

Journey to the Manger



(Photo: Altar area at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Broadus MT)

Daily Advent Devotional

JOURNEY TO THE MANGER

“Journey to the Manger” is a daily devotional to accompany you on your 4-week Advent journey. It begins the First Sunday of Advent, November 27th, and is completed Christmas Eve, December 24th. “Advent” is from the Latin word, *adventus*, which means “coming” or “arrival”. In our Christian Church calendar, Advent is the time we set aside to prepare to celebrate, again, the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In the whirlwind culture of our daily lives, we are tempted to rush to the manger. This daily devotional invites you to take time to ponder, reflect and savor the journey to the manger, a journey you never travel alone.

This 28-day resource is a combination of scripture, brief meditation, images, prayer and pondering questions for every day of your journey. Never done a daily devotional of any kind before? No problem. No prior experience is required. Advent is the perfect time to begin that faith discipline. If possible, set aside a specific time each day for this devotional practice. Miss a day? No problem. Just get back on track and continue the journey.

Journey involves movement. In addition to providing daily devotions, another purpose of this collaborative project is to promote a healthy active lifestyle. Physical movement of any kind is encouraged throughout this Advent journey. That movement includes, but is not limited to: walking, running, cycling, water aerobics, elliptical, stairs, chair exercises, etc. Challenge yourself and set a goal for this time period: November 27-December 24th. Challenges are more fun and successful when we do them together. As an example: 90 miles is the distance that Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem: consider doing it with others as a relay. You can start that challenge anytime. If you don’t get there by December 24th, it’s ok. So, check out the webpage for this project to help set your goal, share your progress, get inspiration and encouragement from others. www.imluchurch.org/journey. Other project activities and resources, including the Facebook link and a downloadable pdf of this devotional, will be posted on the webpage.

Blessings to you on your Advent Journey to the Manger!

“Journey to the Manger” is a collaborative project by Our Savior’s Lutheran (Bonner MT) and Immanuel Lutheran (Missoula MT). Original devotional contributions by: Pastor Julie Long, Marilyn Hall, Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner and Leslie McClintock. Technical advice and assistance from Nancy Marks. Photo images used by permission from: Julie Long, Lana Smith, Abby Long, Adam Long, Randy Long, Holli Humber, Kathy Heidel, Jill Graff, Rob Stuberg, Amy Harstad, Bradn Buerkle, Rebecca Boman, Nancy Marks, Matt Wellert, Cristina Beauchemin, Lindsey Rousselin and Brenda Frelsi. Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise indicated. Print copies made possible from a Thrivent Action Team Grant (Thanks, Georgia Cobb from Immanuel) and Missoula Copy Center.

Advent, 2022

The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come.

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Wind moans, buffets the house
early this November morning.
Streetlight through maple leaves.
Temperature thirty-two degrees, feels like fourteen.
Advent whistles around the eaves;
then as now, Advent meets us where we are.

*

Imagine Mary, thirteen years old,
nine months with child, riding a donkey
ninety miles, from Nazareth to Bethlehem;
Joseph walking, helping her, leading the donkey.
It would have been a grueling journey,
four to five days or longer,
along ravines and hills and rocky ground.
They would have eaten bread and cheese,
perhaps olives, dried fruit, and wine.
They would have slept on the ground.

*

Then in Bethlehem, no room at the Inn.
Her labor on a bed of hay in the stable
would likely have been long and hard,
with only Joseph to help her.

•

At last, the miracle, Jesus Christ, the
Savior. What would she have felt
holding him for the first time?

*

Two thousand twenty-two years later,
Advent comes to us in a sad and broken time.
We who are *troubled in soul, poor and imperfect*,
need the rituals of Advent
to enter the joy of Christmas.

— Leslie McClintock
(Our Savior's Lutheran-Bonner MT)



(Our Savior's Lutheran-Broadus MT 2015)

DAY 1-November 27

Psalm 139:7-10

⁷Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.



“On your mark, get set, go”.

