

Advent 2017

The *Real* War on
Christmas

INTRODUCTION TO THE WAR

War is hell. That's why we cannot afford to waste such a serious word on silly culture clashes. To use a word like war to describe petty squabbles over a sales clerk saying, "Happy Holidays!" instead of, "Merry Christmas!" is deeply insulting to anyone who has suffered the hell of warfare.

It is also the brilliance of our enemy to distract us and divert us from the real war that he has launched. The enemies of God have gone back to this strategy again and again, understanding that if God's people fight each other or some phantom enemy, they remain relatively harmless in the war.

Revelation tells us the story of this war. But its origin may surprise you.

Every winter we put up warm and cozy decorations, we fill our homes with tasty aromas, and we celebrate and remember the humble birth of Jesus, the Christ. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us this story. Every year we remember it. But rarely do we let Revelation help us remember.

And because of this, our memories fail us. Christmas has become far too sentimental. Like a circus lion, Christmas has been tamed, domesticated so that it no longer has any bite.

Revelation tells us that the birth of Christ is an invasion of love. God fulfills his long-awaited promises to Eve, to Israel, and to Mary to come, enter into our world, and rescue it from sin, and death, and the devil.

Revelation tells us that the devil experiences God's love as an act of aggression. The devil seeks to thwart God's redemption by devouring the savior, washing the woman away, and making war on her offspring.

Revelation tells us that the offspring will conquer the devil. The offspring won't achieve victory with weapons of war, but with the love of the savior. They will be transformed by his love, proclaim his love, and finally walk in it, even unto death.

Revelation tells us that the savior is a male child, the very flesh-and-blood presence of God himself. This child will grow into a shepherd who lovingly cares for his sheep. All creation will bow to and serve this humble child.

These four figures in Revelation (a pregnant woman, a dragon, some offspring, and *the* male child) draw us into the war. They will be our guides through this season of Advent.

The woman will teach us how to wait for the Lamb. The dragon will show us the difference between the Lamb's way and all other counterfeit ways. The offspring will teach us how to follow the Lamb. The male child will show us that slaughtered Lambs make the best kings.

May Christmas get its bite back as Advent introduces us to the war the devil has declared on us.

WHAT IS ADVENT?

In the early Christian tradition, like its Jewish heritage, seasons of the year were used as opportunities to observe festivals and holidays. These moments of sacred time were set aside to remember and be formed by God's activity in the present and into the future. Although the Jewish pattern of keeping time revolved around the exodus from Egypt, the Christian calendar is centered on the life and ministry of Jesus.

The church year begins four Sundays before Christmas--with Advent. This season, often commemorated with the lighting of an Advent wreath, is a time of expectation and hope. Advent not only looks back to the first coming of Jesus but also eagerly and anxiously awaits and calls upon Christ to return quickly. "Come, Lord Jesus Christ. Come and make all things new!" Advent forms a people who can be patient with God's gracious redemption of all things.

In a world where the pace of life continually speeds up, where everything has to come fast, and where attention spans are rapidly declining, it might be wonderfully transformative and counterformative to spend four weeks every year intentionally seeking to be shaped by the patient endurance of God. Advent invites the people of God to endure. It invites them to pray expectantly. It forms people who know that justice and righteousness will not come fully through any human institution or plan but will only break out completely when Christ comes to renew all things.

- **Scott Daniels, "Long Expected Jesus"**

OBSERVING ADVENT

Advent Tree

Evergreens have been an enduring symbol of the everlasting life that Christ offers. Because they patiently grow season after season, becoming enormous with large root systems, they offer a powerful and patient image for the kind of long-term waiting God's people are in for. Consider re-thinking your traditional "Christmas" tree this year. Let it train you to wait.

Each week of Advent your household will create an ornament representing the character in our passage. Separate your personal decorations into four piles so that each week you can add each set to the tree with the week's new ornament. Consider waiting until Christmas, the Great Season of Light, to turn the lights on your tree. But then, let them shine brightly for the entire 12 days of the Christmas Season (December 25-January 5).

