

THE WELL COMMUNITY CHURCH
PRESENTS



MMXVI

What is Advent?

Advent is a tradition that has developed over the church's history as time of preparation for Christmas day. Advent is a season in which we focus ourselves on the adoration of Jesus. It is a time of patient waiting and hopeful expectation. The very word advent literally means—coming.

Throughout the Old Testament, God was preparing his people for the coming of the Messiah. During the Advent season we remember, we wonder, and we celebrate. We remember the thousands of years God's people groaned and waited, longing for his salvation. We wonder at the mystery of God's very own son becoming a humble baby to live among us. We celebrate the fulfillment of all the promises God made by sending his Son, our savior.

From now until Christmas day we want to focus our minds attention and hearts affection to adoring Jesus. This season should be filled with great happiness and joy for the people of God because the waiting is over. Like the Ancient Creed says, "For us and for our salvation" Christ has come! We truly, have the greatest reason to celebrate.

As a child eagerly waits to open their presents on Christmas Day, so we eagerly wait for the return of our Savior, when he will make all things perfect and right, and we will live with him forever.

Introduction

This booklet was designed to be a guide for daily communion with God during the seasons of Advent and Christmas. It is our desire the we would individually and collectively as a church, take time each day to slow down and fix our eyes on Christ our savior. As you begin, let me share with you four benefits of our Advent Guide.

Four Benefits of the Advent Guide

1. Bible reading and prayer. It may sound elementary, but having planned, regular, put-in-your-hands, routine Scripture reading and praying helps you actually read your Bible and pray!
2. Community. Through the next six weeks, there will be dozens of others in our church reading the same Scriptures on the same day with you. There will be many in our church praying the same prayers and being stirred to ask the Father for the reign and rule of Jesus together. By participating in the Advent Guide, you are participating with our church community.
3. Historical roots. The prayers and rhythms of this devotional are pulled from ages past, some dating all the way back to the 4th century. The language might feel a little awkward at times, but the effect is that we realize that we are in a long line of sinners who have been saved by Jesus.
4. God of order. Our lives are crazy, especially during the month of December. Schedules go haywire, the shopping lists get longer, and the parties keep multiplying. Our God remains the same, and daily devotions helps us remember this. You know what you can expect. You know what's coming next.

How To Use Advent Guide

Scripture Readings & Prayers

The guide is designed for you to take time each day and walk through passages of scripture in the Old and New Testaments. Take time to read each passage of scripture and reflect on what you read. However, if you miss a day, forget about it and pick up again the next day. The point is not to weigh you down with a checklist, but to build into our lives a rhythm of consistent prayer and Bible reading.

The written prayers are a guide meant to help create a heart of worship and devotion to Jesus. Read the prayer and think about what is being said in the prayer. You may choose to repeat the prayer you read back to God, or pray your own version of that prayer. This particular space is designed for you to draw near to God in prayer before feasting upon God's word.

Reflection

This is a space for solitude, silence, and reflection. During this time you may want to journal your thoughts as you reflect on the scripture readings. You may also want to write prayers to God. This section is designed that you would think upon the word of God. The following are some things to help you in your time of reflection.

- * What is the passage saying? What about Jesus' character is being revealed? How should we respond to God in light of this passage of scripture?

- * In what area of your life do you desire to see and experience the (Hope, Joy, Love, Peace – choose based the weeks Advent Theme) of Christ in your life. Write out your prayer to God asking Him to grant you understanding of His Word, ask him to stir you affections for Jesus that you might experience the hope, joy, love and peace of Christ more intimately.

For Parents

Kids are enamored and inundated around Christmas. As a parent, it is your joy and responsibility to point your children to Jesus during a highly commercialized time of year. This Advent Guide is not merely for adults, but for kids too. Below are a few tips to help you journey through Advent with your kids toward the hope, joy, love, and peace of Jesus.

Ages 2-4

Scripture Readings and Prayers

If you have kids between the ages of two and four, have your kids follow you as you pray the Opening Prayer and listen while you read the scripture readings.

In the Closing Prayer section we repeat the phrases like “Lord, have mercy” and “Christ, have mercy.” Ask your kids to complete the prayer:

“When Daddy says ‘Lord...’ you say, ‘have mercy.’”

“When Mommy says ‘Christ...’ you say, ‘have mercy.’”

This is a simple way to involve your child and teach them to pray. Remember, at this age, “more is caught than taught.” Let your kids jump around the living room, but also provide simple ways to grab their short attention spans with the beauty of Advent.

Reflection

Depending on the development of your children, you can invite your children to color pictures of what they heard in the Scripture readings. We have included coloring sheets for each week’s Advent theme at the very back of this booklet. Prepare your children for this fun event beforehand; it’s good for parents to set good expectations. Inform your kids that they will get to draw a picture toward the end of your time together. This will help them engage with the theme or content for that particular weeks theme.

Ages 5-8

Scripture Readings and Prayers

If your children are between ages of five and eight or can read, the best way for them to engage in the Advent Guide is by letting them read some of the sections. You can even have them lead the family by reading the opening and closing prayers, or let them be creative and lead Opening or Closing Prayer. In the long run, this will help grow the desire of your children to read Scripture and pray. It is okay for your child to fumble on words throughout the reading. It doesn’t have to be crisp or clear; your goal is to simply build your child’s confidence in reading and understanding Scripture.

Reflection

At this age you can begin to teach your children to be silent during the contemplation. They might not reflect on the Scripture but simply sitting still and respecting silence is a key learning experience at this age. They will see you worship by reflecting on God's Word! So, let them be kids, but teach them that silence is golden and a necessary part healthy worship.

Ages 9 and up

Scripture Readings and Prayers

By age nine, most children can lead their family through the entirety of a day in the Advent Guide. Encourage the family to gather-round and give him/her the booklet and cheer on his/her maturity. Additionally, encourage them to use this booklet on their own, so as to develop a youthful appreciation for the elements found in this devotional.

From the age of nine and onward, there is a good chance that your children will have questions regarding the Old Testament. If they read the Old Testament reading for your family, but don't understand how Israel's Only Savior in Isaiah 43 is actually Jesus Christ in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, engage their curiosity and help them in Old Testament literacy.

Reflection

If your nine or ten year old doesn't understand silence and reflection yet, this is the best window of opportunity to teach them. In the Reflection portion, you can encourage your children to journal about what words or ideas come to mind during each Advent reading. If you have younger and older children, this means that during this section, some of your younger children are drawing pictures and your older children can write. Perhaps your child could keep an 'Advent journal' for such writings or personal prayers surrounding the Advent themes.

Some days will be fantastic while others will seem like a waste of time. Have realistic goals and expectations of yourself and your children. Whatever you decide to do this Advent season with your children, simply teach them to love Jesus as much as they love the presents under the Christmas tree.

Finally, if you miss a day, forget about it and pick up again the next day. The point isn't to weigh you down with a checklist, but to build into our lives a rhythm of consistent prayer and Bible reading.

Together, may Christ be enjoyed and our hearts cry out: "Come, Lord Jesus, come!"

For Community Groups

Our Advent Guide has a different Old & New Testament Scripture Reading for each day. So, what ever day your group is meeting you will be going through that day's devotion as a group.