- What is the “mark”, your starting point as you begin this journey to the manger? Maybe you are starting from a place of anticipation, anxiously excited for what is ahead for you.
- Maybe you are starting from a place of joy, brimming over from a recent accomplishment, a new love relationship, planning for a wedding or for a child.
- Maybe you are starting from a place of disappointment or discouragement, not knowing, and maybe even fearing what may be ahead for you.
- Maybe your starting place is one of tragedy and sorrow, mourning the death of a friend or family member who passed away recently or years ago.
- Maybe your starting place is change: change in relationship, change in profession, change in health status, unexpected change that has you feeling lost or uncertain about the future.
- Maybe you are starting from a place of fatigue, tired of COVID-related issues, tired of political drama, or maybe you are just plain tired.
- Maybe your starting place is one of comfort and satisfaction.
- Maybe you are excited to just get going in this daily devotional.

*Wherever your starting “mark” is,
it is the right starting place for you.*

God of beginnings, be with me as I start this journey to the manger. Remind me that your love surrounds me in every step of every day. As I journey with other travelers on this path, give us strength when we are weak, pick us up when we stumble. Help us to put our trust in you for all of our life journeys. I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Ponder: What is my starting place? Where do I see God in my starting place or do I see God at all as I begin this journey? What do I expect to find when I reach the manger?

DAY 2-November 28



Exodus 13:21-22

The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Our travels are new each day. We may have plans or an idea of what the day will bring. We are often surprised. Some surprises are pleasant, some-not so much. But we are to keep traveling forward every day, one step at a time,

through the days and nights of our lives. How do we keep going if we can't see what's coming? Has anyone traveled this road before? Yes! God goes in front of us.

O God, I give thanks that you are always before me. Help me remember that I never travel alone and that you lead the way. Amen.

Ponder: When have I felt alone? What can I do to help me remember that God is always with me?

DAY 3-November 29

Psalm 23:4a

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."



Fear stops us from doing so many things, and there are numerous kinds of death. The fear of....

embarrassment

shame

rejection

disagreement

disappointment

not being enough

change

loss

Walking and moving, in general, releases endorphins that help to **relieve pain, reduce stress and improve mood.** So, moving is a gift from God that helps us in our time of distress. *"I will fear no evil."* Use this as a repetitive phrase as you 'move' today, even if you can't move.... *"I will fear no evil for God is with me."*

Holy One, as we move towards the manger, move our hearts and minds towards the love and forgiveness that you have for all of us. Help us move in your kingdom, wherever we are living. Amen.

Ponder: Read the following Labyrinth devotion by Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner.

Walking the Labyrinth

By Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner, Immanuel Lutheran Church-Missoula

The Labyrinth is an ancient archetypal path that has appeared in many cultures and in Christian spirituality since the fourth century. In college, I walked the Red Sun Labyrinth in Victor, MT. Since then, I have led many through Labyrinths.

Recently, I walked a Labyrinth at Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco. I didn't have anyplace to set my purse. It could get stolen! So, I walked the labyrinth holding it. It was heavy and distracted me. Why hadn't I just set it down! I noticed that I was completely focused on that thing and my decision to carry it with me. Soon, it became a metaphor for all the worries, negative thoughts and patterns that I won't let go. Walking the Labyrinth gave me insight into what I carry and the hope that though I may not let go, or even be able to let go, I do not carry these burdens alone. God is with me, walking alongside and carrying them with me.

Using the guide on the next page, try it by tracing the finger Labyrinth below. It's different from *walking* a Labyrinth, but it offers a new way to reflect upon your own spiritual journey this Advent.



LABYRINTH GUIDE

Remember Before tracing the labyrinth, take time in gratitude to for your life. Bless the people in it. If there's a specific event or situation troubling you, you might bring it to mind and form a healing question.

Release As you enter the labyrinth, quiet the mind, let go of mind chatter and release your troubles. Open your heart to feel whatever it might feel. Become aware of your breathing. Take slow breaths. Relax and move at your own pace.

Receive The Center is a place of reflection. Pause and stay as long as you like. Open yourself to your higher power. Listen to that small inner voice. In the safety of the labyrinth have a heart-to heart talk with yourself.

Return Walking out of the labyrinth, when you are ready, re-trace the same path you followed in. Leaving, integration of your experience happens. Sense well-being, healing, calm, excitement, or peace.

Each experience is different. You may feel nothing or have a powerful reaction. Simply, listen to your heart and take all the time you need.



Temporary labyrinth, Broadus MT 2015

DAY 4-November 30



Jeremiah 6:16

“Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it.”