Advent Songs

Advent is the season of *preparation* for Christmas, not the *celebration* of Christmas. Without time to reflect and prepare we can easily fall into the trap of singing our favorite and familiar Christmas songs with *only* sentiment and nostalgia, while missing the full joy that comes out of the deep longing and extensive waiting of God's people. Advent songs can move people beyond merely feeling good about the world's prospects, into a deep faith that God will not leave the world the way it is but will come once again to "ransom captive Israel" along with the whole of creation. Practice singing these songs throughout the week so that you and your household are ready to sing them with bold confidence. These songs of longing will create a sharp contrast to the songs that will come, songs that erupt with Christmas joy.

[O Come, O Come Emmanuel](#)
[Come Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)
[Psalm 13](#)
[All Who Are Thirsty](#)
[Beautiful Things](#)
[Come Thou Almighty King](#)
[Song of Hope](#)

Advent Wreath

Traditional Advent wreaths have four candles to represent the four weeks of Advent, three blue candles and one pink. The wreath itself is usually made of evergreen branches to represent everlasting life in Jesus. The circle of the Advent wreath signifies God, who has no beginning and no end. Some modern wreaths have a single white candle, lit on Christmas Eve, in the middle that reminds us that Christ is the focus.

How to Observe Advent:

A good time to observe Advent is during the dinner meal time. This doesn't work for every family, so feel free to take time during a different meal or whenever works.

Before each week starts, review the week's theme, prayer, and activities. Consider how you will involve your kids or other family members.

Decide what will work (daily and weekly) for your household and then try to do that. Light the candle on your wreath, work on your ornament, read the prayer, sing the songs, recite the memory verse, read the passage, discuss the prompt, do the activity. Push yourself to try new practices, but also be realistic.

ADVENT WEEK 1

The Pregnant Woman

PATIENCE

**A woman
clothed with the sun
with the moon under her feet
and on her head a crown of 12 stars.**

**She was pregnant
and was crying out in birth pains
and the agony of giving birth.**

Introduction for Kids

God's long awaited promise is like many long and painful pregnancies:

- Like Eve, pregnant with the promise that her offspring would destroy the enemy.
- Like Israel, carrying the promise of the world's king and savior.
- Like Mary, pregnant with the Son of God.

Like a pregnant woman, all of creation waits for Jesus to return and fulfill the Father's promise to make all things new.

A Prayer For the Week

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art,
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.*

*Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to thy glorious throne.*

- Charles Wesley

Memory Verse:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

- Romans 8:19, 22

Advent Colors:

Just as red, white, and blue have meaning in our culture, colors also have meaning in the church (though often a very different meaning). Advent is often marked with *royal blue*, a color that evokes the royalty of our God and king. What would it look like to fill this season with the colors of the coming King? As a family, where might you wave Christ's royal blue as you practice waiting patiently for him to return? How could you decorate your home and your lives with these colors?

Advent Tree:

Create an ornament that represents the Woman pregnant with the promises of God. Is she Eve? Is she Israel? Is she Mary?

Day 1 - The Christmas War Story

Read [Revelation 12:1-17](#)

- Do you know any pregnant women?
- How long does pregnancy last? Can you speed it up?
- What are some of the things pregnant women do while they wait?
- How is pregnancy a great way to think about our waiting on God?

“Our pilgrimage on earth cannot be exempt from trial. We actually progress by means of trial. We do not know ourselves except through trial, or receive a reward except after victory.” - Augustine of Hippo, Common Prayer

Day 2 - Eve, the Mother of All Living

Read [Genesis 3:1-15](#), focus on verses 14 and 15.

Imagine Eve, pregnant with God’s promise, from the beginning until the birth of the one who would destroy the serpent.

- What kind of suffering have people experienced during this time?
- How hard would it be to wait for a child who would finally deal with your enemy?
- In what ways is Eve like the pregnant woman in Revelation 12?

“Blessed is the time of waiting, when we stay awake for the Lord, the Creator of the universe, who fills all things and transcends all things. How I wish he would awaken me, his humble servant, from the sleep of slothfulness, even though I am of little worth. How I wish he would enkindle me with that fire of divine love. The flames of his love burn beyond the stars; the longing for his overwhelming delights and the divine fire ever burns within me!” - Irish monk Columbanus, Common Prayer.

Day 3 - Israel, Pregnant With the Hope of a Future

Read [Micah 4:6-10](#)

God looks forward to “That Day,” when He will be Israel’s King and Israel is restored.