Scripture Readings and Prayers

Take time each week to read the Opening Prayer and scripture readings aloud as a group. If your Community Group has children, set aside a 5-7min portion of your groups meeting time to have the children participate in the life of the group. Please read the "For The Parents" section above and discuss with the parents of the children beforehand on how best to incorporate their children.

Reflection

During this time some groups may choose to break off into smaller groups or gender specific groups for discussion. Community Group leaders, Here are 3 things to consider for each weeks discussion.

1. Take time to discuss the Scripture Readings. What is the passage saying? What about Jesus' character is being revealed? How should we respond to God in light of this passage of scripture?
2. In what area of your life do you desire to see and experience the (Hope, Joy, Love, Peace – choose based the weeks Advent Theme) of Christ in your life. Explain why.
3. What are some challenges people in your community are currently facing in this season of life. How can your Community Group love, pray, and support one another in this season?

WEEK ONE OF ADVENT: HOPE
NOVEMBER 27 - DECEMBER 3



H O P E

MMXVI

Week One of Advent - Sunday

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, we watch and wait for your second coming knowing you are our only comfort and our true hope. In this Advent season may you stir in us a longing for heaven that surpasses our longing for things of this earth. Amen.

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 40:1-5

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

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

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.

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'

Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of

the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of hope.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week One of Advent - Monday

Opening Prayer

You sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life, that when he will come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.

- Book of Common Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 60:1-22

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.
Lift up your eyes all around, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.
All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you;
the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;
they shall come up with acceptance on my altar,
and I will beautify my beautiful house.
Who are these that fly like a cloud,
and like doves to their windows?
For the coastlands shall hope for me,

the ships of Tarshish first,
to bring your children from afar,
 their silver and gold with them,
for the name of the LORD your God,
 and for the Holy One of Israel,
 because he has made you beautiful.
Foreigners shall build up your walls,
 and their kings shall minister to you;
for in my wrath I struck you,
 but in my favor I have had mercy on you.
Your gates shall be open continually;
 day and night they shall not be shut,
that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations,
 with their kings led in procession.
For the nation and kingdom
 that will not serve you shall perish;
 those nations shall be utterly laid waste.
The glory of Lebanon shall come to you,
 the cypress, the plane, and the pine,
to beautify the place of my sanctuary,
 and I will make the place of my feet glorious.
The sons of those who afflicted you
 shall come bending low to you,
and all who despised you
 shall bow down at your feet;
they shall call you the City of the LORD,
 the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.
Whereas you have been forsaken and hated,
 with no one passing through,
I will make you majestic forever,
 a joy from age to age.
You shall suck the milk of nations;
 you shall nurse at the breast of kings;
and you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior
 and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.
Instead of bronze I will bring gold,
 and instead of iron I will bring silver;
instead of wood, bronze,
 instead of stones, iron.

I will make your overseers peace
and your taskmasters righteousness.
Violence shall no more be heard in your land,
devastation or destruction within your borders;
you shall call your walls Salvation,
and your gates Praise.
The sun shall be no more
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give you light;
but the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.
Your sun shall no more go down,
nor your moon withdraw itself;
for the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended.
Your people shall all be righteous;
they shall possess the land forever,
the branch of my planting, the work of my hands,
that I might be glorified.
The least one shall become a clan,
and the smallest one a mighty nation;
I am the LORD;
in its time I will hasten it.

New Testament Bible Reading

Revelation 21:9-11

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Revelation 21:22-27

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will

bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of hope.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week One of Advent - Tuesday

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, as I cross the threshold of this day, I commit myself, soul and body to your care. Watch over, keep, guide, direct, sanctify, bless me. Incline my heart to your ways. Mold me wholly in the image of Jesus. May my lips be a well-tuned harp to sound your praise.

- adapted from The Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 11:1-10

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fatted calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

New Testament Bible Reading

Romans 15:8-13

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and sing to your name."

And again it is said,

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

And again,

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples extol him."

And again Isaiah says,

"The root of Jesse will come,
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope."

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of hope.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you have revealed to your Church your eternal Being of glorious majesty and perfect love as one God in Trinity of Persons: Give us grace to continue steadfast in the confession of this faith, and constant in our worship of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week One of Advent - Wednesday

Opening Prayer

A little child, thou art our guest, that weary ones in thee may rest
Forlorn and lowly is thy birth, that we may rise from heaven to earth.
Thou comest in the darksome night, to make us children of thy light
To make us in the realms divine, like thine own angels round thee shine.
- from "All Praise to Thee, Eternal God" by Martin Luther, 1483-1546

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 65:17-25

"For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
and her people to be a gladness.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and be glad in my people;
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping
and the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not fill out his days,
for the young man shall die a hundred years old,
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain
or bear children for calamity,
for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD,
and their descendants with them.

Before they call I will answer;
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
and dust shall be the serpent's food.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.

New Testament Bible Reading

Revelation 21:1-8

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of hope.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week One of Advent - Thursday

Opening Prayer

God of the covenant, we give you glory and honor for sending your son Jesus Christ to fulfill all your promises. By your grace send us now preachers of repentance who will make us a people prepared to receive him in faith. Lead us to rejoice in his coming in the flesh to accomplish all things for our salvation. Fill us with hope that we may be in constant readiness for the day of his coming again. Amen.

- Lutheran Book of Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 64:1-12

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
 that the mountains might quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
 and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
 and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
 you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From of old no one has heard
 or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
 who acts for those who wait for him.
You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
 those who remember you in your ways.
Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
 in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
We have all become like one who is unclean,
 and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
 and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls upon your name,
 who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
 and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.
But now, O LORD, you are our Father;
 we are the clay, and you are our potter;

we are all the work of your hand.
Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all your people.
Your holy cities have become a wilderness;
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.
Our holy and beautiful house,
where our fathers praised you,
has been burned by fire,
and all our pleasant places have become ruins.
Will you restrain yourself at these things, O LORD?
Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

New Testament Bible Reading

1 Corinthians 2:6-13

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—
these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of hope.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both

the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week One of Advent - Friday

Opening Prayer

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 25:1-12

O LORD, you are my God;
 I will exalt you; I will praise your name,
for you have done wonderful things,
 plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
For you have made the city a heap,
 the fortified city a ruin;
the foreigners' palace is a city no more;
 it will never be rebuilt.
Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;
 cities of ruthless nations will fear you.
For you have been a stronghold to the poor,
 a stronghold to the needy in his distress,
 a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat;
for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall,
 like heat in a dry place.
You subdue the noise of the foreigners;
 as heat by the shade of a cloud,
 so the song of the ruthless is put down.
On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
 a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
 of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain
 the covering that is cast over all peoples,
 the veil that is spread over all nations.
 He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
 and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
 or the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day,

“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.

This is the LORD; we have waited for him;

let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain,

and Moab shall be trampled down in his place,

as straw is trampled down in a dunghill.

And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it

as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim,

but the LORD will lay low his pompous pride together with the skill of his hands.

And the high fortifications of his walls he will bring down,

lay low, and cast to the ground, to the dust.

New Testament Bible Reading

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory?

