the peace God longs to carve out of a violent world. This passage paints a picture of nations choosing learning over fighting and wisdom over domination. Weapons are put down and transformed into tools for growing life, revealing God's dream for a gentler, more generous future.

Isaiah was a prophet who spoke God's truth during a time of fear and uncertainty. He used poetic images to help people imagine a world restored by God's justice and peace. Isaiah called leaders to faithfulness and offered comfort to ordinary people who felt forgotten. Christians read his words in Advent because they point toward the surprising hope God brings through Jesus.

Advent Practices:

- Light a candle and pray for someone in need of hope.
- Deliver a small candle or tea light to a neighbor with a handwritten blessing.

Hope after the Storm

DECEMBER 1

...and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth...

Read Genesis 8:1-19

Hope grows when we trust God to bring new life after overwhelming storms. In today's passage, the floodwaters finally recede, and the ark settles safely on dry ground. What once felt endless begins to shift and new possibilities emerge. This story reminds us that God stays present even when the world feels chaotic and that renewal often begins almost imperceptibly.

St. Brigid of Kildare understood hope. Living in 5th century Ireland, she became known for creating places of refuge, healing, and hospitality. She founded monasteries, tended the land, and welcomed strangers. Stories of Brigid often center on her generosity: multiplying food, caring for the poor, and planting seeds of peace in turbulent times.

Advent Practices:

- Gather evergreen branches and pinecones to create a small "hope centerpiece" for your table.
- Take a slow walk and look for winter signs of life (birds, berries, lichen, moss, or hardy winter plants).



All Shall Be Well

DECEMBER 3

...for the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed...

Read Isaiah 54:1–10.

Hope assures us that God's steadfast love holds us through barrenness and fear. Isaiah speaks to a people who feel empty, abandoned, and exiled using images of a barren woman, a deserted city, and a storm-tossed life. Yet into that ache comes a promise: God's compassion will return, God's love will not let go, and God's peace will endure even when everything else feels unstable.

Julian of Norwich carried this same assurance centuries later. Living through waves of plague, political upheaval, and personal suffering, she received visions of Christ's tender mercy. Her most enduring words echo Isaiah's promise: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." Julian trusted that God's compassion holds us steady when life feels fragile.

Advent Practices:

- Make paper hearts that say, "All shall be well" and place them where you'll see them daily.
- Sit quietly in nature and breathe deeply.



A Shelter of Hope

DECEMBER 4

...then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night...

Read Isaiah 4:2-6.

Hope becomes a shelter when God draws near to protect the vulnerable. Isaiah describes a tender vision: a community restored, a people healed, and a protective canopy of God's presence spread over them like shade in scorching heat. This passage whispers that even when life feels exposed or fragile, God's care covers us, guiding, guarding, and gathering us into safety.

Óscar Romero lived this truth in El Salvador during a time of violence and fear. As archbishop, he became a voice for the poor and oppressed, speaking boldly against injustice even as danger grew around him. Romero offered his people hope by reminding them that God sees their suffering and stands with them. His life testifies that God's shelter is not an escape from the world's pain but a refuge that strengthens us to face it with courage.

Advent Practices:

- Learn about a justice organization.
- Support it with a donation or supplies.



Light after the Long Night

DECEMBER 5

...the LORD binds up the injuries of the people and heals the wounds inflicted by the blow...

Read Isaiah 30:19-26

Hope shines like healing light after a long night of struggle. Isaiah describes a transformed world where tears are dried, wounds are tended, and God's people receive compassion instead of judgment. Even the natural world reflects this renewal: the moon shines like the sun, and the sun blazes with sevenfold brightness. The message is clear: God's healing love reaches into the places where we hurt most, bringing comfort, clarity, and restored joy.

Pauli Murray lived this kind of hope. A poet, legal scholar, priest, and civil rights leader, Murray confronted racism, sexism, and inequality with fierce brilliance and gentle resilience. Their work helped lay the foundation for landmark civil rights victories, and their faith anchored them through seasons of exhaustion and exclusion. Pauli believed deeply in a world healed by justice and compassion.

Advent Practices:

- Turn off the lights and light one candle, watching how its glow grows in the darkness.
- Offer a word of encouragement or gratitude to someone whose work often goes unnoticed.



Comfort for the Weary

DECEMBER 6

...comfort, O comfort my people, says your God...

Read Isaiah 40:1–11.