- What does that restoration look like?
- But at the moment, Israel cries. Why?
- In what ways is Israel like the pregnant woman in Revelation 12?

“Our spirit should be quick to reach out toward God, not only when it is engaged in meditation; at other times also, when it is carrying out its duties, caring for the needy, performing works of charity, or giving generously in the service of others. Our spirit should long for God and call him to mind, so that these works may be seasoned with the salt of God’s love, and so make a pleasing offering to the Lord of the universe.” - John Chrysostom, Common Prayer

Day 4 - Mary, the Mother of the Messiah

Read [Luke 1:26-38](#)

- How long did Mary have to wait for God to fulfill his promises through her?
- What might have Mary done in her waiting?
- In what ways is Mary like the pregnant woman in Revelation 12?

“Father, I abandon myself into your hands. Do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I will thank you. I am ready for all; I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, as in all your creatures. And I’ll ask nothing else, my Lord.” - Charles de Foucauld, Common Prayer

Day 5 - Revelation, Pregnant with a New Heaven and New Earth.

Read [Revelation 12:1-17](#)

Revelation ends with a new vision of the woman: the bride of the Lamb. It is only through God’s protection and God’s provision that the woman survives the dragon’s attacks. It is grace and love that bring the woman through the Wilderness to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. God can be trusted. We choose to hope.

“We can do not great things, only small things with great love. What is important is not how much you do, but how much love you put into doing it.” - Mother Theresa, Common Prayer

ADVENT WEEK 2

The Dragon

VIGILANCE

**A great red dragon,
with seven heads and ten horns,
and on his heads seven crowns.**

**The dragon stood before the woman
who was about to give birth,
so that when she bore her child
he might devour it.**

Introduction for Kids

There is an enemy whose power and authority are a copy of God's.
God has allowed this enemy to use his power and his authority.

The enemy is known by many names:

The ancient serpent

The devil

Satan

The deceiver of the whole world

The enemy will appear to win, but his win, will actually become his loss.

God wins when He gives His Son as a Lamb.

The Lamb wins when he is slaughtered.

The saints win when they imitate the Lamb.

Love wins as it undoes hate in human hearts.

A Prayer For the Week

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

*How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?*

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

*Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
Lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.*

*But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.*

*I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

- Psalm 13 (ESV)

Memory Verse:

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

- Matthew 6:13

Advent Time:

Advent trains us to tell time differently. This time of year can become so busy that we become slaves to our schedule. Gifts to buy, parties to attend, food to make, on top of all the normal routines. The devil deceives us into believing we have to do it all, because we're doing it for Jesus! Except we need to slow down, reflect, and be aware if we are going to remain vigilant. If we are going to overcome the devil, we must remain the masters of our schedule. Choosing to practice Advent is a way of gaining control.

Advent Tree:

Create an ornament that represents the great dragon, furious with the woman and making war on her offspring. Is he the ancient serpent? The devil or Satan? The deceiver of the whole world?

Day 1

Read *Revelation 12:1-17*

- Why was the dragon so concerned about the woman and her child?
- Does this dragon frighten you?
- What power does the dragon have since he has been thrown down from heaven and conquered by the brothers and sisters?
- In what ways is this enemy still dangerous?

“At some thoughts one stands perplexed, above all at the sight of human sin, and wonders whether to combat it by force or by humble love. Always decide “I will combat it by humble love.” If you resolve on that once and for all, you can conquer the whole world. Loving humility is a terrible force: it is the strongest of all things, and there is nothing else like it.” - Starets Zosima, The Brothers Karamozov

Day 2

Read *Matthew 2:1-18*

- Why was Herod so concerned about the child born “king of the Jews?”
- Why might God allow this sort of tragedy?
- Do you believe that God’s love is able to undo this evil and restore these children in his kingdom?
- In what ways is Herod like the dragon in Revelation 12?

Since its earliest centuries, the church has remembered the children murdered by Herod as ‘holy innocents,’ who died because Jesus’ coming posed a threat to those in power. Today we remember all the little ones, born and unborn, who are sacrificed in a culture of death that has not yet welcomed the good news of Jesus. And we recall that Herod’s kingdom is now long gone, but the kingdom of God goes on. - Common Prayer

Day 3

Read *Revelation 13:1-10*

The beast is the physical form the dragon takes, whether through political, economic, cultural, or religious powers. The beast leads people to adore him, commit themselves to him, and follow him. The beast makes war on and conquers the saints who proclaim a king and kingdom who call into question his political, economic, cultural, or religious authority.