 O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of hope.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week One of Advent - Saturday

Opening Prayer

O Lord, Whose power is infinite and wisdom infallible, order things that they may neither hinder, nor discourage me, nor prove obstacles to the progress of your cause. Stand between me and all strife, that no evil befall, no sin corrupt my gifts, zeal, attainments. May I follow duty and not any foolish device of my own. Permit me not to labor at work which You will not bless, that I may serve You without disgrace or debt. I am entirely dependent upon You for support, counsel, consolation. Uphold me by your free Spirit, and may I not think it enough to be preserved from falling, but may I always go forward, always abounding in the work You give me to do. Strengthen me by Your Spirit in my inner self forevery purpose of my Christian life.

- adapted from Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 66:15-24

"For behold, the LORD will come in fire,
 and his chariots like the whirlwind,
to render his anger in fury,
 and his rebuke with flames of fire.

For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment,
 and by his sword, with all flesh;
 and those slain by the LORD shall be many.

"Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the LORD.

"For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

"For as the new heavens and the new earth
 that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD,
 so shall your offspring and your name remain.

From new moon to new moon,
and from Sabbath to Sabbath,
all flesh shall come to worship before me,
declares the LORD.

"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

New Testament Bible Reading

2 Peter 3:1-13

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of hope.

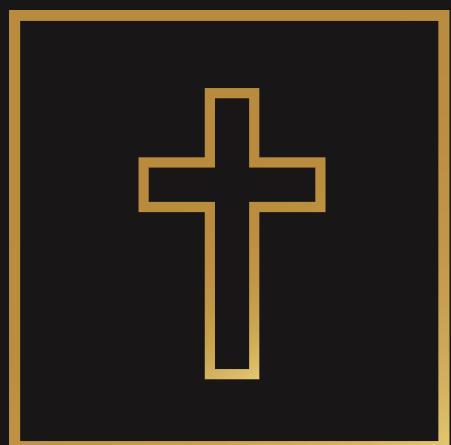
Closing Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

WEEK TWO OF ADVENT: LOVE

DECEMBER 4 - DECEMBER 10



LOVE

MMXVI

Week Two of Advent - Sunday

Opening Prayer

Lord of immortality, before whom angels bow and archangels veil their faces, enable me to serve You with reverence and godly fear. You who are Spirit and requires truth in the inward parts, help me to worship You in spirit and in truth. You who are righteous, let me not harbor sin in my heart, or indulge a worldly temper, or seek satisfaction in things that perish.

- adapted from Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 7:10-17

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!"

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of love.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Two of Advent - Monday

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, as I cross the threshold of this day, I commit myself, soul and body to your care. Watch over, keep, guide, direct, sanctify, bless me. Incline my heart to your ways. Mold me wholly in the image of Jesus. May my lips be a well-tuned harp to sound your praise.
- adapted from The Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 62:1-12

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
 and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
 and her salvation as a burning torch.
The nations shall see your righteousness,
 and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
 that the mouth of the LORD will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
 and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
 and your land shall no more be termed Desolate,
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
 and your land Married;
for the LORD delights in you,
 and your land shall be married.
For as a young man marries a young woman,
 so shall your sons marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
 so shall your God rejoice over you.
On your walls, O Jerusalem,
 I have set watchmen;
all the day and all the night
 they shall never be silent.
You who put the LORD in remembrance,
 take no rest,
and give him no rest
 until he establishes Jerusalem

and makes it a praise in the earth.
The LORD has sworn by his right hand
 and by his mighty arm:
“I will not again give your grain
 to be food for your enemies,
and foreigners shall not drink your wine
 for which you have labored;
but those who garner it shall eat it
 and praise the LORD,
and those who gather it shall drink it
 in the courts of my sanctuary.”
Go through, go through the gates;
 prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway;
 clear it of stones;
 lift up a signal over the peoples.
Behold, the LORD has proclaimed
 to the end of the earth:
Say to the daughter of Zion,
 “Behold, your salvation comes;
behold, his reward is with him,
 and his recompense before him.”
And they shall be called The Holy People,
 The Redeemed of the LORD;
and you shall be called Sought Out,
 A City Not Forsaken.

New Testament Bible Reading

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me,

"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of love.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Two of Advent - Tuesday

Opening Prayer

A little child, thou art our guest, that weary ones in thee may rest
Forlorn and lowly is thy birth, that we may rise from heaven to earth.
Thou comest in the darksome night, to make us children of thy light
To make us in the realms divine, like thine own angels round thee shine.
- from "All Praise to Thee, Eternal God" by Martin Luther, 1483-1546

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 29:15-24

Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel,
 whose deeds are in the dark,
 and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"
You turn things upside down!
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay,
that the thing made should say of its maker,
 "He did not make me";
or the thing formed say of him who formed it,
 "He has no understanding"?
Is it not yet a very little while
 until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
 and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?
In that day the deaf shall hear
 the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and darkness
 the eyes of the blind shall see.
The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
 and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.
For the ruthless shall come to nothing
 and the scoffer cease,
 and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,
who by a word make a man out to be an offender,
 and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,
 and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.
Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:
 "Jacob shall no more be ashamed,
 no more shall his face grow pale.

For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.
And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding,
and those who murmur will accept instruction."

New Testament Bible Reading

Luke 1:57-66

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of love.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Two of Advent - Wednesday

Opening Prayer

All your ways of mercy tend to, and end, in my delight. You wept in sorrow and suffered that I might rejoice. For my joy you have sent the Comforter, multiplied your promises, shown me my future happiness, given me a living fountain. You are preparing joy for me and me for joy; I pray for joy, wait for joy, long for joy; give me more than I can hold, desire or think of. If I weep at night, give me joy in the morning.

- adapted from The Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 32:1-8

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule in justice.
Each will be like a hiding place from the wind,
a shelter from the storm,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.
Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will give attention.
The heart of the hasty will understand and know,
and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.
The fool will no more be called noble,
nor the scoundrel said to be honorable.
For the fool speaks folly,
and his heart is busy with iniquity,
to practice ungodliness,
to utter error concerning the LORD,
to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied,
and to deprive the thirsty of drink.
As for the scoundrel—his devices are evil;
he plans wicked schemes
to ruin the poor with lying words,
even when the plea of the needy is right.
But he who is noble plans noble things,
and on noble things he stands.

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 1:1-17

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of love.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Two of Advent - Thursday

Opening Prayer

God of the covenant, we give you glory and honor for sending your son Jesus Christ to fulfill all your promises. By your grace send us now preachers of repentance who will make us a people prepared to receive him in faith. Lead us to rejoice in his coming in the flesh to accomplish all things for our salvation. Fill us with hope that we may be in constant readiness for the day of his coming again. Amen.

- Lutheran Book of Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 44:1-8

"But now hear, O Jacob my servant,
 Israel whom I have chosen!
Thus says the LORD who made you,
 who formed you from the womb and will help you:
Fear not, O Jacob my servant,
 Jeshurun whom I have chosen.
For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
 and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,
 and my blessing on your descendants.
They shall spring up among the grass
 like willows by flowing streams.
This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,'
 another will call on the name of Jacob,
and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,'
 and name himself by the name of Israel."
Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel
 and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
"I am the first and I am the last;
 besides me there is no god.
Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.
 Let him declare and set it before me,
since I appointed an ancient people.
 Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.
Fear not, nor be afraid;
 have I not told you from of old and declared it?"