Advent is an ancient practice of waiting for the celebration of the Christ Child. But the world doesn't want to wait. The rest of the world rushes towards all that glitters. But we have a different practice. We reflect and respond. The Advent season is all about reflecting on how we can prepare our hearts and homes for

Christ's birth in the world, as it is today. Through prayer, reflections, special music, and good deeds, it is a time for our faith communities and families to remember the true meaning of Jesus' birth.

Holy Keeper of our days, move with us in our walk through Advent. Help us to respond in wonder and with prayer each day. Help us remember that it is your message of hope, love, peace and joy that the angels foretold when they sang in the dark night so long ago. Help us keep our feet on the path leading to the manger. Amen.

Ponder: How can I prepare my heart to walk to the manger this Advent season?

DAY 5-December 1

Isaiah 30:21: *“And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’.”*

Exploring new places can be wonderful and, at times, a challenge. Maybe you have taken directions from a friend to go and walk or hike to a location that is new to you. Bewilderingly, the path disappears, or becomes unclear. Uneasiness warned you that you missed something and you look back to find where you went wrong. Sometimes looking back is the only way forward.



Holy Spirit, Comforter, Guide: whether I'm aware of it or not, you are leading me. Quiet me when I can't see a way ahead. Slow me down so I don't miss the signs of your presence. Help me relax into the way you are taking me...especially when I have no idea where that may be. Amen. (Prayer by Deaconess Janet Alcantara)

Ponder: When did God “nudge” you to guide you in the way to go? What happened? How did you recognize ‘God’s word behind you saying, “This is the way to go”’?

DAY 6-December 2

James 5:7-8

"Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."

Patience-we aren't very good at it, especially in this holiday time of rushing around to get everything done; how we want it done and when we want it done. We're familiar with the prayer: "Lord, grant me patience and I want it now!" Waiting patiently sounds good for everyone else, but not for me. But "waiting patiently" is what we are called to do during Advent. God does indeed come to us every day in so many ways. Be alert! Be ready! Be watchful in this journey!



O Lord, when my mind is racing with "to do" lists; when I want to run faster than I am able, slow me down. Help me to see the blessing in the "waiting" as I watch for you. Amen.

Ponder: Who is my model of patience? What on my "to-do" list can wait until tomorrow?

DAY 7-December 3

Isaiah 40:28-31

"Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

But those who hope in the Lord, will renew their strength.

*They will **soar** on winds like eagles; they will run and not grow weary,*

they will walk and not be faint."



Blessing: In this time of walking to the manger; may our Creator bless you with love for those you meet each day. May the Son, born in the manger, give you peace and joy to share with those you meet this season. May the Holy Spirit come to you with strength for your day. Amen.

DAY 8-December 4



Isaiah 57:14

It shall be said, "Build up, build up, prepare the way; remove every obstruction from my people's way."

Obstacles don't have to be large to stop us from moving forward: a closed gate, a small nail in our tire, an unplowed sidewalk, a branch on the trail, an insulting word from a friend. But we should not be discouraged. Keep going. Help remove that obstruction so that others can travel more easily. We are in this journey together: first or last, we will all arrive.

Free us, O God, from obstacles that seek to block our path or turn us away from you. Give us strength and confidence to move forward. When we are the ones who cause others to stumble or prevent them from following you, forgive us and show us the way to reconciliation. Amen.

Ponder: When did I face an obstacle in my faith life? In my personal life? In my professional life? How was it resolved? Has it been resolved? How does God help me move forward?

DAY 9-December 5



Psalm 46:10-11

"Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

Stillness can take many forms: private quiet time at the start or end of the day, alone with our thoughts on our exercise or meditation routine, rocking a child, watching quietly falling snow, listening to soothing music, resting along the way on a mountain hike. "Be still!" is the command with an exclamation point. In the midst of the constant voices around us, each shouting for our attention — *be still*, just for a few moments. Remember who we are and remember who God is: the One who created us and redeemed us; the One who is always with us; the One we can run to in times of trouble, confusion, anxiety, fear, despair or fatigue. God is our refuge!

Be near me, today, O God. Help me to rest in the stillness of you when I am pulled in so many directions. Strengthen me with your Holy Presence as I continue on this journey. Amen.

Ponder: When are the times I have felt closest to God? How can I "be still"?

DAY 10-December 6



(Photo by Rev. Bradn Buerkle-Russian landscape)

Isaiah 40:3-4

³ *A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

⁴ *Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.*

Ups and down; highs and lows, "joys and junk" (as some may say): That is the journey we travel. We long for a way that is straight and level, easy to follow, no obstacles or distractions. We long for God's peaceable kingdom: where justice and equity reign, where every person is valued and respected, where creation is honored.