- Can you identify the political, economic, cultural, or religious beast(s) in our world today? Can you see through the beasts' empty bragging?
- What do we already know about the power behind the beast?
- Will you endure and keep faith when the beast seems to be winning?

Ivan the Terrible respected and feared Basil. Once, when Basil offered Ivan a piece of raw meat during the lenten season, Ivan rejected it. Basil then boldly and truthfully asked him, "Then why do you drink the blood of men?" noting the ruler's violent behavior toward innocent people. - Common Prayer

Day 4

Read *Revelation 13:11-18*

The second beast looks like the Lamb, but sounds like the dragon. The beast doesn't need to kill God's people if he can simply deceive them and render them useless. Revelation calls us to wisdom: to know the difference between the way of the Lamb and the way of the beast.

- What are some of the beast's attractive features?
- Where can you see The Church being deceived into using the beast's ways?
- In what ways has the beast taken over Christmas, so that Christmas looks more like a celebration of the world's values than anything resembling Jesus?
- Where do you need wisdom this Advent?

Little is known of the original "St. Nick," but Nicholas served as a bishop where he learned of three girls who were going to be sold into slavery by their father. Moved to use the church's wealth to ransom the lives of these little ones, he tossed three bags of gold through the family's window. This little Christmas gift reminds us that today 1.2 million children are trafficked each year in the global slave trade. - Common Prayer

Day 5

Read *Revelation 12:1-17*

- How does this story upset the quiet, lovely nativity scenes that usually fill our Christmas imaginations?
- What would happen if we started to place a great red dragon, or at least a figure of King Herod, in these scenes?
- What if the way we celebrate Christmas can truly mark us as public followers of the Lamb or as public followers of the beast? How are you marked?

“Through his bitter suffering and death, Christ freed us only from eternal death, not from temporal suffering and mortal death. But Christ, too, demands a public confession of our faith, just as the Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler, does from his followers.” - Franz Jagerstatter, Common Prayer

ADVENT WEEK 3

The Offspring

ENDURANCE

**The woman's offspring
those who keep the commandments of God
who hold to the testimony of Jesus;**

**They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony
for they loved not their lives
even unto death**

Introduction for Kids

The Church lives during a period of great tribulation.

Victory has been declared: Jesus has overcome sin, death, and the devil.

Yet, sin, death, and the devil are still free to war against and conquer God's people.

One day, sin, death, and the devil will be gone forever.

Until then, with patient endurance and faithfulness, we must follow Jesus wherever he goes, so that we might join him in his victory over sin, over death, and over the devil.

A Prayer For the Week

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O, divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

- St. Francis of Assisi

Memory Verse:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. - Ephesians 5:1-2

Advent Peace:

The dragon and his beasts make war. The offspring of the woman lay down their lives, as the Lamb did before them. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” Where can you make peace in the world? What would it look like to lay down your life *in your family*? Where could you lay down your desires to help meet the needs of others this week?

Advent Tree:

Create an ornament that represents the offspring of the woman, who are conquered by the beast yet who conquer the dragon.

Day 1

Read [Revelation 12:1-17](#)

- How are the offspring of the woman described?
- Why would this make them a threat to the dragon?
- Do you love your life? Do you love your enemies? Which do you love more?
- How can the blood of the Lamb and the testimony of Jesus change your loves?

Justin the Martyr wrote in the second century, “He called Abraham and commanded him to go out from the country where he was living. With this call he has roused us all, and now we have renounced all the things the world offers, even unto death.” - Common Prayer

Day 2

Read [Acts 12:1-5](#)

Just as the dragon shifts his attention from the male child to the offspring of the woman, so Herod (really, his descendant) shifts his attention from the child born “king of the Jews” to the church.

- Why is the church a threat to Herod?
- And what does Herod do to the followers of Jesus?
- Does James resist his death? Does Peter resist his imprisonment?
- The church accepts what is happening and seeks God.

