

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

December 11 - December 17

THIRD SUNDAY OF



Year A-Advent

Surprisingly, the season of Advent doesn't usher in a time of sweetness and sentiment. It actually takes us to the uneasy place where we find John the Baptist sitting in Matthew 11:2-11. He is alone, confined, and wondering whether he has missed the very Messiah he spent his whole life preparing for.

So, John asks a question that sounds so very human: "Are you the One who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" This is John the Baptizer—the fearless one—the one who could spot the Lamb of God from a distance. And yet here, in the quiet humiliation of a prison cell, even he must ask again: Are you the one?

Advent always seems to bring us to the point where we must face the challenging collapse of our assumptions. Advent brings us to the painful realization that Jesus is not moving according to the timelines and strategies we would prefer. The reason? Our imaginations have not yet caught up with the kind of kingdom he is bringing.

John expected fire, swift action, and unmistakable victory. But Jesus sends word of something else entirely: The blind see. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. And the poor receive good news. It is not the kingdom John imagined. But it is the kingdom.

Part of the discomfort of Advent is how Jesus keeps subverting our expectations. He doesn't seize power or silence his enemies. He heals. He teaches. He touches the unclean. He lifts the overlooked and blesses the meek. And often, he moves so slowly that even the saints begin to wonder whether they've misunderstood him.

This means Advent asks something far stranger than certainty—it asks all of us for a kind of holy unlearning. It invites us to set down our ideas of what God ought to be doing so we can receive what God is actually doing.

Advent is the time of recognition that we are always, every one of us, carrying images of Jesus that need to be surrendered so they can be healed.

This is why John's question isn't a failure, really. It's like a doorway. It's the place where discipleship becomes honest. Jesus will not conform himself to our expectations because he is determined to save us from them.

And so Jesus says, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." Blessed is the one who can stay with Jesus even when Jesus does not behave the way we have assumed. Blessed is the one who can live without the clarity we usually crave.

Only after we have sat with John's question does the voice of Isaiah 35 rise to meet us. For Isaiah does not describe the kingdom in terms of power, but in terms of transformation: deserts blooming, weak hands strengthened, fearful hearts steadied, blind eyes opened, the lame leaping like deer. The prophet gives us a world remade by the tender persistence of God's mercy, not by force.

It is no accident that Jesus echoes Isaiah in his reply to John. He is saying: John, look again! The wilderness is already beginning to blossom in the lives of the forgotten, the wounded, the ones no one thought would ever sing again. The kingdom is here, though not in the way you expected! The promises you proclaimed are being fulfilled, slowly and quietly, right under your feet.

FOR reflection

How is God moving in your life? How accepting are you of his timeline vs. your own? Pray for Jesus to help you surrender your expectations of him so you can freely accept his healing and grace.



SCRIPTURE

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Thursday

Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 1:6-18; 2 Peter 3:1-10

Friday

Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:11-18

Saturday

Psalm 146:5-10; 1 Samuel 2:1-8; Luke 3:1-18

Sunday

Psalm 146:5-10; Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Monday

Psalm 42; Isaiah 29:17-24; Acts 5:12-16

Tuesday

Psalm 42; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Jude 1:17-25

Wednesday

Psalm 42; Zechariah 8:1-17; Matthew 8:14-17, 28-34

Why do the daily readings begin on Thursday?

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday.

The Morning Liturgy

Opening Scripture

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Isaiah 40:5

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 51)

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

Amen.

Scripture Reading (read Psalm and Gospel text here)

Period of Silence

Confessing Our Faith (Apostles' Creed)

The Lord's Prayer

The Collect

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.

A Midday Prayer

Blessed Savior, at this hour you hung upon the cross, stretching out your loving arms. Grant that all the peoples of the earth may look to you and be saved; for your mercies' sake. *Amen*.

An Early Evening Prayer

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love.

Amen.

A Bedtime Confession and Prayer

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name.

Amen.

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

