

DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR ADVENT

GOD
BLESS US,
EVERY
ONE!



Encountering Christ in
Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*



Creative Communications
Sample Pages

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* has been a delightful part of the celebration of Christmas since it was first written in 1843. Dickens deeply, and penitently, understands that Scrooge is really a reflection of himself and so many of us in our sinful state; yet the transformation of this central character, and us, is the blessing we receive from the Child of Christmas.

There are five sections, or staves, in this classic, and each of them is represented in part in the selections to follow:

The first stave (Marley's Ghost)—an introduction to Ebenezer Scrooge and his life before his transformation: The first week of Advent to Tuesday after the Second Sunday of Advent.

The next three staves (The Three Spirits of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet-to-Come)—Scrooge's journey through repentance and renewal: Wednesday after the Second Sunday of Advent to Saturday after the Third Sunday of Advent.

The final stave (The End)—Scrooge's transformed-self that now embraces the joy of Christmas: The final week of Advent.

I hope my own reflections for each of these days in Advent will help to lift up the Child who was not ashamed to take upon himself the poverty of our being and makes us all new—for our sake, and for the sake of the whole world!



FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ISAIAH 40:7

MARLEY WAS DEAD: TO BEGIN WITH. *There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail. Mind! I don't mean to say that I know of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a doornail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the country's done for. You will, therefore, permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a doornail.*

“O ld Marley” was dead. His “old”-ness is not simply a sign of his age, but the way he lived. He did not care for sisters and brothers in need. He did not seek to challenge the very systems that oppress them (and us). And now he is “as dead as a doornail”—and those present were only there to certify his death. We might see a lot of our own “old”-ness in his story. Yet in Advent we prepare for a “new” and promising story that comes to us in the Child Jesus—a story where what is “old” gives way to what is “new” in the gifts of his life, hope, joy, and compassion. The story of his life and death and resurrection becomes our story. Even when the door of death shuts us in, the risen Jesus comes and shows the marks of the nails in his hands and side, and by his spirited-breath blows upon us peace. Let that wind blow! ❀



MONDAY *after the* FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT

~~~~~  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me. PSALM 51:3

OH! BUT HE WAS A TIGHT-FISTED HAND AT THE GRINDSTONE, SCROOGE! *a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was in his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days, and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.*

Perhaps if you met a person like Scrooge, you would turn away. Many did. Even the dogs on the leash of a blind man would go another direction! Still, he is portrayed here as a character of what we might call “rugged individualism,” indifferent to all, stoic, maybe even cynical, nihilistic, unaffected by the seasons of the year or the weather itself. That brings his character a little closer to home. For we are all so infected, and there is Scrooge in all of us. Our disease, like that of Scrooge, and for that matter also his harshest critics, is our own sense of “right”-ness over those judged (by ourselves) wrong. Need proof? Ask your spouse, your truest friends, your political opponent. We cannot see how we are turned in on ourselves, though it is as clear as day to even a blind-man’s dog. From which sin—and many more sins springing from it—good Lord, deliver us! ❁



TUESDAY *after the* FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT

~~~~~  
Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones
that you have crushed rejoice. PSALM 51:8

IT WAS COLD, BLEAK, BITING WEATHER; FOGGY WITHAL; and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. ... Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of strong imagination, he failed.

On a cold day, we seek warmth. The fire of Scrooge provides meager warmth, but certainly more than the solitary coal and comforter of the nameless clerk (whom we only know later in the story—when the names of the poor seemingly matter—to be Bob Cratchit). How much have we sought only our own personal warmth while leaving others to suffer? We might recall that Peter warmed himself by a fire on a cold night, and there denied his Lord. Jesus would stand on the pavement stone of Pilate's palace, and later be taken away to be crucified; the people could only beat their hands upon their breasts in the coldness of this moment. Yet one morning a few days later, Peter would again see Jesus—by a charcoal fire. Jesus invites and welcomes Peter to come and have breakfast with him. The loving warmth of this risen One melts away the chill of despair beyond our failing imagination. ❁



WEDNESDAY *after the* FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT

~~~~~  
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put  
a new and right spirit within me. PSALM 51:10

“A MERRY CHRISTMAS, UNCLE! GOD SAVE YOU!” CRIED A CHEERFUL VOICE. *It was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach. “Bah!” said Scrooge. “Humbug!” ... “Don’t be cross, uncle!” said the nephew. “What else can I be,” returned the uncle, “when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What’s Christmastime to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books, and having every item in ’em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will,” said Scrooge indignantly, “every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.”*

Scrooge, in the hardness of his heart, cannot hear the wonderful buoyant message that his nephew brings: “A merry Christmas! God save you!” For Scrooge, the merriness of the season of Christmas seems a total waste of resources. Strange that a man in the business of saving so much could not see how he has wasted away the very resources of his own soul. Yet, Christmas is about saving one and all. Jesus wears the holly upon his brow and lets the thorns of our hardheartedness pierce his soul—even unto death and burial—that we might instead be gladdened with new birth. Scrooge would come to grasp the saving of Christmas, and his heart would also grow from that precious stake of holly. ❁



THURSDAY *after the* FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT

~~~~~  
**Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain me in a willing spirit. PSALM 51:12**

“I AM SURE I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF CHRISTMASTIME, WHEN IT HAS COME ROUND—*apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!*”

In the face of criticism, Scrooge’s nephew dares to call Christmas “good.” Here all of humanity gets to share in the journey of being “fellow-passengers to the grave” with a deeper trust in a Promise that kindness, forgiveness, and acts of charity are greater than all that we may possess. The nephew backs this claim up by calling us to the Child of Christmas, its “sacred name and origin.” And so, the nephew concludes, “God bless it!” It will not be the last time that God’s blessing will be so invoked on the lips of the confessing poor and downtrodden. Might we be so willing to join them in professing this “good” news in word and deed, nor shying away from naming its Promising Child! ❀



FRIDAY *after the* FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT

~~~~~  
How does God's love abide in anyone  
who has the world's goods and sees a brother  
or sister in need and yet refuses help? 1 JOHN 3:17

“UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY SCARCELY FURNISH CHRISTIAN CHEER OF MIND OR BODY TO THE MULTITUDE,” returned the gentleman, “a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?” “Nothing!” Scrooge replied. ... I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there.” “Many can't go there; and many would rather die.” “If they would rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

In the Victorian era, the poor were treated shamefully. Only if they worked would they receive but a meager portion of food and provisions. If they did not, they got sent to the prisons or the treadmill. Today, half of the world's population lives in poverty, and one out of every four lives in extreme poverty. How often have we heard the words “Remember the poor” and, like Scrooge, turned a deaf ear or a blind and callous eye to such as these? Yet Jesus, who was himself poor and brought them “good news,” feeds us at his table and sends us out to be bread for the world. We do not comfort ourselves in status-quo “establishments.” We look for new ways for hope to reign for one and all. ❁



Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* has been a delightful part of the celebration of Christmas since it was first written in 1843. Dickens deeply, and penitently understands that Scrooge is really a reflection of himself and so many of us in our sinful state; yet the transformation of this central character, and us, is the blessing we receive from the Child of Christmas.

These reflections for each of the days in Advent will help to lift up the Child who was not ashamed to take upon himself the poverty of our being and makes us all new—for our sake, and for the sake of the whole world!