In 1980 Ita Ford, a missionary serving the poor during El Salvador’s civil war, was murdered by officers of the Salvadoran military. She wrote, “The reasons why so many people are being killed are quite complicated, yet there are some clear, simple strands. One is that people have found a meaning to live, to sacrifice, struggle, and even die. And whether their life spans sixteen years, sixty, or ninety, for them their life has had a purpose. In many ways, they are fortunate people.” - Common Prayer

Day 3

Read [Revelation 13:1-10](#)

Flip back to yesterday's reading.

- What did James do? What did Peter do?
 - In what ways do these men and the church live as those who have an ear to hear?
 - In what ways does yesterday's passage bear witness to the truth about today's?
- There is no literal beast killing and conquering: there is only an insecure and power-hungry man described as a beast.
- Are we being passive or neglecting some responsibility if we let beasts like Herod war and conquer against innocent people? What is the Church to do?

“As we - by our prayers - vanquish all the demons that stir up war, and lead to the violation of oaths, and disturb the peace, we in this service are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them. None fight better for the king than we do. We do not indeed fight under him, although he demands it; but we fight on his behalf, forming a special army of piety by offering our prayers to God.” - Origen of Alexandria, third century church leader.

Day 4

Read [Acts 6:8-15, 7:54-8:8](#)

- Who is Stephen; what is he like and what does he do?
- How does Stephen serve as another example of the Church's mission?
- In what ways does Stephen provide another example of yesterday's theme?
- What is the result of Stephen's death? What good comes from it?
- If John, Peter, and Stephen can live in this way, what would it take for us to imitate them as they imitate the Lamb?

“There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then is, this: first, you shall love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you.” - Common Prayer

Day 5

Read *Revelation 7:9-17*

Advent trains us to look forward to the return of Jesus. Here, we find, the offspring of the woman gathered victoriously before God and the Lamb.

- How are these people described?
- What is their relationship with the Lamb?
- Is this a life worth living and a death worth dying?

In the end, the question is, Which looks more like Jesus? For we are called not just to be successful but to be faithful to the way of the cross, even unto death. The way of the cross did not seem to work on Friday, but the promise is that Sunday is coming. In the end, Love wins. - Common Prayer.

ADVENT WEEK 4

The Male Child

REVERENCE

**The woman gave birth
to a male child**

**One who is to rule all the nations
with a rod of iron**

**But the child
was caught up to God
and to his throne.**

Introduction for Kids

The Savior of the world is finally born;
the true King and true Ruler of heaven and earth.

This King is a shepherd.

To his sheep, his rod is the crook of a compassionate shepherd.

To the nations, his rod looks a lot like a weapon.

But his weapon is His Word.

And since the beginning, His Word has always been love.

A Prayer For the Week:

*Christ with me
Christ before me
Christ behind me
Christ in me
Christ beneath me
Christ above me
Christ on my right
Christ on my left
Christ when I lie down
Christ when I sit down
Christ when I arise
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me
Christ in every eye that sees me
Christ in every ear that hears me*

Memory Verse:

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David,
a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

- Luke 2:11

Advent Singing:

Even though we traditionally wait to sing Christmas songs until Christmas, there is a need to learn the music so that we can be ready to sing with heart and joy. Since this is the only time of the year we sing these songs, you may need to teach them to your kids or even learn them yourself. This is a great chance to notice some of the strange lyrics. Practice singing each of these songs every day until Christmas.

[O Come, All Ye Faithful](#)

[What Child is This?](#)

[Hark! The Herald Angel's Sing](#)

[Silent Night](#)

[Joy to the World](#)

[Go Tell it on the Mountain](#)

Advent Tree:

Create an ornament that represents the male child who will rule the world with his rod of iron. Is it a weapon in his hand? Or a shepherd's crook?

Day 1 - O Wisdom



Read Together:

O Wisdom, you came from the mouth of the Most High, and reaching from beginning to end, you ordered all things mightily and sweetly. *Come*, and teach us the way of judgment.

Mary's Song - The Magnificat:

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.
He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored
because the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is his name.

He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.

He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.
He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,
just as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever.”

- Common English Bible (CEB)

Lord, it was not enough for you to care for the poor. You chose to become one of them by descending as you did. Keep us free from fear and selfish preoccupations that we may walk as you walked among the poor, sick, and dying in body and spirit. Amen. - Common Prayer

Day 2 - O Lord and Ruler



Read Together:

O Lord and Ruler of the house of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush, and on Mount Sinai gave him your Law. *Come*, and with outstretched arm redeem us.