We are waiting.

While we wait, we pray: "*Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.*"

While we wait, we act.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we 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. (Prayer attributed to St. Francis)

DAY 11-December 7



Isaiah 35:5-7a

*"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;
6 then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert;
7 the burning sand shall become a pool
and the thirsty ground springs of water;*

As you re-read these verses, you can almost feel the relief that the water brings to the desert, to the thirsty ground. What's happening here? At this point in Isaiah, **God is sending good news to the disheartened tribes of**

Israel as they awaited the coming of the Messiah. God makes his promise to send a Messiah. God sends us good news today. We *know* who is born in the manger. We *know* who brings sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and movement to the lame. That's the crazy part of Advent! We wait to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, and yet we live with the certainty that the Messiah already came in Jesus!

Holy Child, you bring the rains that water the Earth, and you bring the snow to protect the land from cold temperatures. Nourish our faith, Holy God, that we may be your hope-filled people in the times of dryness. Give us courage to speak of the Christ Child to our friends and neighbors. Help us share the joy of our salvation with each person we meet this season. Amen

Ponder: So...what do we do now? How do we live as 'water-filled' people of God? How do we show our faith today?

DAY 12-December 8

Psalm: 139:13-14

*"For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.*

God made us and the Holy Creator loves us!

THANK GOD!!!!

As they say, God doesn't make mistakes.
And we are good, beloved children of God.

Blessing: May the Holy Creator renew your confidence; may Emmanuel renew your compassion and love of people, and may the Holy Spirit bring you peace. Amen.



DAY 13-December 9

Psalm 40:1-2

¹ *I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

² *He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.*

Have you ever had your feet stuck, really stuck in thick mud? You floundered and flailed your arms, trying to get yourself out. When that didn't work, you had to call for help. We can get stuck, really stuck in our faith journeys, too. We encounter difficulties that challenge our faith and bog us down. We get stuck. We flounder and flail our arms, trying to get ourselves out. But we can't do it alone. The Psalmist reminds us that God hears our cries. We are rescued again and again by the One who created us: lifting us up, setting us on the solid foundation of God's love and presence. We boldly move on.

When I am stuck, drained of energy from trying to go my own way, hear my cry and save me, O God. Set my feet firmly in you as I continue to journey where you lead. Amen.



Ponder: When have you felt "stuck" in your faith life? Times when you wanted to grow deeper and learn more but didn't know where to start? Times when you wanted to pray for help, but didn't know how to begin? How were you rescued?

DAY 14-December 10



Isaiah 49:13

*"Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the LORD has comforted his people
and will have compassion on his suffering ones."*

Music, while walking or moving, makes our journey bearable and enjoyable. Streaming music through ear buds is standard practice these days. Music is a gift. It expresses our most exuberant joy, our deepest sorrow and everything in between. We sing children to sleep with soothing lullabies. Music is played or sung at the bedside of the dying, providing comfort and peace. Creation sings, too. Do you hear it?

For the song in my heart and for the songs of creation around me, I give you thanks, O Lord. Open my ears to listen and to hear. Weave your melody into my soul. Amen.

Ponder: What is my first memory of music? What is my favorite song or type of music?

DAY 15-December 11



Isaiah 11:1-2: *“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”*

“A shoot...” a small beginning of new growth from the parent plant. We are ‘the shoots’ from Jesus, the child in that manger we journey to see. We continue to live out the hopes and dreams the prophets foretold of that Holy Babe in Bethlehem.

Creator God, you generously give us what we need to sustain us in times of good and times of trial. Help us to grow into the gifts of wisdom and understanding that we might be your people in this time and place. We pray as those who come as a mere shoot from our parent, Jesus, Amen.

Ponder: As I move ever closer to the manger in this season of waiting, how am I like that new shoot? How do I embrace the gifts the Spirit of the Lord brings – those of wisdom and understanding--those of counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord?

DAY 16-December 12



Psalm 23: 1-3a

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.*

These are hectic days and anxious times. We don’t seem to have enough hours in the day to get everything done that we would like, especially in this time before Christmas. Healthy eating is a challenge. Our energy drains quickly. Tempers are often short. Some of that is because we cheat ourselves out of the gift of rest. This

familiar psalm reminds us that rest is not an option. Our Shepherd God **MAKES** us lie down and leads us to still places. We cannot run on empty for very long and stay healthy. We need rest to be restored. Take advantage of the opportunities this Advent season, however short-lived, to simply rest. And then, get up and continue on.

