

DECEMBER 6, 2020
SECOND SUNDAY
OF ADVENT



God has good news for all people.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These passages are related to the Lectionary texts for this Sunday.

Sunday	Mark 1:1-8	The beginning of the good news
Monday	Isaiah 40:1-11	Comfort my people
Tuesday	2 Peter 3:8-15a	Promise of the Lord's coming
Wednesday	Malachi 4:1-6	The great day of the Lord
Thursday	Matthew 3:1-10	The preaching of John the Baptist
Friday	1 Timothy 1:12-17	Gratitude for God's mercy
Saturday	Psalms 85:1-2, 8-13	A prayer for God's peace
Sunday	John 1:6-8, 19-28	John's witness to the light

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

"[T]he voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" Mark 1:3 (NRSV)

PRAYERS AND BLESSING

A Prayer for the Week:

Eternal God, we thank you that through your Son, Jesus Christ, love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Amen. (Psalm 85:10)

Mealtime Prayer:

Generous God, may this gift of food strengthen us to walk in your way of comfort, hope, and peace through the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Blessing to Give:

May the Lord God feed you like a shepherd and keep you safe. (Isaiah 40:11)



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DECEMBER 6, 2020

HYMN OF THE WEEK

*There's a Voice in the
Wilderness*



WEEKLY MILESTONES

Take a moment to tell or think about a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your life.

CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- What is some good news you have heard recently?
- What events in the news do people consider to be positive news or good news?
- The word gospel means good news. How is the coming of Christ into our world good news for you?

DEVOTIONS

Read: Mark 1:1-8.

The beginning of a book helps set up what the book is about and where the story is going. This is true of the Gospel of Mark as well. Mark 1:1-8 is part of Mark's prologue (vv. 1-13) and was used in ancient writings with this very purpose in mind: to give information that helps people follow the story as it unfolds. Mark's point is that good news ("good tidings" in Isaiah 40:9), the gospel, is beginning to happen through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This good news is linked to John the baptizer who is himself reminiscent of Elijah. When Elijah comes again, God's people will encounter God's promised deliverance (Malachi 4:5). That future time is now present through John and through Jesus. John's message of repentance (v. 4) will be continued by Jesus when he says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:14). Where do you see the good news of Jesus happening today?

Pray: Merciful God, we thank you for fulfilling your promise of hope and peace through the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERVICE

Good news has a positive effect on people. Isaiah 40 gives prophetic comfort to God's people. What word of comfort or encouragement can you give to someone this week?

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Set up a Christmas nativity set in your home. Place the wise men further away from the set for now. Wait to place Jesus in the manger until Christmas Eve. On your Advent wreath, light the first candle of hope and the second one of peace. Pause for a moment to sit in silence and look upon the nativity set and think about the coming of Jesus.

Say this Bible verse: **Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people.** (Psalm 85:8a)

Pray: **Lord, help us to prepare the way of the Lord. Give us peace and hope. Amen.**



In addition to *Taking Faith Home*, celebrate milestones in your daily life as an effective faith formation tool. Go to: www.milestonesministry.org

DECEMBER 13, 2020
THIRD SUNDAY
OF ADVENT



Jesus brings good news.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These passages are related to the Lectionary texts for this Sunday.

Sunday	John 1:6-8, 19-28	John's witness to the light
Monday	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11	Good news of deliverance
Tuesday	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	A call to rejoice
Wednesday	Romans 10:14-17	Those who bring good news
Thursday	1 Thessalonians 3:6-13	Timothy's encouraging report
Friday	Genesis 18:1-18	A son for Abraham and Sarah
Saturday	Psalms 126	A people who dream
Sunday	Luke 1:26-38	The birth of Jesus foretold

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. Isaiah 61:1 (NRSV)

PRAYERS AND BLESSING

A Prayer for the Week:

God of power and might, help us to be aware of the needs of people and be prepared to bring joy and good news to people through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Mealtime Prayer:

May this gift of food fill our hearts with laughter and make us shout with joy. Amen.

A Blessing to Give:

May the God of peace make you holy in spirit and soul and body. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)



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DECEMBER 13, 2020
HYMN OF THE WEEK
Joy to the World



WEEKLY MILESTONES

Take a moment to tell or think about a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your life.

CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- Think or talk about a time when you felt sad or brokenhearted.
- When you feel discouraged, who do you talk to or what do you do to feel better?
- Jesus comes to change our lives. How does Jesus make a difference for your life and the lives of others?

DEVOTIONS

Read: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11.

An American emailed his friend in Zimbabwe and asked if he was well. The response was "I am well if you are well." That response comes with a communal understanding of wellness. We can't be well on our own. Neither can we truly feel okay about ourselves if we feel safe and protected while our neighbor does not feel okay. Isaiah 61:1-2 brings good news for all, including—and especially—the oppressed, the brokenhearted, captives, prisoners, those who mourn and those who owe debts (The year of the Lord's favor was a time to forgive debts). God's work of justice and mercy that brings joy will be seen in all the nations (v. 11) and is for all, not just a select and privileged few. How do you see the wellbeing of others as important to your own wellbeing?