Mary's Song - The Magnificat:

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,

and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

For the Mighty One is holy,

and he has done great things for me.

He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.

His mighty arm has done tremendous things!

He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away with empty hands.

He has helped his servant Israel

and remembered to be merciful.

For he made this promise to our ancestors,

to Abraham and his children forever."

- New Living Translation (NLT)

"O Lord, who brings to nothing the designs of the nations, O Ruler, who raises the lowly and humbles the lofty, have mercy on those who are disheartened! Raise us who have fallen, show thyself to those who call on you, and heal those who are sick. Feed the hungry, free our captives, strengthen the weak, encourage those who lose heart! All nations shall know that you alone are God." - Common Prayer

Day 3 - O Root of Jesse



Read Together:

O Root of Jesse, you stand as a banner for all mankind; before you kings shall keep silence and to you all nations shall have recourse. Come, save us, and do not delay.

Mary's Song - The Magnificat:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

- English Standard Version

“Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the incarnation. From the time when Christ came, the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, and the speech of kindness diffused. A heavenly way of life has been implanted on the earth.” - Leo the Great, Common Prayer

Day 4 - O Key of David



Read Together:

O Key of David, Scepter of the house of Israel, you open and no man closes; you close and no man opens. *Come*, and deliver him from the chains of prison who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Mary's Song - The Magnificat:

“My soul doth magnify the Lord,

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:

for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;

and holy is his name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

He hath shewed strength with his arm;

he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats,

and exalted them of low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things;

and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He hath helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy;

As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham,

and to his seed for ever.”

- King James Version (KJV)

Lord, you have conquered death and triumphed over evil. There is nothing left for us to fear. Put us to work on this earth, striving for the kingdom in everything we do. Let us die to ourselves each day that we might find ourselves made new in you. Amen. - Common Prayer

Day 5 - O Rising Dawn



Read Together:

O Rising Dawn, Radiance of the Light eternal and Sun of Justice;
Come, enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

Mary's Song - The Magnificat:

"I'm bursting with God-news;

I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.

God took one good look at me, and look what happened—

I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!

What God has done for me will never be forgotten,

the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.

His mercy flows in wave after wave

on those who are in awe before him.

He bared his arm and showed his strength,

scattered the bluffing braggarts.

He knocked tyrants off their high horses,

pulled victims out of the mud.

The starving poor sat down to a banquet;

the callous rich were left out in the cold.

He embraced his chosen child, Israel;

he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.

It's exactly what he promised,

beginning with Abraham and right up to now."

- The Message

Give us the courage to follow the way of your cross, and to trust that though it confounds the logic of the world, your way interrupts the patterns of sin and death, both now and forever. Amen. - Common Prayer

Day 6 - O King of Nations



Read Together:

O King of the Gentiles, Desired of all, you are the cornerstone that binds two into one. *Come*, and save poor man whom you fashion out of clay.

Mary's Song - The Magnificat:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”

- New International Version (NIV)

*“To worship the LORD is — in the world’s eyes — a waste of time. It is, indeed, a **royal** waste of time, but a waste nonetheless. By engaging in it, we don’t accomplish anything useful in our society’s terms. Rather, the entire reason for our worship is that God deserves it. Worship is a royal waste of time, but indeed it is royal, for it immerses us in the regal splendor of the King of the cosmos.” - Marva Dawn*

Day 7 - O God With Us



Read Together:

O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Expected of the nations and their Savior: *Come*, and save us, O Lord our God.

Mary's Song - The Magnificat:

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored
because the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone,

from one generation to the next, who honors him as God.

He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,

just as he promised to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever.”

- Common English Bible (CEB)

“...some of those who were most used to hear our dear Father's dying voice would be able to interpret his meaning; but though he strove to speak we were still unsuccessful: finding we could not understand what he said, he paused a little, and then with all the remaining strength he had, cried out, 'The best of all is, God is with us'; and then, as if to assert the faithfulness of our promise-keeping Jehovah and comfort the hearts of his weeping friends, lifting up his dying arm in token of victory and raising his feeble voice with a holy triumph not to be expressed, again repeated the heart-reviving words, 'The best of all is, God is with us!'” – John Wesley