And you are my witnesses!
Is there a God besides me?
There is no Rock; I know not any."

New Testament Bible Reading

Luke 1:5-25

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of love.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Two of Advent - Friday

Opening Prayer

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 43:1-13

But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob,
 he who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name, you are mine.
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.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
 Cush and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my eyes,
 and honored, and I love you,
I give men in return for you,
 peoples in exchange for your life.
Fear not, for I am with you;
 I will bring your offspring from the east,
 and from the west I will gather you.
I will say to the north, Give up,
 and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar
 and my daughters from the end of the earth,
everyone who is called by my name,
 whom I created for my glory,
 whom I formed and made.”
Bring out the people who are blind, yet have eyes,

who are deaf, yet have ears!
All the nations gather together,
and the peoples assemble.
Who among them can declare this,
and show us the former things?
Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right,
and let them hear and say, It is true.
“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,
that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor shall there be any after me.
I, I am the LORD,
and besides me there is no savior.
I declared and saved and proclaimed,
when there was no strange god among you;
and you are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and I am God.
Also henceforth I am he;
there is none who can deliver from my hand;
I work, and who can turn it back?”

New Testament Bible Reading

John 1:1-18

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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of love.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Two of Advent - Saturday

Opening Prayer

O Lord, Whose power is infinite and wisdom infallible, order things that they may neither hinder, nor discourage me, nor prove obstacles to the progress of your cause. Stand between me and all strife, that no evil befall, no sin corrupt my gifts, zeal, attainments. May I follow duty and not any foolish device of my own. Permit me not to labor at work which You will not bless, that I may serve You without disgrace or debt. I am entirely dependent upon You for support, counsel, consolation. Uphold me by your free Spirit, and may I not think it enough to be preserved from falling, but may I always go forward, always abounding in the work You give me to do. Strengthen me by Your Spirit in my inner self forevery purpose of my Christian life.

- adapted from Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 43:16-21

Thus says the LORD,
 who makes a way in the sea,
 a path in the mighty waters,
 who brings forth chariot and horse,
 army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
“Remember not the former things,
 nor consider the things of old.
Behold, I am doing a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.
The wild beasts will honor me,
 the jackals and the ostriches,
for I give water in the wilderness,
 rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
 the people whom I formed for myself
that they might declare my praise.

New Testament Bible Reading

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of love.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

WEEK THREE OF ADVENT: JOY

DECEMBER 11 - DECEMBER 17



JOY

MMXVI

Week Three of Advent - Sunday

Opening Prayer

Let your mighty outstretched arm, O Lord God, be our defense; your mercy and loving kindness in Jesus Christ, your dear Son, our salvation; your true word our instruction; the grace of your Holy Spirit our comfort and consolation, to the end and in the end, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

- John Knox, Book of Common Order, 1564

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 9:1-7

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shone.
You have multiplied the nation;
 you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
 as with joy at the harvest,
 as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
 and the staff for his shoulder,
 the rod of his oppressor,
 you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
 and every garment rolled in blood
 will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
 and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace

there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
 from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 4:12-18

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
 the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people dwelling in darkness
 have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
 on them a light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of joy.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Three of Advent - Monday

Opening Prayer

You sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life, that when he will come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.

- Book of Common Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 30:18-26

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.

For the LORD is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him.

For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, "Be gone!"

And he will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and bread, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous. In that day your livestock will graze in large pastures, and the oxen and the donkeys that work the ground will eat seasoned fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. And on every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.

New Testament Bible Reading

Romans 8:31-39

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the

right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of joy.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Three of Advent - Tuesday

Opening Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

- Book of Common Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 56:1-8

Thus says the LORD:

“Keep justice, and do righteousness,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my righteousness be revealed.

Blessed is the man who does this,
and the son of man who holds it fast,
who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it,
and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say,

“The LORD will surely separate me from his people”;

and let not the eunuch say,

“Behold, I am a dry tree.”

For thus says the LORD:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,

I will give in my house and within my walls

a monument and a name

better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name

that shall not be cut off.

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,

to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,

everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,

and holds fast my covenant—

these I will bring to my holy mountain,

and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples."

The Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
"I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered."

New Testament Bible Reading

Ephesians 2:11-22

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of joy.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Three of Advent - Wednesday

Opening Prayer

All your ways of mercy tend to, and end, in my delight. You wept in sorrow and suffered that I might rejoice. For my joy you have sent the Comforter, multiplied your promises, shown me my future happiness, given me a living fountain. You are preparing joy for me and me for joy; I pray for joy, wait for joy, long for joy; give me more than I can hold, desire or think of. If I weep at night, give me joy in the morning.

- adapted from The Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 12:1-6

You will say in that day:

“I will give thanks to you, O LORD,
 for though you were angry with me,
your anger turned away,
 that you might comfort me.

“Behold, God is my salvation;
 I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,
 and he has become my salvation.”

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day:

“Give thanks to the LORD,
 call upon his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples,
 proclaim that his name is exalted.

“Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
 let this be made known in all the earth.

Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,
 for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

New Testament Bible Reading

John 4:7-26

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying

to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week’s theme of joy.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Three of Advent - Thursday

Opening Prayer

God of the covenant, we give you glory and honor for sending your son Jesus Christ to fulfill all your promises. By your grace send us now preachers of repentance who will make us a people prepared to receive him in faith. Lead us to rejoice in his coming in the flesh to accomplish all things for our salvation. Fill us with hope that we may be in constant readiness for the day of his coming again. Amen.

- Lutheran Book of Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
 the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;
it shall blossom abundantly
 and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
 the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD,
 the majesty of our God.
Strengthen the weak hands,
 and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who have an anxious heart,
 “Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
 will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
 He will come and save you.”
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
 and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
 and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
 and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
 and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
 the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

New Testament Bible Reading

Hebrews 12:12-24

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week’s theme of joy.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Three of Advent - Friday

Opening Prayer

O may angels glorify Him incessantly, and, if possible, prostrate themselves lower before the blessed King of heaven! I long to bear a part with them in ceaseless praise; but when I have done all I can to eternity I shall not be able to offer more than a small fraction of the homage that the glorious God deserves. Give me a heart full of divine, heavenly love.

- adapted from Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 52:1-10

Awake, awake,
 put on your strength, O Zion;
put on your beautiful garments,
 O Jerusalem, the holy city;
for there shall no more come into you
 the uncircumcised and the unclean.
Shake yourself from the dust and arise;
 be seated, O Jerusalem;
loose the bonds from your neck,
 O captive daughter of Zion.

For thus says the LORD: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money." For thus says the Lord GOD: "My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. Now therefore what have I here," declares the LORD, "seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail," declares the LORD, "and continually all the day my name is despised. Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am."

How beautiful upon the mountains
 are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
 who publishes salvation,
 who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
 together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
 the return of the LORD to Zion.

Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 11:2-15

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.’