Pray: God of justice, we give you thanks that your goodness and mercy is for us and for all the world through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Isaiah 61:11)

SERVICE

There is a theme of joy in our readings this week. This joy includes God's promise to overcome pain, disappointment, and fear. Think of someone currently experiencing difficulties. How can you be the hands and voice of God's good news to that person this week?

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Place the wise men further away from the nativity set for now. Wait to place Jesus in the manger until Christmas Eve. On your Advent wreath, light the first candle of hope, the second one of peace, and the third one of joy. Pause for a moment to sit in silence and look upon the nativity set and think about the good news and joy the coming of Jesus brings us.

Say this Bible verse: Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Pray: Lord God, thank you for being with us in times of sadness and times of joy. Give us hope, peace and joy as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amen.



In addition to *Taking Faith Home*, celebrate milestones in your daily life as an effective faith formation tool. Go to: www.milestonesministry.org

DECEMBER 20, 2020
FOURTH SUNDAY
OF ADVENT



God favors the peasant girl Mary.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These passages are related to the Lectionary texts for this Sunday.

Sunday	Luke 1:26-38	The birth of Jesus foretold
Monday	2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16	The Lord's message to David
Tuesday	Romans 16:25-27	Paul's closing prayer
Wednesday	Luke 1:46b-55	Mary's song of praise
Thursday	Luke 2:1-20	The birth of Jesus
Friday	John 3:11-16	For God so loved the world
Saturday	Psalms 89:1-4, 19-26	God's promise to David
Sunday	Luke 2:22-40	Jesus presented in the temple

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." Luke 1:30-31 (NRSV)

PRAYERS AND BLESSING

A Prayer for the Week:

Lord God, just as you favored your servant Mary, grant all of us faith and trust in your power to bring salvation to all through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mealtime Prayer:

With this food we receive your steadfast love, O Lord; with our mouths we proclaim your faithfulness to all generations through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Psalm 89:1)

A Blessing to Give:

May the love of God bless you with the good news of Jesus' birth.



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DECEMBER 20, 2020

HYMN OF THE WEEK

Wait for the Lord



WEEKLY MILESTONES

Take a moment to tell or think about a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your life.

CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- When have you received special attention from friends or family?
- Think of someone you have valued as a friend. In what ways do you value them?
- The angel Gabriel describes Mary as favored. What does it mean to you that God has given the world our Savior and Lord Jesus through Mary, a young peasant girl?

DEVOTIONS

Read: Luke 1:26-38.

In verses 28 and 30 the angel Gabriel says that Mary is favored, that is, Mary experiences the undeserved kindness of God. In Luke 2:40 and 52 the child Jesus is also described as favored. Divine attention comes to a young virgin to deliver Jesus, the Son of the Most High. The beginning of the Gospel of Luke tells of Elizabeth, a barren woman who gives birth, Mary, a peasant girl who gives birth to the future king in the lineage of David, and of shepherds in the field who will be the first evangelists of the good news of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:18). The message is clear: with God all things are possible, and as with Mary, our faithful response is, "let it be with me according to your word" (v. 38). Mary is the model of the life of faith that acknowledges that God has done great things for her. As we prepare to enter the season of Jesus' birth, we are met with God's favor and blessings for us as well. How has God come to you with divine favor?

Pray: **God of undeserved kindness, give us faith to trust that with you all things are possible through Christ Jesus our Lord, Son of the Most High God. Amen.**

SERVICE

During this Advent season think of those who are not favored in our society. For example, the homeless are poor, hungry, and in need. In what ways can you show God's love to them through an act of kindness?

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

From your nativity set, hold each piece in silence for a moment. Then place the pieces back in the scene. Have Mary and Joseph arrive first, followed by the shepherds and then the wise men. Wait to place Jesus in the manger until Christmas Eve. On your Advent wreath, light the first candle of hope, the second one of peace, the third one of joy, and the fourth one of love. *Say this Bible verse: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

Pray: **Lord God, thank you for showing us love even when we are afraid like Mary, the mother of Jesus. Give us hope, peace, joy, and love as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amen.**



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DECEMBER 24-25, 2020
CHRISTMAS EVE,
CHRISTMAS DAY



Jesus is born for those in need.

CHRISTMAS BIBLE READINGS

Take time to read and reflect on these Bible passages as part of your Christmas celebration.

Thursday	Luke 2:1-20 Isaiah 9:2-7	The birth of Jesus The reign of the coming king
Friday	Psalms 96 John 1:1-14	Sing a new song The Word became flesh

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR CHRISTMAS

But the angel said to [the shepherds], "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

Luke 2:10-11 (NRSV)

PRAYERS AND BLESSING

A Prayer for Christmas:

Amazing God, for good news given to peasants, to shepherds, and to us, we give you thanks and praise through Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Mealtime Prayer:

With this gift of food we remember you are to be praised for all you do for us through Jesus Christ, born in a manger in Bethlehem. Amen. (Psalm 96:4)

A Blessing to Give:

May the God who comes to save you, bless you with joy. (Titus 2:11)



DECEMBER 24-25, 2020

HYMN FOR CHRISTMAS

Silent Night



CHRISTMAS MILESTONES

Take a moment to tell or think about a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your life.

CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- Tell or think about a time when you surprised someone.
- Tell or think about a time when someone surprised you.
- How does Jesus' birth in Bethlehem amaze you?

DEVOTIONS

Read: Luke 2:1-20.

The shepherds in the fields have a startling encounter with God, bringing them good news of Jesus' birth. In that time and place, shepherds were described as "sinners." Their work in the fields kept them from observing the Sabbath. They were unclean and seen as liars, thieves, and generally unsavory. With this social stigma, they are likely people who had themselves given up on God. More than outcasts, they had simply walked away from hope in the mercy of God. In Luke 2, God does not give up on the shepherds—or us—as God reaches out to them in the fields. God didn't wait for them to show up at the temple or the synagogue. God doesn't have to wait for us to show up at "church," either. The startling news of Jesus' birth is that it is for those who need God most. When have you felt like giving up on God? How does this birth story help you hear good news?

Pray: **Loving God, help us to hear the good news of Jesus' birth for all the world, especially when we feel far from you; in the name of Jesus, the Savior, Messiah, and Lord, amen.**

SERVICE

There are those around us in need of seeing God's love in action. Is there a local soup kitchen or shelter where you can volunteer time or donate items this week for those in need of seeing the good news of Jesus birth in action?

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Make your Christmas Day into a celebration of Jesus' birthday. Use some Christmas pastries or a cake to help celebrate. Place a white candle in its center and on Christmas Day, light the candle, sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, and then take time to complete this sentence:

Say: **The birth of Jesus is special to me because _____.**

Then sing some Christmas carols.



DECEMBER 27, 2020
FIRST SUNDAY
AFTER CHRISTMAS



The sight of baby Jesus brings peace.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These passages are related to the Lectionary texts for this Sunday.

Sunday	Luke 2:22-40	Jesus presented in the temple
Monday	Isaiah 61:10–62:3	Rejoice in the Lord
Tuesday	Galatians 4:4-7	Adoption as God's children
Wednesday	Jude 1-2	A prayer for blessing
Thursday	Ecclesiastes 3:1-13	A time for everything
Friday	Psalms 8	Divine majesty and human dignity
Saturday	Psalms 148	All creation praises God
Sunday	John 1:1-18	The Word became flesh

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation." **Luke 2:29-30 (NRSV)**

PRAYERS AND BLESSING

A Prayer for the Week:

God of peace, give us faith to walk in peace each day and to trust your eternal care for us and for all the world through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Mealtime Prayer:

Praise the Lord, all you people; for our Savior Jesus and for this gift of food, praise the Lord. (Psalm 148:1)

A Blessing to Give:

May Jesus, the light of the world, give you peace.



DECEMBER 27, 2020

HYMN OF THE WEEK

Away in a Manger



WEEKLY MILESTONES

Take a moment to tell or think about a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your life.

CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- When something painful happens, where do you look for hope?
- What does it mean to you to be a person of peace?
- How does the message of the birth of Jesus bring you hope and peace?

DEVOTIONS

Read: Luke 2:22-40.

Luke 2:29-32 is known as the *Nunc Dimittis* (Latin for, "Now release," the first words of Simeon's song of praise in the Latin Bible) used in worship and also tender words offered at the deathbed of a loved one. Simeon's song makes it clear that in Jesus, God has acted in a way that now gives peace for all people, including Gentiles, the non-Jews of the world. Luke makes it clear that the promise given to the Jewish people to be a blessing to the world has now come to pass through the birth of Jesus. Barriers are broken down. Jews and Gentiles together have hope. Mary and Joseph who can only offer two turtledoves (often a gift given by the poor) as a sacrifice for Jesus' birth, have actually given the world its real hope and peace. It brings the joy expressed in Psalm 148, but it also brings the pain that will pierce Mary's soul. Compassion is like that. It feels the pain of others and trusts that God's saving work is the light, hope, and peace of the world. How has love brought you pain and peace at the same time?

Pray: **Loving God, we thank you for Simeon, Anna, and all those throughout history who have lifted up Jesus as the hope and peace for all the world. Amen.**

SERVICE

In the temple in Jerusalem, Simeon and Anna encouraged and blessed two young, first-time parents, Mary and Joseph. Identify parents with young children in your congregation or community. Is there an act of service you can do on their behalf (e.g., help with cleaning, bringing a meal, or childcare) so they can enjoy some time out together?

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Psalm 148 is a psalm that offers praise to God in all things. Praise means to give thanks. Write your own psalm. Make a list of things for which you wish to praise God. Using the list, say each praise aloud. For example:

I praise God for earth and all stars. Praise the Lord!

I praise God for family and friends. Praise the Lord!

And so forth until you finish the list.

