

Introduction to the day

Advent is about the “coming days.” God’s people have always lived in great expectation, but that expectation finds specific, repeated enunciation in the texts appointed for these four weeks. The ancients anticipated a “righteous Branch to spring up for David.” The Thessalonians awaited “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints.” Jesus’ contemporaries hoped for the time “to stand before the Son of Man.” With them we eagerly await the coming days: another Christmas celebration, a second coming, and the advent of Christ in word and supper.

First Sunday of Advent

Praise to you, O God, our salvation who is near.
You hold us in our waiting and keep us awake to the world.
You show up in our lives at unexpected times.
Bless us as we light this candle to keep vigil for your arrival.
We trust that even though we do not know the day or the hour,
you hurry to gather all people to your peace. **Amen.**

LIGHTING ADVENT CANDLE

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.
Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection alert us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and redeem us for your life of justice, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 33:14-16

A reading from Jeremiah.
In the Old Testament, “righteousness” often has to do with being faithful in relationship. God acts righteously both in punishing Israel for its sin and in having mercy. In today’s reading, Jerusalem’s future name—“The LORD is our righteousness”—proclaims that God is even now working salvation for Israel.

PSALM: Psalm 25:1-10

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. (*Ps. 25:1*)

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.
Upon Timothy’s report from the congregation at Thessalonica, Paul is exuberant with gratitude for them. In this passage from his letter, Paul voices overflowing thanks, joy, and blessings for the people of this growing church.

GOSPEL: Luke 21:25-36

God will fulfill God’s purposes and, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, and terror, but God’s people shall be given strength to stand boldly and receive God’s promised redemption.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - Real Worries, Real Hope

“Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” With these words, often invoked at the table of holy communion, the church proclaims “the mystery of faith” (*ELW*, p. 110). At communion, we remember the good story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. But there is more! We also look forward to a time yet to be.

Thoughts of the future can inspire hopefulness for the promise of good things to come. Yet looking ahead can also conjure worries about what we do not know, or a sense of foreboding about what is out of our control. It's hard not to hear in Jesus' references to nature a warning about the dramatic effects of climate change. We inhabit a world in which ordinary signs that used to reliably mark the change of seasons are shifting. So when he talks about the trees sprouting leaves as a sure sign that summer is near, the image may leave us unsettled. In recent times, trees in some places have started budding when meteorological spring and summer are still months away. How will the trees respond when frost comes again? How is the church to respond in times such as these? Will the fig tree bloom on time this year?

Jesus' parable of the fig tree comes smack-dab in the middle of some very disturbing news. Jesus offers an image of hope amid circumstances that seem all but hopeless. He talks of new growth even while what is old and familiar is passing away. Much like Jesus' parable, the season of Advent invites the church to hold together these multiple, seemingly contradictory realities. We are called to rise up with courage and hope as we anticipate Jesus coming to us, without ignoring the weight of the world or neglecting our very real concerns. Jesus gathers us to the table where we remember his death but also his resurrection, where we pray for the world and also anticipate God's redemption of all things.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As we prepare for Emmanuel, God-with-us, let us pray for all people and places that long for God's presence.

God of righteousness, your people live in hopeful expectation of your coming. Fill your church with renewed passion for our shared mission, and deepen our relationships with other Christians and other faith traditions in our local community and across the world. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God of the cosmos, all creation shows that your presence is near. Help us sense your goodness and love in the sun and moon, in sprouting leaves and bare branches, in the roaring sea and quiet breeze. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God of the nations, your reign extends over all principalities and powers. Give leaders and all in authority hearts for justice and peace. Encourage efforts to enact policies that benefit the common good. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God of change, you accompany us through life's transitions. Be near to all who are changing jobs, moving, welcoming children, or facing the loss of loved ones. Sustain those who are ill or suffering (*especially* Linda Boland, Ken Fulford, Sandra Gagnon, Shirley Glickman, Walter Hobden, Donna L. Hoffman, Claude Jeannotte, Cassie Jessup, Bill Lorbetskie, Glenda Panke, Barry Rogers, Marilyn Schneider, Danny Schultz, Doug Sell, Debbie Thom, Ron Thom, Keith Weckwerth, Denita Wolfgram, Elaine Yourth, Harold Yourth, Stephanie Yourth, and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. In times of change, remind us of your steadfast love. In this moment of silence, we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts, those who need your healing touch. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God of community, your Spirit holds us together. Sustain our care for one another. Inspire us to seek new ways to live together and to embrace the diversity of thought and identity in our communities. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

God of memory, we give you thanks for faithful ones who have died. Tend to our grief and sorrow with renewed trust in your promise of abundant and eternal life. Lord, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

Savior of the nations, come, and receive these prayers and the pleas of our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

BLESSING (ELW p. 114)

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ✝ give you peace.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Remember the poor.

Thanks be to God.

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