

HOPE - Week One - November 29, 2020

Readings adapted from ReDiscover Christmas by Outreach.

Today is the first Sunday of advent. It is the beginning of our 4-week journey into a rediscovery of hope, peace, joy, love and Jesus Christ himself.

Wherever you find yourself this year on your level of anxiety, uncertainty or pain. Wherever you are on your own spiritual journey. Wherever you are in the midst of holiday stress or pressure.

Come with us on this journey of advent.

If you have an advent wreath, we invite you to light it with us this week - and each week leading up to Christmas. As we light these candles together, we pray that the Spirit will draw us together.

As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, we will discover together good news in troubling times.

Because no matter how troubling the times and no matter how heavy our hearts, there is good news. The greatest news!

Today we light the first candle of our advent wreath. It is the candle of hope.

The first Sunday of Advent signifies the hope people felt in their hearts for the promised Messiah to lead them out of dark and hard times. We pray that we might rediscover the hope in our hearts that Jesus continues to bring into our world. Place your hope in the light of the world, who was born a baby in Bethlehem and who is coming again.

Hear these words of hope from the good news of Matthew and Luke: "And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

"All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" (Mt 1:21-23)

"Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" (Lk 1:29-33)

JOY - Week Two - December 6, 2020

Readings adapted from ReDiscover Christmas by Outreach.

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. It is the Sunday of JOY which reminds us of the angel's good news that was told to the shepherds.

We imagine ourselves on the hillside where the joyous announcement was made by a sky full of angels.

Luke tells us, "That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12)

We trust that joy is possible - even in the midst of hardship and disappointment. Even when we're discouraged. Even when life doesn't make sense. Even in the year 2020.

Today we light the two candles of our advent wreath.

We light the candle of hope, and now we also light the candle of joy.

As we focus on joy this week, ask God to fill you with the gift of his joy. Surrender the pain and fear in your life to his joy.

Reflect on what brings you joy this season.

And what keeps you from experiencing joy?

As you think about these things, allow Isaiah's words to encourage you: "I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness." (Isa 61:10)

LOVE - Week Three - December 13, 2020

Readings adapted from ReDiscover Christmas by Outreach.

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. It is the Sunday of LOVE which reminds us that Jesus was sent to us because of God's great love for us.

John's gospel tells us, "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." (Jn 3:16-17)

Today we light three candles on our advent wreath - the candles of hope, joy, and now love. As we light these candles, we notice that God's light is shining brighter and dispelling the darkness more each week.

Let God's love be your focus this week, no matter what you're going through. His love desires to heal us and draw us together - even as we are hurting and separated this year.

Experience the depth of his love and allow that love to overflow to others in grace and unity. Let love fill you as Christmas draws closer! "May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God." (Eph 3:18-19).

Imagine what it must have been like at that first Christmas. Luke tells us, "When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them." (Luke 2:16-20)

PEACE - Week Four - December 20, 2020

Readings adapted from ReDiscover Christmas by Outreach.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. It is the Sunday of PEACE which reminds us that Jesus came to bring peace. Jesus is the One whom we call the Prince of Peace. Isaiah foretold this when he wrote, “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isa 9:6)

Today we light four candles on our Advent wreath. Let us light our candles of hope - for Jesus brings hope in our uncertainties. We light the candle of joy; Jesus brings joy to our discouragements. We light the candle of love - for Jesus brings love to our differences. And now we also light the candle of peace - recognizing Jesus brings peace to our struggles.

In a world that seems to be filled with anxiety, conflict, and uncertainty more than peace, allow God to be your peace. Whatever circumstances you are facing, let the peace of Christ be your comfort, rest, and refuge.

Let us join with the angels in declaring the peace that Jesus brings.

“That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

CHRIST - Christmas Eve & Christmas Day - December 24-25, 2020

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The fifth and final candle of Advent represents Jesus Christ. This candle signifies the ultimate reason for our Christmas journey. He is the baby Jesus, God's only Son, the Savior of the world.

Jesus is the reason we celebrate. He is the source of all the gifts we've discovered on this Advent journey - the gifts of hope, joy, love and peace.

And so let us light all five candles of our Advent wreaths together. We light the candles of hope - joy - love - and peace. And finally, we light the Christ candle in celebration of Jesus' birth.

The waiting is almost over. The Messiah is coming.

And even as we celebrate his arrival in our world, we also long for when he will return. We long for the time when his work will be complete, when his kingdom will come, when all the earth will be restored.

But while we wait for that day - we still celebrate this day. We rejoice in his birth. We rejoice in his coming to earth. Christ has come. Christ will come again.

"The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it....The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son." (Jn 1:4-5, 9-14)

Come let us adore him!