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of joy.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may

greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Week Three of Advent - Saturday

Opening Prayer

O Lord, Whose power is infinite and wisdom infallible, order things that they may neither hinder, nor discourage me, nor prove obstacles to the progress of your cause. Stand between me and all strife, that no evil befall, no sin corrupt my gifts, zeal, attainments. May I follow duty and not any foolish device of my own. Permit me not to labor at work which You will not bless, that I may serve You without disgrace or debt. I am entirely dependent upon You for support, counsel, consolation. Uphold me by your free Spirit, and may I not think it enough to be preserved from falling, but may I always go forward, always abounding in the work You give me to do. Strengthen me by Your Spirit in my inner self forevery purpose of my Christian life.

- adapted from Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 55:1-13

"Come, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
 hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
 my steadfast, sure love for David.
Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,
 a leader and commander for the peoples.
Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,
 and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,
 for he has glorified you.
"Seek the LORD while he may be found;
 call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,

and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
“For you shall go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall make a name for the LORD,
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

New Testament Bible Reading

John 6:25-40

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the

true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of joy.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- Book of Common Prayer

WEEK FOUR OF ADVENT: PEACE

DECEMBER 18 - DECEMBER 24



P E A C E

MMXVI

Week Four of Advent - Sunday

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, the light of minds that know you, the life of souls that love you, the strength of wills that serve you; help us to know you that we may truly love you, so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, In Jesus' name, Amen.

- Saint Augustine of Hippo

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 42:1-9

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
 my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
 he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,
 or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
 and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;
 he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be discouraged
 till he has established justice in the earth;
 and the coastlands wait for his law.
Thus says God, the LORD,
 who created the heavens and stretched them out,
 who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people on it
 and spirit to those who walk in it:
“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;
 I will take you by the hand and keep you;
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
 a light for the nations,
 to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
 from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am the LORD; that is my name;
 my glory I give to no other,
 nor my praise to carved idols.
Behold, the former things have come to pass,

and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth
I tell you of them."

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 12:9-21

He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
He will not quarrel or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,
until he brings justice to victory;
and in his name the Gentiles will hope."

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of peace.

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
- Book of Common Prayer

Week Four of Advent - Monday

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, as I cross the threshold of this day, I commit myself, soul and body to your care. Watch over, keep, guide, direct, sanctify, bless me. Incline my heart to your ways. Mold me wholly in the image of Jesus. May my lips be a well-tuned harp to sound your praise.
- adapted from The Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 54:1-17

"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;
 break forth into singing and cry aloud,
 you who have not been in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
 than the children of her who is married," says the LORD.
"Enlarge the place of your tent,
 and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords
 and strengthen your stakes.
For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
 and your offspring will possess the nations
 and will people the desolate cities.
"Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
 be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
 and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.
For your Maker is your husband,
 the LORD of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
 the God of the whole earth he is called.
For the LORD has called you
 like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
 says your God.
For a brief moment I deserted you,
 but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing anger for a moment
 I hid my face from you,

but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,"
says the LORD, your Redeemer.

"This is like the days of Noah to me:
as I swore that the waters of Noah
should no more go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you,
and will not rebuke you.

For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,"
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

"O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted,
behold, I will set your stones in antimony,
and lay your foundations with sapphires.

I will make your pinnacles of agate,
your gates of carbuncles,
and all your wall of precious stones.

All your children shall be taught by the LORD,
and great shall be the peace of your children.

In righteousness you shall be established;
you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
and from terror, for it shall not come near you.

If anyone stirs up strife,
it is not from me;
whoever stirs up strife with you
shall fall because of you.

Behold, I have created the smith
who blows the fire of coals
and produces a weapon for its purpose.

I have also created the ravager to destroy;
no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,
and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.

This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD
and their vindication from me, declares the LORD."

New Testament Bible Reading

Hebrews 11:1-16

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commanding him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of peace.

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
- Book of Common Prayer

Week Four of Advent - Tuesday

Opening Prayer

A little child, thou art our guest, that weary ones in thee may rest
Forlorn and lowly is thy birth, that we may rise from heaven to earth.
Thou comest in the darksome night, to make us children of thy light
To make us in the realms divine, like thine own angels round thee shine.
- from "All Praise to Thee, Eternal God" by Martin Luther, 1483-1546

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 31:1-5

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help
 and rely on horses,
who trust in chariots because they are many
 and in horsemen because they are very strong,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel
 or consult the LORD!
And yet he is wise and brings disaster;
 he does not call back his words,
but will arise against the house of the evildoers
 and against the helpers of those who work iniquity.
The Egyptians are man, and not God,
 and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.
When the LORD stretches out his hand,
 the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall,
 and they will all perish together.
For thus the LORD said to me,
"As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey,
 and when a band of shepherds is called out against him
he is not terrified by their shouting
 or daunted at their noise,
so the LORD of hosts will come down
 to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill.
Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts
 will protect Jerusalem;
he will protect and deliver it;
 he will spare and rescue it."

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 6:25-34

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of peace.

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
- Book of Common Prayer

Week Four of Advent - Wednesday

Opening Prayer

All your ways of mercy tend to, and end, in my delight. You wept in sorrow and suffered that I might rejoice. For my joy you have sent the Comforter, multiplied your promises, shown me my future happiness, given me a living fountain. You are preparing joy for me and me for joy; I pray for joy, wait for joy, long for joy; give me more than I can hold, desire or think of. If I weep at night, give me joy in the morning.

- adapted from The Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 26:1-15

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

"We have a strong city;
 he sets up salvation
 as walls and bulwarks.

Open the gates,
 that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in.

You keep him in perfect peace
 whose mind is stayed on you,
 because he trusts in you.

Trust in the LORD forever,
 for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.

For he has humbled
 the inhabitants of the height,
 the lofty city.

He lays it low, lays it low to the ground,
 casts it to the dust.

The foot tramples it,
 the feet of the poor,
 the steps of the needy."

The path of the righteous is level;
 you make level the way of the righteous.

In the path of your judgments,
 O LORD, we wait for you;

your name and remembrance
 are the desire of our soul.

My soul yearns for you in the night;

my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.
For when your judgments are in the earth,
 the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.
If favor is shown to the wicked,
 he does not learn righteousness;
in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly
 and does not see the majesty of the LORD.
O LORD, your hand is lifted up,
 but they do not see it.
Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
 Let the fire for your adversaries consume them.
O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,
 for you have indeed done for us all our works.
O LORD our God,
 other lords besides you have ruled over us,
 but your name alone we bring to remembrance.
They are dead, they will not live;
 they are shades, they will not arise;
to that end you have visited them with destruction
 and wiped out all remembrance of them.
But you have increased the nation, O LORD,
 you have increased the nation; you are glorified;
 you have enlarged all the borders of the land.

New Testament Bible Reading

1 Peter 3:8-22

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

“Whoever desires to love life
 and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
 and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;
 let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
 and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of peace.

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
- Book of Common Prayer

Week Four of Advent - Thursday

Opening Prayer

God of the covenant, we give you glory and honor for sending your son Jesus Christ to fulfill all your promises. By your grace send us now preachers of repentance who will make us a people prepared to receive him in faith. Lead us to rejoice in his coming in the flesh to accomplish all things for our salvation. Fill us with hope that we may be in constant readiness for the day of his coming again. Amen.

- Lutheran Book of Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 8:11-22

For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 21:33-46

“Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to

get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week’s theme of peace.

