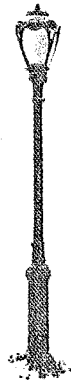


HOPE

Wait with this word for awhile before you turn the page. Let *Hope* settle into your thoughts. Let this word soak into your life. Let it spread across your imagination as you look toward Christmas. Do not hurry. Wait. And when you have taken some time with this word, turn the page.

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT



DAY ONE

Responding to the Word *Hope*

What is your first reaction to this word?

Describe your most recent experience of *hope*.
Be as specific as possible.

What memories or stories from past Advent and Christmas seasons does this word, *hope*, call forth from your life?

What might God desire that you *hope* for in the gift of these days
and weeks that lead us toward Christmas?

INVOCATION

*O Hope,
aperture of God's expansive view;
prism through which all true Light breaks,
illuminating paths and patterns,
ways and wanderers.
Refract our shortsightedness
that we may look to the East with distance vision
and find our Advent way.
Come, O Hope,
focus our blurred
and distracted sight
that we might see clearly the One who is coming.
Amen.*

SILENCE

REFLECTION ON HOPE

Hope. Perhaps no other word better illumines the Advent story. Hope that Mary would say Yes! Hope that Joseph would not reject her upon hearing the news of her pregnancy. Hope that their long journey to Bethlehem would bring no harm. Hope that the bright star overhead would bring only good.

Parents hope for room in an inn. Shepherds hope for good news of a birth in a manger. Angels hope for peace in human hearts. Advent could not be Advent without hope. Not at the first and not today, for without the burning cry of hope, the world could descend into deadening discouragement.

Hope opens something in the human heart. Like shutters slowly parting to admit a winter dawn, hope permits strands of light to make their way to us, even when we still stand in cold darkness; but hope also reveals a landscape beyond us into which we can live and move and have our being. With hope, closely held

interior thoughts are gently turned outward; deep desires, perhaps long hidden in secret corners of our heart, might be lifted up to the light. At times, hope peels back the edges of our imagination to free what waits underneath—a changed life, a new resolve, a yes pregnant with possibility. In other moments hope dares us to unfold a layer of desire—for relationship, for clarity, for courage.

In the stories and season of Advent, God opens everything to us through hope born of expectation—expectation that Christ is coming to make all things new. And in the coming of Christ we find the coming of hope, made real in time, space, and flesh.

May you, like an expectant parent, use these days and nights prayerfully hoping for what is to come. May you live through the scriptures of this season, in which the light of God's hope breaks in on a waiting world to illumine the landscape in which we live and move and have our being.

HYMN OF HOPE

Sing or read the words of this Advent hymn. Attend to the words carefully. How do they stir up a sense of hope for this season?

COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS

*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

BENEDICTION

Hope in the Lord. May night give way to morning; may darkness break open to light; may you make room for Christ. Hope in the Lord, for he is coming to make all things new. Amen.



DAY TWO

Read Isaiah 11:1-10.

“A SHOOT SHALL come out from the stump of Jesse,” the reading begins. A sure sign of hope is a sign of life where at first there seems to be no life. As winter leaves a sparse and barren landscape, spring brings rooted signs of newness in the unfolding of each day. The prophet Isaiah understood this image of hope for the imaginations of God’s people.

As you sit with this psalm from Isaiah, write down the names of three people in your life who come to mind as you think of persons who need a sign of hope. For what do they hope? What “shoot” or “bud” would be a sign of life to them and to those who love them? Pray for each one by name, and in your prayer, speak aloud their individual hope. Plant these prayers in the winter soil of Advent and release them to God, asking God to tend to them through this season and beyond.

Your reflections—



DAY THREE

Read Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19.

THE PSALMIST PRAYS to God for the establishment of a kingdom in which justice, righteousness, and peace are realized. Here is a word about God's hope for creation, a God-shaped hope where love for neighbor flourishes.

Get a map of your city and spread it out on a table. Look over the different parts of town and pray for each section, the ones in which you know neighbors and the ones where you do not. Pay attention to parts of your city where issues of justice and fairness need your attention. Sit with this map for awhile and pray for the establishment of God's reign on earth and for how, this Advent, you can be an instrument in the coming of that reign where hope resides.

Your reflections—



DAY FOUR

Read Romans 15:4-13.