Hope begins with comfort - real, embodied reassurance that God has not forgotten us. Isaiah speaks to a people who feel exiled and exhausted, promising that God is coming close with tenderness and strength. The passage paints a picture of a shepherd who gathers lambs in gentle arms, carries them close to the heart, and leads them with care. God's comfort is steady and compassionate.

St. Nicholas became known for offering this kind of comfort in the 4th century when he cared for the poor, intervened on behalf of the vulnerable, and quietly gave gifts to families in need. Long before he became associated with Santa Claus traditions, Nicholas embodied generous compassion. His life reminds us that hope grows when our care for others reflects the tenderheartedness of God.

Advent Practices:

- Place a small surprise (a note or a sweet) inside a family member's shoe or stocking as a reminder of St. Nicholas's secret generosity.
- Prepare an anonymous gift (gift card, snack bag, handwritten note) and leave it where someone might find it.





PEACE

DECEMBER 7

'...the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight..."

Read Matthew 3:1–12.

Peace begins with honest truth-telling that clears space for God's healing. John the Baptist appears in the wilderness with a startling message calling people to repentance and realignment. His words challenge the comfortable and the powerful to examine their lives. John's ministry reminds us that peace is the courageous work of clearing away what clutters our hearts so God's new life can take root.

John the Baptist stands as one of Advent's most urgent voices. Clothed in camel's hair, living far from the centers of influence, he prepares the way for Jesus with truth, humility, and conviction. His message carries God's desire for healing, justice, and transformed community. To follow his call is to make room for a more honest, peace-filled way of living.

Advent Practices:

- Clean one small area in your home as a way of making room for peace.
- Pick up litter as a sign of preparing the way for God's healing in your neighborhood.

Peace in the Midst of Ruin

DECEMBER 8

...they lift up their voices, they sing for joy; they shout from the west over the majesty of the LORD...

Read Isaiah 24:1–16a.

Peace persists even in devastation when we practice joyful forgiveness. Isaiah's vision is stark: the earth itself reeling under the weight of injustice. Yet, in the middle of this desolation, a surprising sound rises, people singing for joy. Their voices become a rebellion against despair, testifying that God's presence can be celebrated even when circumstances feel bleak. Peace is a deep trust in God's ability to restore what seems lost.

Desmond Tutu embodied this resilient peace. Through the brutality of apartheid and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he insisted that healing requires both truth and joy. Tutu's contagious laughter was a form of resistance. He believed forgiveness was not weakness but strength, a holy practice that clears space for communities to be remade. His life teaches us that peace endures when we dare to forgive and dare to hope.

Advent Practices:

- One hour of only kind or affirming speech.
- Offer genuine compliments or affirmations.



God Helps the Small

DECEMBER 9

...do not fear, you worm Jacob, you insect Israel! I will help you, says the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One...

Read Isaiah 41:14-20.

Peace grows when we recognize our own vulnerability and discover that God meets us there with strength and tenderness. Isaiah speaks to a people who feel insignificant, using startling images, “worm,” “insect” to reflect how powerless they believe themselves to be. Yet God responds with reassurance: I will help you. The passage blooms into a promise of transformation, deserts becoming pools of water, barren ground sprouting cedars and myrtles. What feels small becomes the place where God’s peace takes root.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux lived this truth through what she called her “Little Way.” Believing herself small, she embraced acts of kindness, quiet sacrifices, and gentle love as pathways to God. Thérèse trusted that holiness is found in small, faithful acts done with great love. Her life reminds us that peace often begins with humble tenderness and grows through daily choices to love well.

Advent Practices:

- Sit quietly for one minute and name a place in your life where you feel small or in need of God’s help.
- Offer a simple kindness to someone outside your home.



Trusting the Promise

DECEMBER 10

...do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great....

Read Genesis 15:1–18.

Peace takes root when we trust God's promises even when we cannot yet see their fulfillment. Abram stands beneath the night sky, uncertain about his future and the path ahead. God meets him in his doubt and fear with assurance and a promise as vast as the stars. The covenant made in this passage is tender and mysterious, revealing that God's faithfulness does not depend on our clarity but on God's own steadfast love.

St. Benedict understood the need for peace shaped by trust and steady rhythms. Living in a time of political instability and moral chaos, he created communities centered on prayer, work, hospitality, and holy balance. Benedict taught that peace grows when our lives are rooted in stability, trust, and faithful practice. His Rule invites us to trust that God is present in the ordinary, the slow, and the unseen.