Thank you for taking care of me, O God. Help me to realize my need for calm and rest, as I go forward in my journey to the manger. Fill me. Renew me. Lead me. Amen.

Ponder: Where are my favorite places to stop and rest? Why are they special places for me?

DAY 17-December 13



Luke 1: 26, 38: ^{vs26} *"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you...the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.'"* ^{vs 38} *"Here I am, the servant of the Lord..."*

Mary was in her sixth month of a baffling experience, let alone that it was culturally wrong since she was not married and living in a rural village. Imagine the rumors! But Mary hears the angel's words:

"The Lord is with you...Do not be afraid."

Those same words *come to us* through scripture...God is with us...wherever we go. We hear words of comfort and assurance. *Do not be afraid*-perfect words to hold near to our hearts as we live each day! Pick what feels right as you move through your day and frequently remind yourself of God's words to you.

Lord, you are with me

I will not be afraid

Our response: Here I am, Lord. Amen.

DAY 18-December 14

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—

from where will my help come?

² *My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.*

³ *He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.*

⁴ *He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

⁵ *The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.*

⁶ *The sun shall not strike you by day
nor the moon by night.*

⁷ *The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.*

⁸ *The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.*



Thank you, O God, for always keeping me in your holy care. Amen.

Ponder: Look up and look around. What do you see? Who do you see? What do you notice that you never noticed before?

DAY 19-December 15



Psalm 25: 4-5

*Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.*

*⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.*

To wait...one of the most difficult things we are ever asked to do.

As we ask our Lord to 'teach us the ways to go', we walk by faith while we wait, trusting in God's guidance. It is only when we can look back at a situation or a time in our life, that we 'see' the hand of God reaching out to guide and comfort.

God works good in spite of many challenging situations, but it doesn't always seem that way at the time.

Holy God, as we move through our days, we take this time to thank you for your ever-present help in times of challenge. Teach us your paths. Open our eyes to the salvation You have given us. Help us to see the beauty surrounding us, and to remember You move with us through each circumstance in our lives.

**Thank you for sending Jesus as a Child, that we may hold Him near our hearts.
Amen.**

Ponder: Sometimes it takes time to help heal wounds that trouble us. Think back to a difficult time in your life. How did God bless you in the midst of the challenge? How would you thank God for the results? Mary and Joseph were faced with a difficult social situation for both of them. How is your response like theirs? How did God help you?

DAY 20-December 16

Isaiah 43:2-3a

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

We often find ourselves in situations that seem to swallow us whole, as if we are going through mighty rapids or raging wildfire. But the prophet reminds us that we will pass **“through”** the raging waters and walk **“through”** the flames. Our God, never leaves us but accompanies us **through** whatever is in our path. For our God **is** the Holy One, the one who saves us; the one who will never let us go-not now, not ever.



O God, you have called us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(ELW pg 317 Vesper prayer)

Ponder: When have I felt overwhelmed? How did I get through that time? Where was God?

DAY 21-December 17



Isaiah 40:1

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.”

It’s time for a “comfort break” on this journey we travel together. Make time and take the time to: Relax. Breathe. Close your eyes.

Wrap yourself in a favorite blanket.

Listen to your favorite music.

Watch a heart-warming movie. Make yourself a soothing cup of tea or other yummy warm drink.

Enjoy your favorite comfort food.

Hug your child, grandchild, lover, friend, pet (if they will let you). Receive their hugs in return.

Like a child in their mother’s arms, we are held and comforted by our loving God.

Allow God’s love to embrace you today.

Mothering God: Hold me in your arms. Soothe my pain and distress. Calm my anxious heart. Help me rest in your love and grace. Amen.

DAY 22-December 18



Mary and Elizabeth rejoice (courtesy of Worship Sounds Music Blog, <http://worshipsounds.wordpress.com>)

Luke 1: 46-48

*And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the
lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me
blessed for the Mighty One
has done great things for me.”*

This is the beginning of the “Song of Mary” or the “Magnificat”. Mary is with her cousin, Elizabeth, when she says these words of praise and faith. Mary is in a very difficult and potentially dangerous position. She is an unwed mother.