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
- Book of Common Prayer

Week Four of Advent - Friday

Opening Prayer

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

- Book of Common Prayer

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

It shall come to pass in the latter days

 that the mountain of the house of the LORD

shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

 and shall be lifted up above the hills;

and all the nations shall flow to it,

 and many peoples shall come, and say:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

 to the house of the God of Jacob,

that he may teach us his ways

 and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

 and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,

 and shall decide disputes for many peoples;

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

 and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

 neither shall they learn war anymore.

O house of Jacob,

 come, let us walk

 in the light of the LORD.

New Testament Bible Reading

John 5:19-29

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of peace.

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
- Book of Common Prayer

Week Four of Advent - Saturday

Opening Prayer

O Lord, Whose power is infinite and wisdom infallible, order things that they may neither hinder, nor discourage me, nor prove obstacles to the progress of your cause. Stand between me and all strife, that no evil befall, no sin corrupt my gifts, zeal, attainments. May I follow duty and not any foolish device of my own. Permit me not to labor at work which You will not bless, that I may serve You without disgrace or debt. I am entirely dependent upon You for support, counsel, consolation. Uphold me by your free Spirit, and may I not think it enough to be preserved from falling, but may I always go forward, always abounding in the work You give me to do. Strengthen me by Your Spirit in my inner self forevery purpose of my Christian life.

- adapted from Valley of Vision

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 41:8-20

But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off";
fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
Behold, all who are incensed against you
shall be put to shame and confounded;
those who strive against you
shall be as nothing and shall perish.
You shall seek those who contend with you,
but you shall not find them;
those who war against you
shall be as nothing at all.
For I, the LORD your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, "Fear not,
I am the one who helps you."

Fear not, you worm Jacob,
you men of Israel!
I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.
Behold, I make of you a threshing sledge,
new, sharp, and having teeth;
you shall thresh the mountains and crush them,
and you shall make the hills like chaff;
you shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away,
and the tempest shall scatter them.
And you shall rejoice in the LORD;
in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.
When the poor and needy seek water,
and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the LORD will answer them;
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys.
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.
I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive.
I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together,
that they may see and know,
may consider and understand together,
that the hand of the LORD has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it.

New Testament Bible Reading

Revelation 1:9-20

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above and this week's theme of peace.

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

- Book of Common Prayer

CHRISTMAS DAY
DECEMBER 25



A D V E N T

MMXVI

Christmas Day

Opening Prayer

O may angels glorify Him incessantly, and, if possible, prostrate themselves lower before the blessed King of heaven! I long to bear a part with them in ceaseless praise; but when I have done all I can to eternity I shall not be able to offer more than a small fraction of the homage that the glorious God deserves. Give me a heart full of divine, heavenly love.

- adapted from Valley of Vision

Song of Praise

"In Peace and Joy I Now Depart"

by Martin Luther, 1483-1546

In peace and joy I now depart
At God's disposing;
For full of comfort is my heart,
Soft reposing.
So the Lord hath promised me,
And death is but a slumber.
'Tis Christ that wrought this work for me,
My faithful Savior,
Whom Thou hast made mine eyes to see
By Thy favor.
Now I know He is my Life,
My help in need and dying.
Him Thou hast unto all set forth
Their great Salvation
And to His kingdom called the earth,
Every nation,
By Thy dear and wholesome Word,
In every place resounding.
He is the hope and saving light
Of lands benighted;
By Him are they who dwelt in night
Fed and lighted.
He is Israel's praise and bliss,
Their joy, reward, and glory.

Old Testament Bible Reading

Isaiah 9:1-7

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shone.
You have multiplied the nation;
 you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
 as with joy at the harvest,
 as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
 and the staff for his shoulder,
 the rod of his oppressor,
 you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
 and every garment rolled in blood
 will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
 and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
 there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
 from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

New Testament Bible Reading

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Reflection

Take time to think and reflect upon the scriptures above.

Song of Praise

“Joy to the World, the Lord is Come”

by Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

Joy to the World! The Lord has come.
Let earth receive her king,
Let every heart prepare him room,
Let heaven and nature sing!
Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ!
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy!
No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found!
He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness

And wonders of his love.

Closing Prayer

A little child, thou art our guest, that weary ones in thee may rest
Forlorn and lowly is thy birth, that we may rise from heaven to earth.
Thou comest in the darksome night, to make us children of thy light
To make us in the realms divine, like thine own angels round thee shine.
- from "All Praise to Thee, Eternal God" by Martin Luther, 1483-1546

Resources

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

prayers cited are adapted from the following:

Lutheran Hymnal.

www.lutheran-hymnal.com

Pray: A collection of Prayers for use in Public Worship.

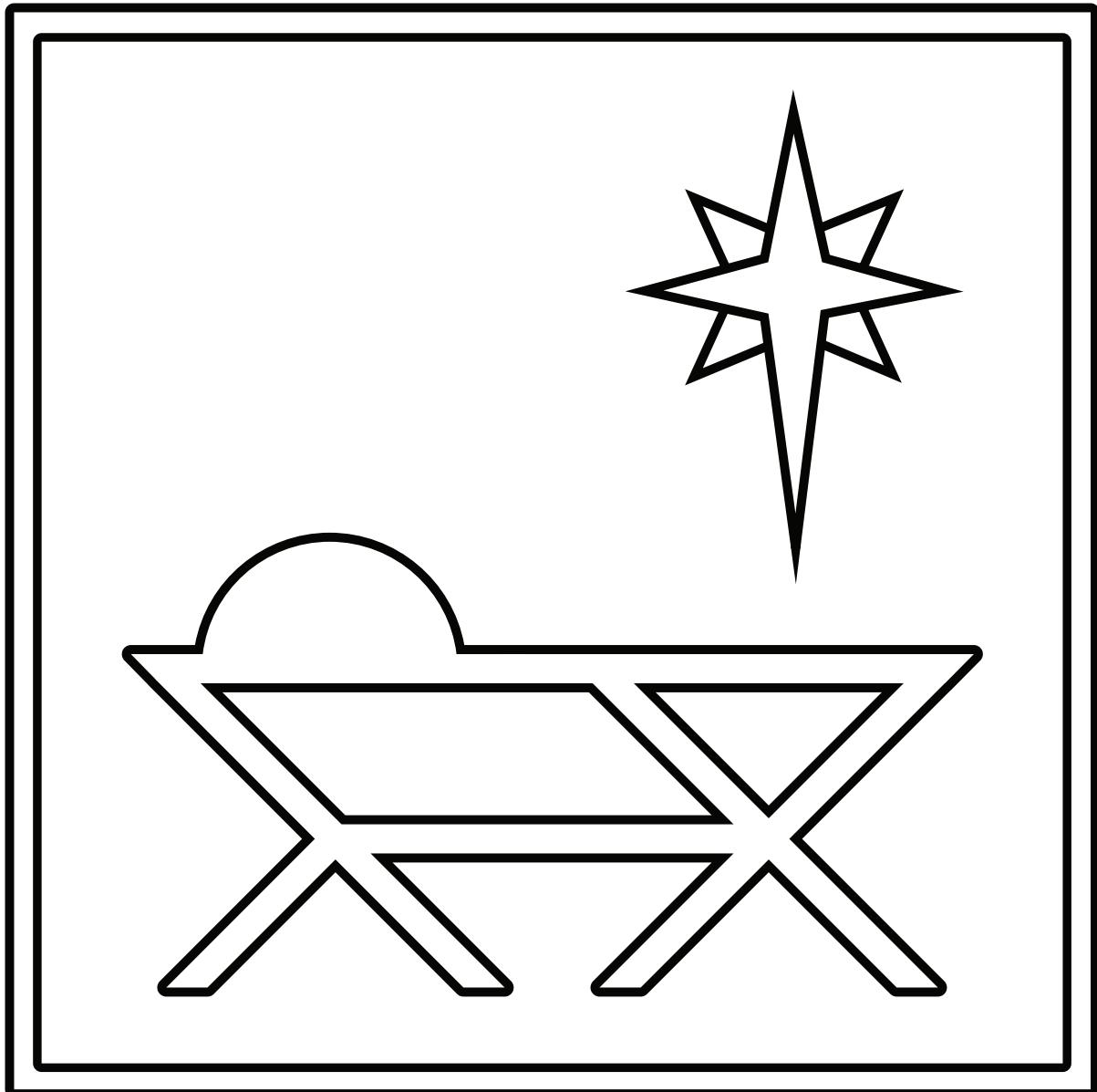
<http://pcv.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Pray.pdf>