Advent Practices:

- Step outside after dark and look at the night sky, thanking God for one promise you are holding onto.
- Greet someone with warmth, practicing Benedict's spirit of hospitality and peace.



Companions on the Journey

DECEMBER 11

...where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God...

Ruth 1:6–18.

Peace deepens when we choose loyal companionship, refusing to abandon one another in times of uncertainty. Ruth's vow to Naomi is one of Scripture's most tender acts of commitment, an embrace of another's future, another's people, another's God. In a moment when both women face grief and insecurity, Ruth's devotion becomes a blessing that carries them both forward. Her love reveals how peace grows through presence, solidarity, and faithful companionship.

St. Aelred of Rievaulx celebrated this kind of sacred friendship. A 12th-century monk and abbot, Aelred wrote about how God's love is revealed through friendships marked by trust, compassion, and mutual support. For him, a true friend is a person who reflects Christ's love and helps us become more whole. Aelred reminds us that peace is something we cultivate together.

Advent Practices:

- Prepare a warm drink or meal prayerfully.
- Offer a portion of it to someone who lives alone or is homebound.



Joy Restored

DECEMBER 12

Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel!

Read Ruth 4:13–17.

Peace restores joy where grief once lived. After so much loss, uncertainty, and wandering, Naomi's story takes a surprising turn. A child is born into the family bringing hope not only to Ruth, but to Naomi, whose bitterness is transformed into blessing. The women of the community gather around her, naming this child as a restorer of life. This scene reminds us that God's peace often arrives through unexpected relationships and new beginnings.

Maya Angelou understood the power of reclaimed joy. Through poetry, storytelling, and prophetic witness, she spoke honestly about suffering while also celebrating resilience, dignity, and the capacity for rebirth. Her voice poured light into places marked by pain. Angelou taught that joy does not erase grief. It grows from it, rising like a blessing through courage and truth.

Advent Practices:

- Read a short quote or poem by Maya Angelou that brings you comfort or strength.
- Leave "joy notes" around for others.



Lifting Up the Lowly

DECEMBER 13

...he raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap...

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-8.

Peace demands lifting up the lowly and confronting systems that harm God's children. Hannah's song is a bold proclamation naming a God who topples the proud, strengthens the weak, fills the hungry, and overturns injustice. Her prayer challenges us to see peace not as quiet comfort but as the active work of reordering the world so all may flourish. Peace is born when God's justice lifts people from the dust and restores dignity where it has been denied.

Fannie Lou Hamer embodied this prophetic peace. A leader in the Civil Rights Movement, she fought tirelessly for voting rights, economic justice, and human dignity often at great personal cost. Her famous declaration, "Nobody's free until everybody's free," echoes the spirit of Hannah's song. Hamer believed that peace requires courage, truth, and solidarity, especially with those who are most oppressed. Her life calls us to join God's work of raising up the lowly.

Advent Practices:

- Talk with your household about one injustice you want to pray for or learn more about.
- Donate canned goods, school supplies, or hygiene items to a local organization that supports families in need.



JOY

DECEMBER 14

...he has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly...

Joy erupts when God lifts the lowly and overturns injustice. Mary's Magnificat stands in a long line of songs sung by faithful women echoing the boldness of Hannah's prayer from yesterday's reading. Like Hannah, Mary sings of a God who upends the status quo: scattering the proud, feeding the hungry, and strengthening the powerless. This continuity is no accident; it reveals a God whose character is consistent across generations who delights in bringing justice through unexpected people.

Mary stands at the heart of Advent's promise. Young, vulnerable, and full of courage, she welcomes God's call with a song that is both tender and revolutionary. Her joy is deep trust that God is at work in ways she cannot yet see. Mary teaches us that joy is a proclamation that God is transforming the world.

Advent Practices:

- Sing or listen to a favorite Advent or Christmas song that brings you joy, imagining Mary and Hannah singing alongside you.
- Share a treat, note, or flower with a neighbor to brighten their day and spread joy.

Joy that Restores

DECEMBER 15

...they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel...

Read Isaiah 29:17-24.

Joy blossoms wherever God restores sight, clarity, and healing. Isaiah paints a picture of transformation with forests growing where once there were fields, the deaf hearing, the blind seeing, and those who have made mistakes gaining understanding. It is a vision of God turning confusion into comprehension, shame into hope, and spiritual dryness into new life. This is the joy of restoration: a joy grounded in God's ability to make all things whole.

