



Advent Devotional 2019

Preparing for the Coming of Christ Week Two – Prepare the Way of the Lord

Can you spare a few minutes for God?

This devotional guide is designed to help you set aside time to focus on preparing your heart for the coming of Christ. Within, you will find a meditation for the week and daily guides with short passages of Scripture, questions for your reflection, and suggestions for prayer. The Saturday/Sunday opening sets the theme for the week. This section is your weekend devotional. In it you will find an opening prayer, meant to be carried over into the week and prayed each day as you begin. There is also a spiritual practice for the week to help you incorporate the Advent themes into your day to day life. May you be richly blessed as you seek the presence of God this Advent and may it make your celebration of Christmas all the more meaningful.



Week Two Theme: PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”

Dec 7/8 – Saturday/Sunday – Reflection and Template for the Week

Every year we go to the same place for the annual conference. And every year the same thing happens. The food is delicious, and it is served on an ample buffet, with multiple choices for entrees, sides, starches, salad and soup. I don’t mean to do it. I start the line thinking I will get a small dinner portion this time. But there are so many different foods to try. I take just a little bit of this and a little of that and soon my plate is filled beyond capacity.

This time of year can be like that in our lives. We don’t mean to be overloaded and overcommitted. We make choices to do one small thing here, another thing there and before we know it our schedule is full. How full is your plate in this second week of December? Is there time for God, for prayer, for church, for Scripture reading, for serving others in His name?

John the Baptist enters our lives through the Advent readings every year at this time. John came as a forerunner to Jesus and called people to prepare the way for the arrival of Son of God. The message he offered is summarized in the same way as the message of Jesus: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Repent means to change direction, literally to come to a new way of thinking.

We are challenged every year at this time to re-evaluate our lives in light of the fact that the Kingdom of heaven has come near in the person of Jesus Christ. John is not milk toast. He drives his point home with confrontational force and relevance. Will you be defensive or will you allow him to challenge you this year?





How is your life right now? Is your plate so full that there is no time left to re-evaluate? It is so easy to get comfortable. Are you willing to allow John the Baptist to make you a little uncomfortable, to shake you up, to challenge you to prepare your heart anew, to make room in the inn of your heart for the advent of Christ? Sometimes we need to be made a little uncomfortable if real change is to take place in our lives and in our world.

Practical Atheism: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., made people uncomfortable. He challenged the status quo in a time of unjust segregation and racial inequality. In one of his early sermons, King, a Baptist minister, talks about some of the dangers that confront American Christians: “We’ve got to go back and rediscover...that all reality has spiritual control. In other words,...there is a God behind

the process. Well,... you say: ‘...The mere fact we are at church, we believe in God, we don’t need to go back and rediscover that. The mere fact that we are here, and the mere fact that we sing and pray, and come to church – we believe in God.’ Well, there’s some truth in that. But **we must remember that it’s possible to affirm the existence of God with your lips and deny his existence with your life.** The most dangerous type of atheism is not theoretical atheism but practical atheism....And **the world, even the church, is filled up with people who pay lip service to God and not life service.** And there is always a danger that we will make it appear externally that we believe in God when internally we don’t. **We say with our mouths that we believe in him, but we live with our lives like he never existed.** That is the ever-present danger confronting religion. That’s a dangerous type of atheism.” At what times in your life might these haunting words be true of you? Are there times that you are living your life as if God never existed? As John the Baptist would say, what fruit are you bearing in your life?

Opening Prayer (to use each morning as you begin)

O Lord God, destroy and root out whatever the Adversary plants in my soul, that with my sins destroyed you may sow understanding and good work in my mouth and heart, so that in act and in truth I may serve only You. Give me memory, give me love, give me faith. O Lord, work good in me, and provide me with what You know that I need. Amen. -- attributed to Columbanus (c. 543 - 613), from *Celtic Daily Prayer*, (Northumbria Community), V. 2, p. 1522. What seeds might the enemy be trying to sow in your thoughts, in your heart, in your life? Spend time talking to God about those.

Scripture from Sundays Gospel Reading:

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”’ ...

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at 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 one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’ -- Matthew 3:1-3, 6-11

Prayer today: Spend time praying for the week ahead. Ask God to help you to know Him present with you as you use these devotions, ask Him to speak to you, to guide you and to lead you. Ask Him to make you alert to the spiritual realities all around you. Ask Him to make you expectant that He will come again.

Spiritual Practice: (to use throughout the day, each day of this week)

John the Baptist challenges us to rethink our lives. Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr., challenges us to reexamine life in America. We will have more excerpts from King’s sermon this week. How might you be allowing the good things on the buffet of a comfortable life so fill your plate that there is little room left for God? Try to catch yourself each day—what are you doing that hinders you from spending time with and serving God? How can you serve God in those things more

fully? What things might you forego doing to allow more time for God in your life? Make a list throughout the day or at day's end.

Dec 9 – Monday – The Things that are Passing Away and Giving Our Lives to the Things of Eternity

Begin: with the opening prayer for the week. Then read today's Scripture:

⁶A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. –Isaiah 40:6-8

Ponder: The voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way is given a message in today's verses.