IN THIS PASSAGE from Paul there is no question about the role of hope in the Christian life. The reading ends with these words: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." And just a few lines before this, in verse 4, Paul teaches the people that one sure source of hope is scripture, God's holy Word.

Is there a story or passage from scripture that comes to mind when you think about hope? If so, take time to recall it. If you know where the passage is located, mark its place in your Bible. If you do not know where to find it, simply mark its place in your memory by recalling all that you can about it.

If no scripture comes to mind for you, ask a close friend or family member for a suggestion of scripture that speaks of hope. Invite the person to share that passage with you.

Your reflections—



DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 3:1-12.

A ROUGH AND wild John the Baptist seems to interrupt Advent's gentler story. But the way of the Lord, the path for Jesus, had to be prepared so that people did not miss what God was doing right before their eyes. John's life was full of sacrifice. He lived and died so that Jesus could bring hope into the world. John lived and died so that God's Word could be fulfilled.

Who prepared a way for you to follow Jesus? Who taught you about the Bible? Where did you learn about prayer? What is your earliest memory of worship or Sunday school? Write down the names of people who helped prepare a way for you to grow in your faith and in your hope in God. Then simply give God thanks for these persons in your life.

Your reflections—



DAY SIX
The Waiting World

IF A YOUNG couple expecting their first child came to your community tonight with no money, no place to live, and no medical care, where they could stay? What hope does your community offer for such a need? Take time to find out what services are provided in your community. Become informed about these services and choose a way to support one of these services with your time, resources, and prayers. Help “prepare the way” of hope in a waiting world.

Your reflections—



DAY SEVEN

Praying in Hope

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas.

—Psalm 65:5

DAILY EXAMEN

One classic prayer practice is called the *daily examen*. Nothing about this form of prayer hides behind its name: it is a *daily* prayer by which to *examine* life with God. What can be more hopeful than a prayer by which we honestly bring before God the ins, outs, ups, and downs of a day, and then learn to release them all to the One who already knows us inside out. By such a practice, each new day begins in the hope for new life.

A daily examen prayer is usually practiced just before going to bed. There are many different models and forms for this kind of prayer, but in each of them we are invited to take time to remember the past day—what we thought, did, and felt—and with a simple set of questions, examine our responses before and with God. Essentially a prayer of examen makes room for an honest accounting of the day: where we were strong in faith and where we were weak or neglectful. A prayer of examen allows us to scan back over the day with an eye to both the moments when our thoughts or actions were pleasing to God and those when our responses were less faithful.

To live into God's hope requires learning to trust the ways of God, sharing with God a full and honest relationship. One of God's ways is the way of hope—making all things new in any time or place. A prayer of examen allows us to set our entire day before God, including the parts that did not delight God, and to entrust the past day to God so that in the morning, in the new day, we can begin again in God's merciful hope. May this way of prayer release us into Advent hopefulness.

A GUIDE TO THE PRACTICE OF A DAILY EXAMEN

As mentioned, a daily examen is prayed just before going to sleep. It may take five minutes or twenty, depending on how much time you choose to spend in the practice. The following guide, based on my own practice, may be adapted to the language and questions of your own life. This model rarely takes more than ten minutes for me to complete and often even less time.

To begin, choose the night when you will make room for the practice. Go about all usual bedtime routines so that once ready to retire, no other tasks will need your attention. Then move to your bed or chair and ask yourself the following questions, sitting with each one for a few minutes as you sift through the day's events. Make mental notes or, if you journal, feel free to do so.

- *When in this day was I aware of God's presence?*
(Be specific as you remember.)
- *When were my actions and choices in this day pleasing to God?*
- *When were my actions and choices not pleasing to God?*

Now release into God's care all of the day, the ways in which your life delighted God and the ways in which you may have missed the mark of God's delight. Imagine turning all over to God so that you can rest in God and rest in hope that the next day will provide new opportunities to awaken to God's presence and to begin again the life of faith. Ask for God's help in rest and waking.
Rest.

Clearly, a daily examen is a very personal prayer. It is an individual prayer, most often practiced in solitude, but a group can practice this prayer in community. A group, class, or community can learn the practice together and make a commitment to one another to practice it each night over a period of time. For example, this

prayer could be learned and then prayed for the remainder of Advent and through the Christmas season, or a small group could go on retreat and commit to practicing the examen each night of the retreat.