St. Luke the Physician bears witness to this kind of joy. As a healer and careful observer of Jesus' ministry, Luke highlights moments when Jesus restores bodies, spirits, and communities. His Gospel overflows with stories of healing, reminding us that joy is the fruit of God's mending work in our midst. Luke shows us that God's joy is embodied and concerned with human well-being.

Advent Practices:

- Drink a glass of water slowly, noticing how refreshment restores your body, and give thanks for the ways God heals and renews you.
- Take a prayerful walk for healing and wholeness.



Joy that Flows like a River

DECEMBER 16

...wherever the river flows, every living creature that swarms will live...

Read Ezekiel 47:1–12.

Joy flows wherever God's renewing presence brings life. Ezekiel's vision begins with a trickle of water seeping out from beneath the threshold. As the water moves outward, it deepens, widens, and becomes a river that no one can cross. This river rushes into dead places, healing them, turning saltwater fresh, and transforming barren landscapes into fruit-filled trees. Joy is God's life-giving presence moving into places long parched.

St. Hildegard of Bingen celebrated this life-giving movement of God in her writings, music, and art. She spoke of *viriditas*—the greening power of God that infuses creation with vitality and renewal. Hildegard saw the world as pulsing with divine life, even in unlikely places. Her mystical vision reminds us that God's joy flows through creation, healing what is dry and awakening what is dormant.

Advent Practices:

- Notice a houseplant, tree, or bit of greenery and take a moment to appreciate its quiet beauty and resilience.
- Visit a water source to reflect on the ways God brings life to dry places.



Joy that Heals Community

DECEMBER 17

...they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness...

Read Zechariah 8:1-17.

Joy emerges in communities where healing, truth, and tenderness take root. Zechariah's vision describes a restored Jerusalem, a place where all sit together in safety, where work is fruitful, and where people speak truthfully. God promises to dwell among the people again, knitting the community back together after years of fear and division.

Henri Nouwen lived and taught this vision of healing community. Nouwen believed that healing happens in relationships. Through his writing, teaching, and life, he showed that true joy is found when we embrace vulnerability, practice compassion, and create spaces where every person belongs.

Advent Practices:

- Invite someone into a moment of connection. Share a meal, exchange stories, or simply ask how they're doing.
- Support a community justice effort today. Drop off needed supplies at a community fridge, mutual aid pantry, or local advocacy group.



The Promise that Holds Us Together

DECEMBER 18

...I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me...

Read 2 Samuel 7:1–17.

Joy and love are rooted in God's promise to be present with us. In this passage, God speaks to David offering a relationship. Instead of David constructing a house for God, God promises to build a lasting house through David's lineage. It is a covenant of presence, belonging, and steady love. Even when David and his descendants falter, God's faithfulness does not. This promise becomes the thread leading toward Jesus.

St. Catherine of Siena understood the power of calling leaders back to God's vision of justice and mercy. Living in a time of political turmoil and spiritual confusion, she spoke boldly to popes and rulers, reminding them of their responsibility to love, serve, and protect their people. Catherine's courage shows us that God calls us to speak truth with love, trusting that God's promises hold communities together.

Advent Practices:

- Sit with your family and talk about a promise someone has kept that meant a lot to you.
- Write a brief note or email to a local leader encouraging them to lead with compassion and justice.



Joy in Being Beloved

DECEMBER 19

...therefore you are great, O LORD God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you...

Read 2 Samuel 7:18–22.

Joy is rooted in knowing we are God's beloved. After hearing God's astonishing promises, David sits before the Lord in humility and wonder. He recognizes that his identity, king, leader, servant, is grounded not in what he has achieved but in God's unwavering love and faithfulness. This passage invites us to rest in the truth that our worth is not earned; it is given. Joy grows when we trust that God's love names us, claims us, and holds us.

Howard Thurman lived from this deep center of belovedness. A contemplative theologian and spiritual guide for many civil rights leaders, Thurman understood that activism without grounding would collapse under its own weight. His writings point us back to the quiet place within where God speaks love into our lives. Thurman believed that when we truly know we are beloved, we can move through the world with courage, gentleness, and joy.

Advent Practices:

- Light a candle and sit in silence for 30 seconds, resting in the truth that you are God's beloved.
- Offer a sincere word of encouragement to someone who may need to be reminded of their worth today.





LOVE

DECEMBER 21

...Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife...

Read Matthew 1:18–25.