Yet, she accepts where the path leads and she places her trust in God, her Savior.

Holy Creator, we give you thanks for the record of Mary’s faith. Give us the courage to move with You through each day of our lives. Accept our faith that you are with us where ever we are and wherever we go. Show us those friends and family members who walk with us, who encourage and support our faith in you.

Help us remember that you can do great things for us, too.

We pray, in this season of Advent, in the name of the Christ Child. Amen.

Ponder: How can we place our fate in the hands of the Almighty? Can we do that each day? Who can hear us as we give our offering to God and why might that be important? Remember: Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs, not alone.

Remember, you have friends to walk with you.

DAY 23-December 19

Psalm 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Our response?

THANK YOU GOD!!!!

Thank you for being with us in the darkness!

Thank you for walking with us through our joys, our sorrows, and our confusion!

Thank you God, that even when it doesn't feel like it, you are with me.

Thank you for giving me strength when I feel weak.

Thank you God...I need your help.

Thank you for sending those who follow your way and walk with me, so I know, in a different way, that I'm not alone.



Ponder: Mary and Joseph walked a difficult path on their way to the manger.

How is yours going? What are you thankful for?

DAY 24-December 20

Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."



These are familiar words to those who listen to Handel's Messiah. The music swells with joy and praise of our God. However, not all of us enjoy music from the past. The spirit of this music is the **JOY** that the Messiah is coming; that the Christ will bring about a new way of living. The surprise was that the Messiah came as a vulnerable, approachable child. It is easy to love a little baby. The challenge comes in following the real Messiah who comes. But for now, there is **JOY**.

Holy God, You sent your Son as a guide to the ways of your kingdom to love, joy, peace, and forgiveness. Open our eyes and hearts to the miracle this season holds. Move us to love as you love, to forgive as you forgive, and to be a presence of peace. Thank you for being with us as we move closer to the manger. In the name of the Christ Child, we pray. Amen.

Ponder: Where can you go, or what can you do to help you rediscover the joy of this season?

Handel's music: For Unto Us is Born:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MS3vpAWW2Zc>

DAY 25-December 21

Micah 6:8

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

From a scriptural point of view, justice means **loving our neighbor as we love ourselves and it is rooted in the character and nature of God.**

As God is just and loving, so we are called to do justice and live in love.

*"The Lord loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord." (Psalm 33:5).
"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you;" (Psalm 89:14).*



This is a very different way of viewing justice. Originally, St. Nicholas shared gifts with those who were the outcasts, those at the edge of society, or broken.

Holy God, as we keep moving towards the manger, open our eyes to see those in need of justice and kindness. Give us the will and strength to work for your kingdom wherever we may find ourselves. Thank you for the love that your Son brought into the world, that we may follow his example to "see and respond to" the outsider. In the name of the Christ Child we pray, Amen.

Ponder: Who do I see that is in need of some loving kindness, some justice? *What can I do?*

DAY 26-December 22



Luke 24: 32, 33a, 35: *(The two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus.) "They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?...That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem...Then they told what had happened on the road, and how (Jesus)he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."*

O Come Emmanuel, dwell in us, that we may share the love and joy of our faith with others. Make us brave to tell of your love and forgiveness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ponder: How do you tell the story of Jesus?
Who could you talk to about this?
What makes it hard to share our faith?

DAY 27-December 23



John 1:1-5, 14

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

That baby in the manger, God's Word in flesh and blood, walked our journeys, shared our joys and sorrows, took all of our guilt and shame on himself. Christ showed us light in the darkness, hope in times of despair, new paths when we only see barriers and life when we only see death. The holy birth that we hunger for, is here, now. How is God's Word alive in the flesh today? God's Word is alive in us; in our actions and in our reactions; in our work and in our play; in our giving and in our for-giving; in our sharing and in our caring.

Almighty God, you gave us your only Son to take on our human nature and to illumine the world with your light. By your grace adopt us as your children and enlighten us with your Spirit that we may reflect your holy light. Amen.

(adapted. Evangelical Lutheran Worship pg. 20)

Ponder: How do my words and actions reflect the living Christ? What do I need to change?

DAY 28-December 24th



Matthew 1:18-25

“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*“ Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”*

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.”

**O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray.
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell;
oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Immanuel.**

(“O Little Town of Bethlehem”. Christmas Carol. vs. 4)