1. How might this message relate the following quote from Marth Luther King Jr.'s sermon?

"And I think, my friends, that that is the thing that has happened in America. That we have unconsciously left God behind. Now, we haven't consciously done it;...You see, we didn't grow up and say, 'Now, goodbye God, we're going to leave you now.' The materialism in America has been an unconscious thing. Since the rise of the Industrial Revolution in England, and then the invention of our gadgets and contrivances and all of the... modern conveniences – we unconsciously left God behind. We didn't mean to do it.

We just became so involved in getting our big bank accounts that we unconsciously forgot about God – we didn't mean to do it. We became so involved in getting our nice luxurious cars and they're very nice, but we became so involved in it that it has become much more convenient to ride out to the beach on Sunday afternoon than to come to church that morning...we became so involved and fascinated by...television that we found it a little more convenient to stay home than to come to church. It was an unconscious thing – we didn't mean to do it. We just became so involved in things that we forgot about God."

2. What from Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermon challenges you? What might you add to his list of modern contrivances that tend to hinder or side-track you?
3. As you consider the things you typically do day in, day out and week in, week out, how much of your effort is spent on things that are temporary and of this world – that will pass away in eternity?

Close: This week, how might you offer more "life service" to God and less service to self and things that are passing away?

Remember: to use the spiritual practice from Saturday/Sunday throughout your day.

Dec 10 – Tuesday – The Comforting and Discomforting Aspects of the Glorious Presence of Christ

Begin: with the opening prayer for the week. Then read today's Scripture:

¹²Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. ¹⁴His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. ¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. ¹⁹Now write what you have seen. – Revelation 1:12-19

Ponder: After telling John that He will come again, the glorified Jesus appears in this vision to John.

1. What do you notice about Him and who He says He is?
2. What in this scene do you find comforting, what do you find unsettling?

Close: Ask God to bring to your mind the things He wishes to unsettle in your life and the areas in which He seeks to bring comfort. Talk to Him about these now.

Remember: to use the spiritual practice from Saturday/Sunday throughout your day.

Dec 11 – Wednesday – Remember the Love You Had at First

Begin: with the opening prayer for the week. Then read today's Scripture:

²"Jesus said, 'To the angel of church in Ephesus write...I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. ³I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not

grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. ... ⁷ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”— Revelation 2:2-5, 7a

Ponder: As the vision continues, Jesus gives John messages to 7 churches. We will only focus on a few of them here.

1. What does Jesus praise in the church at Ephesus? Are these things He would praise you for in your life?
2. What challenge does Jesus give them? How might He be challenging you in this?

Close: Thinking of Jesus as your “first love”, ask Him to help you remember and place Him first today.

Remember: to use the spiritual practice from Saturday/Sunday throughout your day.

Dec 12 – Thursday – Awake to the Life Jesus Wants For Us

Begin: with the opening prayer for the week. Then read today’s Scripture:

“Jesus said, ‘To the angel of the church in Sardis write: ...I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. ³ Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. ⁵ If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. ⁶ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’” – Revelation 3:1-3, 5-6

Ponder: Jesus offers words of challenge to the church in Sardis.

1. What does Jesus call upon the people in the church in Sardis to do? What would this look like in your own life?
2. What promises does Jesus give to those who heed His words? What is at stake here? How does this relate to faith?

Close: Ask God to help you be awake and alert to live the life He is calling you to live today.

Remember: to use the spiritual practice from Saturday/Sunday at the end of your day.

Dec 6 – Friday – The Invitation to Live Life Beyond Merely Lukewarm

Begin: with the opening prayer for the week. Then read today’s Scripture:

¹⁴ “Jesus said, ‘To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ...¹⁵ “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. ²⁰ Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me... ²² Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’” – Revelation 3:14-20, 22

Ponder: Jesus continues with a challenge to the church at Laodicea.

1. What does Jesus rebuke about the way they are living? Are there any ways your life is like this?
2. What warning does He give? What invitation? What would it mean for you to accept this invitation from Him?
3. Consider this one final quote from King’s sermon: “And that is the danger confronting us my friends: that in a nation as ours where we stress mass production, and that’s mighty important, where we have so many conveniences and luxuries and all of that, there is the danger that we will unconsciously forget about God. I’m not saying that these things aren’t important; we need them...But whenever they become substitutes for God, they become injurious....none of these things can ever be real substitutes for God. Automobiles and subways, televisions and radios, dollars and cents can never be substitutes for God. For long before any of these things came into existence, we needed God. And long after they have passed away, we will still need God...I’m not going to put my ultimate faith in things. I’m not going to put my ultimate faith in gadgets and contrivances....not to these little gods that are here today and gone tomorrow, but to God who is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Our beautiful automobiles will come and go, but God will be here. Plants may wither, the flowers fade away, but the word of our God shall stand forever.” -- excerpts are from King’s 1954 sermon: “Rediscovering Lost Values”

*Is there anything in your life that threatens to become or has become a substitute for God?

Close: Open the door of your heart to Jesus now – and ask for His help to do so in your life throughout the day today.

Remember: to use the spiritual practice from Saturday/Sunday throughout your day.