Love chooses compassion over fear and reputation. Joseph finds himself in an impossible situation caught between what his community expects and what God is asking of him. Rather than react with anger or protect his own standing, he chooses mercy. When the angel speaks, Joseph listens. When God calls, he obeys. His quiet courage reveals a love that refuses to shame, abandon, or condemn. It is a love rooted not in fear, but in trust.

Joseph becomes a model of steadfast, protective love. He shelters Mary, travels with her, welcomes Jesus into the world, and listens for God's guidance again and again. His story reminds us that love is rarely loud or dramatic; more often, it is steady, gentle, and quietly courageous. Joseph shows us that love transforms lives when we choose tenderness over fear and mercy over public opinion.

Advent Practices:

- Pause for a moment of silence and pray for someone you know who is facing a difficult decision.
- Offer a small act of protective love in your community.

Love Made Visible

DECEMBER 22

...your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches far away...

Read Isaiah 33:17-22.

Love builds communities where justice becomes visible. Isaiah offers a vision of one where people see clearly, feel secure, and dwell in a land shaped not by God's righteousness. God is portrayed as judge, ruler, and protector, bringing stability where chaos once reigned. This passage imagines a community where God's presence transforms how people treat one another, and where justice is woven into the fabric of daily life.

Clarence Jordan embodied this kind of love through the creation of Koinonia Farm. Koinonia became a prophetic witness to racial equality, shared work, hospitality, and economic justice. His community faced violence, boycotts, and threats, yet remained committed to embodying the Kingdom of God. Through Koinonia, Jordan showed that love becomes visible when we choose to live together.

Advent Practices:

- Share with your household a moment when you felt loved or supported by a community.
- Donate to a local food co-op, community garden, or mutual aid project that nourishes people and strengthens your neighborhood.



Love that Unites

DECEMBER 23

...for all of you are one in Christ Jesus...

Read Galatians 3:6–14.

Love acts with courageous conviction, insisting that all people belong in God's family. Paul reminds the church in Galatia that God's promise is not limited to a select few. God's blessing extends to all nations, all peoples, all who live by faith. Through Christ, we are woven into a wide, diverse, beautifully interconnected community. The divisions that once separated people lose their power when confronted with God's expansive love. This passage calls us to live boldly into that unity.

John Lewis carried this conviction with prophetic courage. As a civil rights leader, congressman, and lifelong advocate for justice, he believed that love must be active, persistent, and willing to get into what he famously called "good trouble." Lewis's life shows that love is not passive feeling. It is the courageous commitment to stand with those who are marginalized and to insist that every person is beloved of God.

Advent Practices:

- Read a John Lewis quote together and reflect on how it calls you to live with love and courage.
- Find some "good trouble" to get into in the coming year.





Christmas Eve

DECEMBER 24

...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.'...

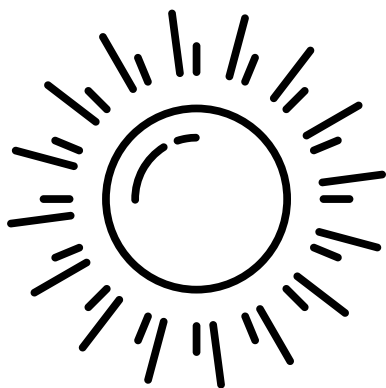
Read Luke 2:1-20.

Love comes close, right into the ordinary, overlooked places of our lives. On the night Jesus is born, there is no palace, no pageantry, no grand announcement to the powerful. Instead, God reveals the good news to shepherds, people living on the margins, watching their flocks in the dark. The angels shatter the night with a message meant for all people: joy is arriving, and it is wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger.

The shepherds become the first witnesses to this miracle. Their astonishment, their haste to see the child, and their joyful testimony remind us that God delights in revealing divine love to those who feel forgotten. The shepherds show us how to receive the gift of God's presence: with wonder, gratitude, and the willingness to share the news.

Advent Practices:

- Sit by your Christmas tree and read the birth story.
- Look for one person tonight who may feel alone, someone working late, a neighbor, or a friend, and offer kindness and connection.



Christmas Day

DECEMBER 25

...and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory...

Read John 1:1–14.

Love becomes flesh so that we may know God face-to-face. John's Gospel opens with sweeping poetry that stretches across eternity, Christ present with God from the beginning, the Word through whom all things were made. Yet this cosmic Christ enters the world not through human vulnerability. God takes on our flesh, our joys, our limitations, and our suffering. In Jesus, divine love becomes something we can touch, trust, and follow.