The Book of Common Prayer.

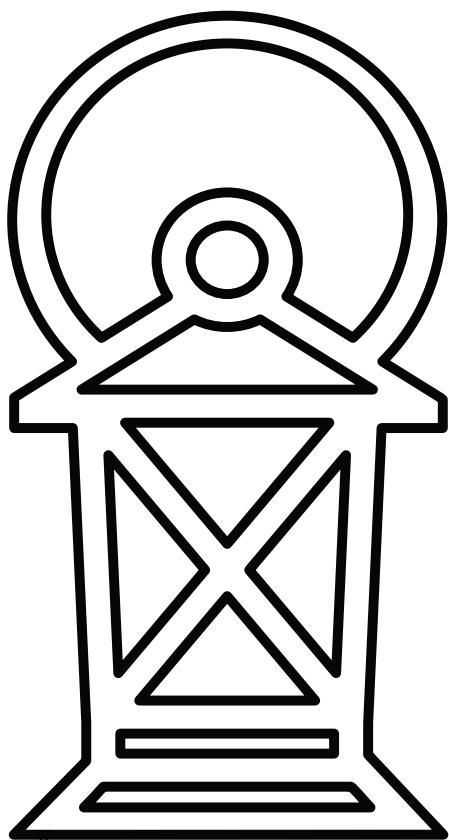
The Episcopal Church, Oxford University Press, USA. 1972.

The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions.

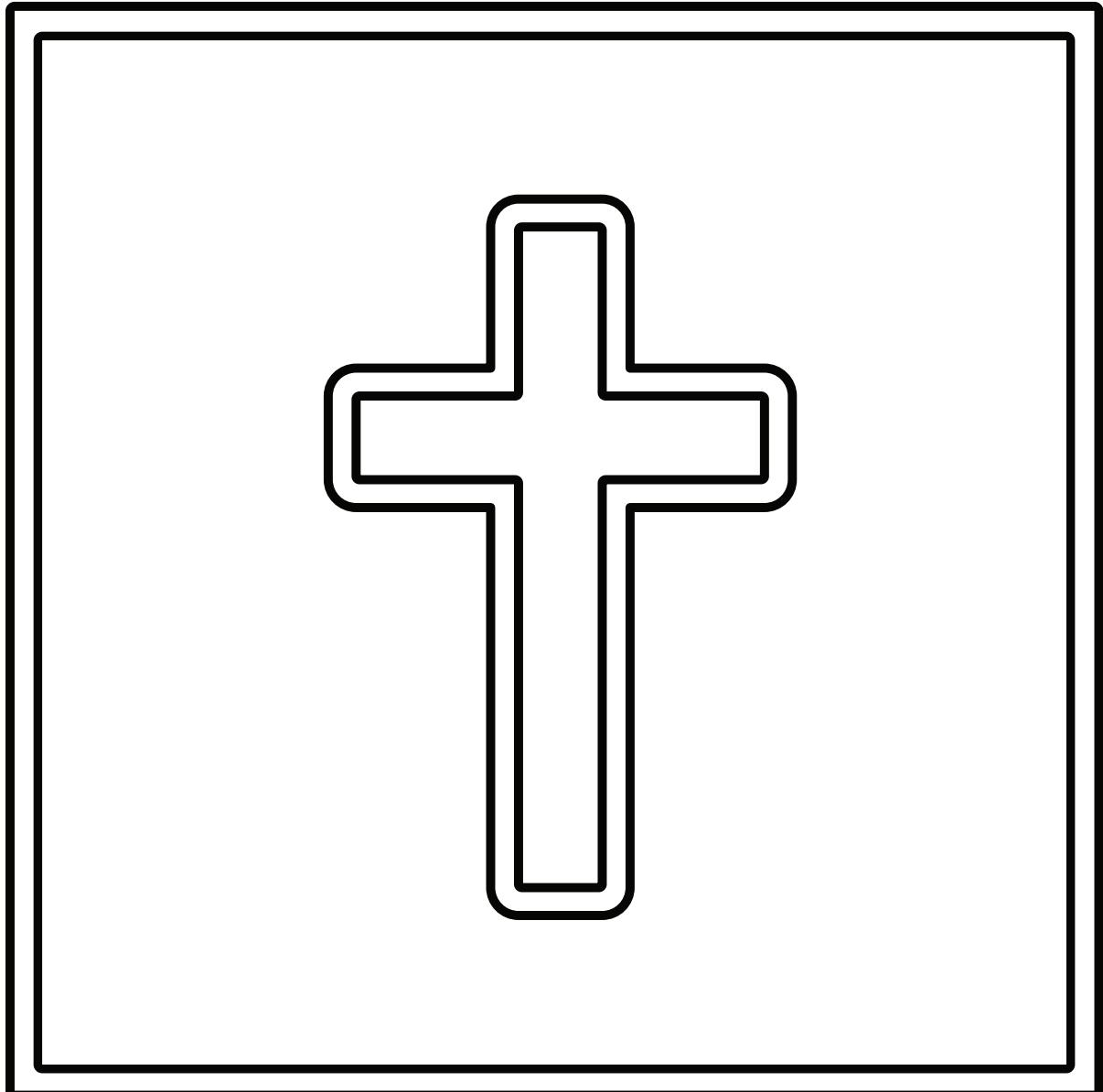
The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, UK. 2003.



