

the
FULLNESS
of TIME



INSPIRATION FROM

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

ADVENT DEVOTIONS

Welcome to Advent! The birth of Jesus Christ happened exactly at the right moment in history, in the fullness of time. This marvelous event—carefully prepared for and orchestrated by God—unveiled the coming of Jesus, the fulfillment of God’s plan of redemption for all people.

Christ’s divine mission saves us from what we cannot overcome ourselves—sin and death. Even more strikingly though, we are adopted into the family of God to live as his children through Christ. And so, this plan of sheer goodness, written into the human flesh of this King from heaven, fittingly first comes to us as a little Child.

This booklet is designed to accompany your meditations this Advent. Consider beginning your devotional time each day this season by quieting your mind, then slowly reading the Scripture verse, allowing your heart to take it in. Read the words of beloved spiritual master Henri Nouwen, followed by a reflection from contemporary writer and retreat leader Amy Ekeh, closing with a prayer. My prayer is that these devotions might serve as a springboard to a fullness of faith in our Savior.

Blessings to you as our Emmanuel, God-with-us, guides your Advent season, in anticipation of the joy of Christmas.



Pat Gohn, *editor*

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Worth Waiting For

... he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 1:9-10

*We must listen with our whole being, trusting that the Word that created us will also heal us. God wants to become present to us and thus radically transform our fearful hearts. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 48)*

Advent is a time of waiting. We are waiting for someone to arrive. But why must we wait? Words and phrases from the above readings burst with possibility: making mysteries known, gathering up all things, listening, trusting, transforming. These wonderful, sacred things take time. In a world that is accustomed to “instant,” it is easy to forget how long it takes to truly make a mystery known, or gather up all things, or radically transform hearts.

The coming of our Savior takes time because salvation takes time. God does not snap his fingers or push a button in order to save us. He sends his Son to be with us and love us. Salvation is a relationship. This takes time. This is worth waiting for.

Lord Jesus, help me to savor this time of waiting. Help me to enjoy the slow process of your drawing near to me and to our world. I will wait patiently as you transform my heart. Amen.

MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Already but Not Yet

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Mark 1:14-15

*Jesus is God-for-us, God-with-us, God-within-us. Jesus is God giving himself completely, pouring himself out for us without reserve. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 67)*

A major theme of Jesus’ preaching is that the kingdom of God has *already drawn near*. Then, why are we still waiting when the time has already been “fulfilled” by the ministry and presence of Jesus? What are we waiting for when Jesus is already *Emmanuel*, God-with-us?

We are living in the mystery of God’s presence. This presence is already with us, and yet we yearn for it. God is with us, and yet God is still giving himself over to us, pouring himself out, filling what remains empty in us—and in our families, communities, church and world. Jesus has come. Jesus is coming. Both are true, and so we wait for that final return of Jesus. Until that day, it will always be Advent for us.

Emmanuel, you have already come into the world and into our hearts. Your kingdom is already among us. Keep coming to us. Give yourself to us until we are completely yours, and you are ours. Amen.

TUESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

The Living Word

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...

Hebrews 4:12

*Christ is the Word of God who became flesh for us. Through the discipline of the Book, the Word of God can continue to become flesh in us. Reading the Scriptures as God's most intimate word for us is thus the realization of the incarnation in the concrete reality of our present life. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ*, 77)*

The Bible is not like other books on our shelves. It is a living Word, an ongoing conversation between human beings and God. In this sense, it is not only an ancient story but a contemporary one. The story of God-with-us is still unfolding, from the Garden of Eden to the glory of Revelation. Just as God came to be with us in the human life of Jesus Christ, so God continues to “enflesh” himself in the words of the Bible.

This is why the inspired words of Scripture can continue to act in us with the sharpness, liveliness and grace of God himself. God did not deliver his Word and disappear; God continues to dwell with us there.

Jesus, Word of God, enlighten us with your Spirit when we read the Bible or hear it proclaimed. Through this living Word, may we be united with you in thought and deed. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Holy Unrest

And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Mark 1:17-18

*You are Christian only when you believe that you have a role to play in the realization of this new kingdom and when you urge everyone you meet with a holy unrest to make haste, so that the promise might soon be fulfilled. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 102)*

Even in the slow process of waiting and watching, there is a sense of urgency in our Christian living. The call has already gone out: “Follow me!” The kingdom of God is among us! We have a role; we must do our part. This role is not for some other day; this part we have to play is not something we can do later. Today is the day we must begin anew—to follow, to fish for people, to realize God’s kingdom with a sense of “holy unrest.”

Has anyone in your life been left behind? Does anyone need good news? Embrace them, speak to them, bring them with you into the bright light of God. We are Christians. This is what we do, and we begin again each day.

Lord Jesus, every day you call me to follow you. Give me ears to hear your voice and a heart to answer your call with a sense of holy unrest. Amen.

THURSDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Full of Faith

Then Mary said, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Luke 1:38

*And “faith,” as the Greek word *pistis* shows, is an act of trust. It is the great “Yes” to the one who has explained the scriptures to us as scriptures that are about him. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 59)*

There are several ways to understand the word *faith*—a word so essential to our life with God. Faith can mean *belief*: we have faith that God exists. Faith can mean *trust*: we have faith in God’s care for us. Faith can also mean *faithfulness*—a great “Yes”—a pledge of total fidelity—heart, mind, soul and body. This is the faith of Abraham in ancient days, of Moses in the desert, of Mary at the Annunciation, of Jesus on the cross and of Paul in prison. This is our faith too, when we refuse to leave the side of Christ no matter how hard we may be pulled by distractions, inclinations or other ways of life.

Faith is both a gift and a decision. May we always live out this faith—graciously given to us—and deliberately live each day with heartfelt fidelity.

Here I am, Lord. I believe in you. I trust in you. I promise, with your help, to be faithful to you. Amen.

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Celebrate Advent and draw closer to God through the daily reflections and prayers inspired by Scripture and the spiritual writings of **Henri J. M. Nouwen**. Author Amy Ekeh offers rich, warm and encouraging reflections that invite readers to pray each day and encounter Emmanuel, God-with-us.



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