The Word Made Flesh is the heart of the Christmas mystery. Jesus reveals God as intimate presence that walks with us, heals us, feeds us, and calls us into abundant life. Christmas invites us to see the glory of God in the small, ordinary, and everyday moments. In Christ, love is a person who comes close and stays close.

Christmas Practices:

- Light a candle and share a moment where you have recently felt God's presence made real in your life.
- Connect with your loved ones and celebrate the birth of Christ!

Love that Shines

DECEMBER 26

...being perfected in a short time, they fulfilled long years; for their souls were pleasing to the Lord...

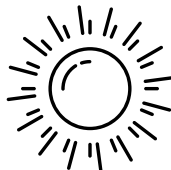
Read Wisdom 4:7–15.

Love reveals its fullness not in length of days, but in faithfulness of life. The Wisdom reading for today reflects on the mystery of lives marked by righteousness, courage, and deep integrity. Even when the world cannot understand their goodness or recognize their holiness, God receives them with joy. The passage teaches us that a life pleasing to God is not measured in years, but in the depth of love, justice, and mercy it bears.

St. Stephen reflects this truth. Though his ministry in the early church was brief, it was radiant with courage and compassion. Filled with the Spirit, he served the vulnerable, spoke truth with conviction, and forgave his enemies even as they caused his death. Stephen's witness demonstrates the meaning of Wisdom 4: a life rooted in God can shine brightly, even if it is short or misunderstood by the world.

Christmas Practices:

- Share together about someone whose life made a lasting impact.
- Leave a generous tip, check on a neighbor, or support someone who is often overlooked.



Love in Wisdom

DECEMBER 27

...then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always...

Read Proverbs 8:22–31.

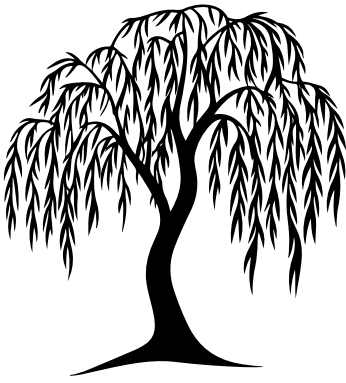
Love is woven into the very fabric of creation. In Proverbs 8, Holy Wisdom speaks as God's joyful companion, present before the mountains were shaped or the seas were appointed their bounds. She delights in the world and in the human family, revealing that creation is not an accident but an act of divine joy. This passage reminds us that God's love is not limited to certain moments or people. It pulses through every corner of the universe and every breath we take.

Dorothy Day understood this deep connection between divine wisdom and daily life. Co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, she rooted her activism in the belief that every person carries sacred worth. Through hospitality houses, shared meals, and acts of mercy, she made God's wisdom tangible in the lives of the poor and forgotten.

Christmas Practices:

- Sit with a warm drink and reflect on one part of creation or daily life that feels especially full of God's joy today.
- Do a small act of mercy in Dorothy Day's spirit. Volunteer at a local shelter or support a mutual aid effort.





First Sunday after Christmas

DECEMBER 28

...she refused to be consoled, because they are no more...

Read Matthew 2:13-23.

Love weeps with those who suffer and stands alongside those who hurt. The story of the flight into Egypt is painful. While Jesus is protected through the family's escape, the children of Bethlehem suffer violence. Matthew recalls Rachel's ancient cry to name the depth of this communal sorrow. Christmas joy cannot ignore this suffering; instead, it compels us to lament and to protect the vulnerable.

The mothers of Bethlehem become witnesses to this truth. Their grief is honored in Scripture, reminding us that God sees every tear and hears every cry. Jesus, a refugee, grows up knowing his earliest days were shaped by the violence of empire, a reality that binds him forever to those who flee danger today. This passage invites us to respond to suffering with active, compassionate love.

Christmas Practices:

- Light a candle in silence, holding in prayer all who face danger, displacement, or violence today.
- Donate diapers, baby formula, and children's clothing to a local shelter, refugee support group, or family assistance ministry.

Love that Leads us Home

DECEMBER 29

...set up road markers for yourself, make yourself guideposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went...

Read Jeremiah 31:15–22.

Love meets us in our grief and leads us toward home. Jeremiah begins with Rachel's deep lament—her cry echoing across generations for children lost to violence and exile. Yet the passage does not end in despair. God responds with promises of return, restoration, and renewed belonging. Israel, once scattered, will come home. Even those who have wandered far are invited back. God's love moves through sorrow, guiding us toward healing.