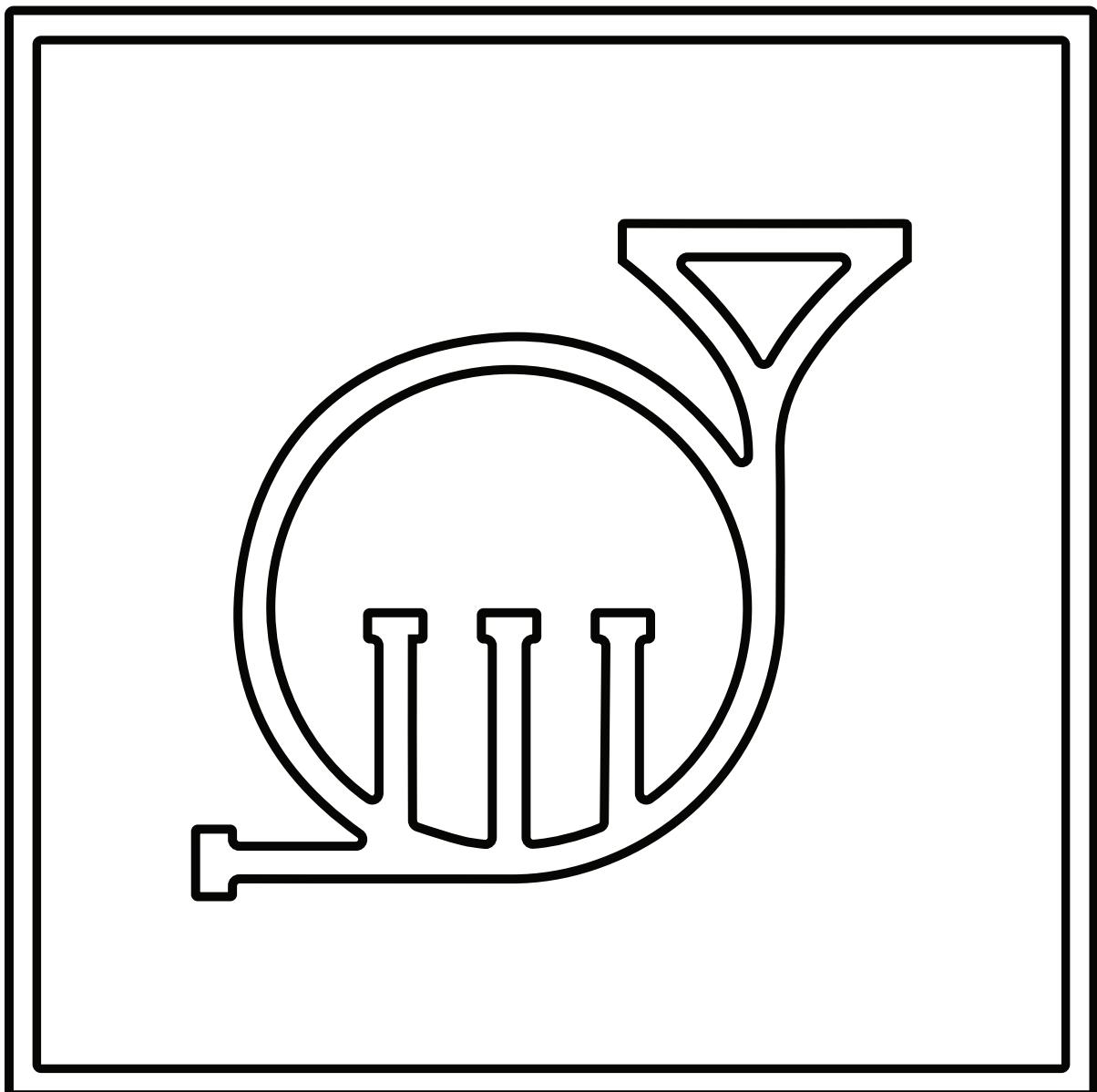
A D V E N T



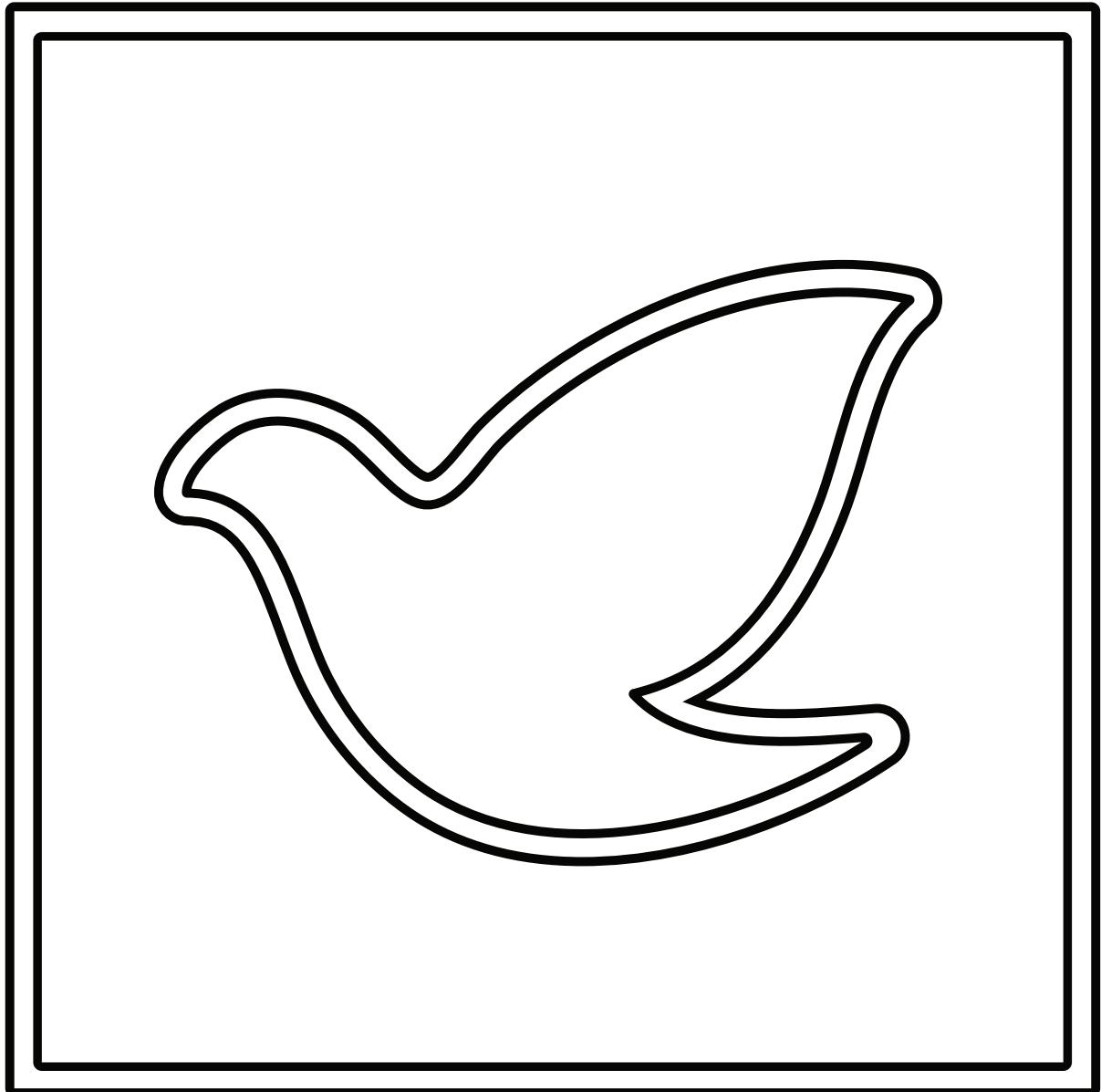
H O P E



L O V E



J O Y



P E A C E