Marsha P. Johnson witnessed to this kind of home-making love in her own unexpected way. In a world that often rejected queer and trans youth, she created spaces of belonging in street-corner sanctuaries, shared apartments, and chosen family. Like Jeremiah's vision of return, her work insisted that every person deserves a place to be held, protected, and welcomed home. Her life reminds us that love rebuilds community where exile once lived.

Christmas Practices:

- Create a small "guidepost" together. Draw or write a word that represents where you feel God calling you.
- Support a local organization that provides housing.



Love that Makes Us Neighbors

DECEMBER 30

...those of steadfast mind you keep in peace, in peace because they trust in you...

Read Isaiah 26:1–9.

Love builds peaceable communities through steady kindness. Isaiah envisions a strong and spacious city, secured not by military might but by trust in God. Its gates open to those who live with integrity; its peace grows from people who walk in the ways of righteousness. This passage reminds us that true peace is not accidental. It is cultivated through faithfulness, trust, and small daily choices rooted in love.

Fred Rogers embodied this gentle, steady way of peace. Through simple language and profound empathy, he taught children and adults alike that kindness is a courageous choice. Rogers believed every person was a neighbor, deserving of dignity and understanding. His moral clarity helped build communities grounded in compassion, reminding us that love has moved into the neighborhood.

Christmas Practices:

- Share one “forever memory” from this year—a moment worth carrying into the year ahead.
- Be a good neighbor.



Love that Chooses Reconciliation

DECEMBER 31

..give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern...

Read 1 Kings 3:5–14.

Love chooses wisdom and reconciliation over revenge. When Solomon is invited to ask God for anything, he asks for a discerning heart, a mind able to see clearly, judge justly, and care for God's people with compassion. Solomon's prayer shows us that wisdom is rooted in humility and love. It is less about cleverness and more about choosing what nurtures peace, protects the vulnerable, and restores relationships.

Nelson Mandela embodied this kind of wise, forgiving leadership. After decades of imprisonment under apartheid, he emerged not with a fierce commitment to reconciliation. Mandela chose the path one that built bridges rather than deepened wounds. As one year ends and another begins, this story invites us to ask for wisdom that helps us love well, forgive generously, and choose reconciliation where bitterness once lived.

Christmas Practices:

- Share one hope for the new year.
- Reach out with encouragement to someone you've been distant from.





Holy Name of Jesus

January 1

...and he was called Jesus,,,

Read Luke 2:15-21.

Love gives us a holy name and identity. On this day, the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, we remember that God's salvation is spoken into the world through a name. "Jesus" means God saves, a reminder that God's love comes close enough to be called by name. Naming becomes an act of blessing, a proclamation of identity rooted in God's purposes.

Sojourner Truth understood the sacred power of names. Born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree, she later took the name Sojourner Truth because she believed God called her to testify to the truth. Claiming her God-given name was a bold rejection of the identity forced upon her and a courageous embrace of divine calling. Her life reminds us that God speaks names of dignity, calling, liberation, and belovedness over each of us.

Christmas Practices:

- Share the story or meaning of each person's name in your house and speak a simple blessing over them.
- Send a message of encouragement to someone beginning a new chapter in their lives.

Love that Sends Us Forward

January 2

...go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you...

Read Genesis 12:1-7.

Love sends us into new places with grace going before us. God's call to Abram is both unsettling and full of promise: leave what you know, step into what you cannot yet see, and trust that blessing will meet you along the way. This passage reminds us that faith is often a journey into the unfamiliar. But God does not send Abram alone. God goes before him, shaping a future of promise, presence, and blessing.

John Wesley knew the courage and joy of new beginnings. As the founder of the Methodist movement, he stepped into fields, towns, and communities that the Church had overlooked. Wesley trusted prevenient grace, God's grace that goes before us, preparing hearts, opening doors, and guiding every step. His life reminds us that each new beginning is an invitation to rely on God's love and to walk faithfully into what comes next.

Christmas Practices:

- Talk about a "new beginning" you hope for.
- Pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer as a household or on your own, offering yourself to God's new leading.



Love that Awakens Us

January 3

...surely the LORD is in this place and I did not know it...

Read Genesis 28:10-22.

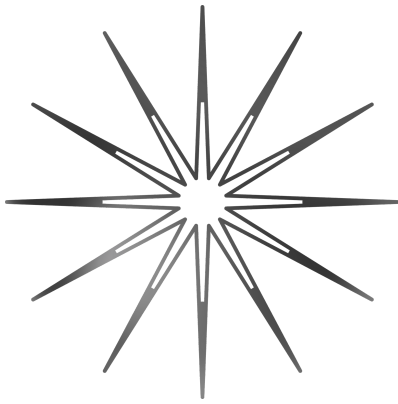
Love meets us unexpectedly and awakens us to God's nearness. Jacob, exhausted and on the run, stops for the night with only a stone for a pillow. In that vulnerable place, God meets him with a dream of a ladder stretching between heaven and earth, a sign that God's presence is not distant but woven into the places we least expect. When Jacob wakes, he realizes that God was with him all along. The story reminds us that divine love often appears in the quiet, hidden, ordinary corners of our lives.

Thomas Merton experienced this awakening in his own journey of contemplation and spiritual discovery. As a modern monk, writer, and mystic, Merton taught that God is present in stillness, silence, and the depths of the human heart. His moments of insight remind us that God is closer than we imagine, and that love reveals itself when we slow down enough to notice.

Christmas Practices:

- Sit in silence together for two minutes, noticing your breath and welcoming God's presence.
- Visit a quiet outdoor space to sense God's nearness in creation.





Second Sunday after Christmas

January 4

...arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you...

Read Isaiah 60:1–6.

God calls us to shine with a light that draws all people toward hope. Isaiah's vision of Radiant Jerusalem imagines a city glowing so bright that nations are drawn to its warmth, and people far and wide walk by its light. This is not human achievement but divine glory reflected through God's people. Even when darkness covers the earth, God's light rises, revealing a future filled with gathering, abundance, and joy.

Radiant Jerusalem stands as a symbol of our calling. The light that fills the city is meant to spill outward, touching neighbors, healing divisions, and illuminating paths of peace. We shine not by pretending we are perfect, but by letting God's love reflect through our words, our kindness, and our courage. When we shine with God's light, others are drawn not to us, but toward hope itself.

Christmas Practices:

- Light a candle as a “shine your light” reminder, and name one way you want to reflect God's love this week.
- Do something that brings light to your neighborhood.

Love that Surrounds Us

January 5

...we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...

Read Hebrews 11:32–12:2.

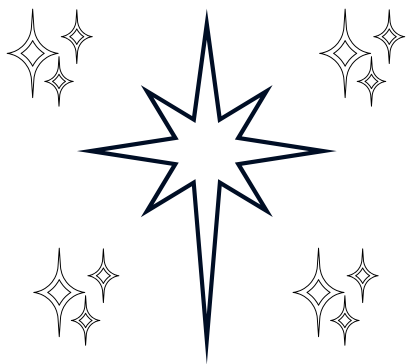
Epiphany courage grows when we remember those cheering us on. Hebrews recounts a long line of ancestors, people who lived by faith even when they could not see the fullness of God's promise. Some conquered kingdoms; others endured suffering. All kept going because they trusted that God was faithful. As the passage turns toward Jesus, we are reminded that we do not run alone.

The Cloud of Witnesses is more than a list of names; it is a living communion of ancestors in faith. Some are biblical heroes, some are church saints, some are family members who shaped our stories with love, courage, or quiet faithfulness. They remind us that endurance is possible, that hope is worth holding, and that God completes what we cannot. Their presence gives us strength to press forward into the light of Epiphany.

Christmas Practices:

- Look at old family photos or keepsakes and name the “witnesses” whose faith, love, or courage have shaped your life.
- Visit or call an elder to thank them for the light they’ve shared with you.





Epiphany

January 6

...when they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy...

Read Matthew 2:1–12.

God uses unexpected travelers to reveal divine light to the world. The Magi, astrologers from distant lands, are among the most surprising guests in the Christmas story. Guided not by Scripture but by a star, they journey on. Their arrival reveals something profound: God's light shines far beyond borders, drawing seekers from every nation. Their worship proclaims that Christ's birth is good news for the world.

The Magi remind us that faith often begins with curiosity, courage, and a willingness to follow the faint glimmer of hope. They cross deserts, navigate political tension, and refuse to cooperate with Herod's violence. Their pilgrimage becomes an act of resistance and devotion, showing us that Epiphany is about revelation, justice, and joy. God still uses unexpected travelers, outsiders, and dreamers to point the world toward divine light.

Epiphany Practices:

- Make a star to hang in your home as a reminder that God still guides us.
- Place a star on your door as a sign of welcome, hospitality, and Christ's light.



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