

GOD with US



DAILY
DEVOTIONS
FOR ADVENT

Deacon Greg Kandra

Introduction

Are we there, yet?

Our journey toward Christmas may just be starting, but already, like the song says, “It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas.” The store sales begin in October, the lights go up after Halloween and by Thanksgiving most of us have gotten more than enough of Mariah Carey to last us until next year.

But have we forgotten about Advent?

I once preached about the odd, blended season of “Chradvent,” the conflation of Christmas and Advent that has turned this season of anticipation and hope into barely a blip on the calendar, a brief blur on the way to The Big Day. We’ve made Advent little more than an afterthought.

This year, let’s give it thought.

I hope this little devotional can help facilitate that and guide us toward a deeper appreciation for what this season means.

This time of year is really a moment to be aware not only of God’s coming into human history through the person of Jesus but also to express our gratitude and wonder at his *continuing* presence in our world. God *is* with us! It is a season heralding hope.

So let’s wait with joyful hope. Many of the Scripture selections, reflections and prayers here encourage us to do that. Soon enough, we will arrive at Christmas.

But first, let’s set out on this journey once again, reassured that we do not go alone. God is at our side—and *on* our side.

Deacon Greg Kandra

FIRST **SUNDAY** OF ADVENT

Coming Soon

The days are coming—[says] the LORD—when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. **JEREMIAH 33:14**

We know the drill. There's Thanksgiving, then the onslaught: gifts to buy and cards to sign and packages to wrap and flights to book and gifts to send. Where is that old recipe for apple pie?

Scripture speaks: *The days are coming*, Jeremiah says.

The season of waiting begins. Do we really need to be reminded? Well, life intrudes. So maybe we do.

We need to be reminded of why we wait—and who is coming.

Many places make a practice of lighting the Advent wreath, one candle at a time, the light growing week by week. It's a flickering reminder of The One who is to come, the Light that will banish all darkness. It reassures us, too, that God will fulfill his promise. He is near.

So just for now: Let's pray for patience. Pray for calm.

Seek light. Look for ways to share it.

Let's remember, above all, what these days are really about.

God of Patience, help me to be patient amid so much busyness, and grant me your peace to light my days. Amen.

MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

RSVP

House of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the LORD! **ISAIAH 2:5**

This is a season of invitations.

They pop up in our mailbox or on our computer screen. We get invited to office parties, concerts, luncheons, dinners and family gatherings. Charities invite us to donate, give, share. The offers keep coming. It can be exhausting.

But here is an offer we can't refuse.

"Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

In these weeks when the days are getting shorter and darker—and time, it seems, is more fleeting than ever!—what we crave is more than daylight or even twinkling bulbs. We hunger for God's light in our lives. We yearn for serenity and hope.

During Advent, God invites us to look for him. How will we RSVP?

God of Invitation, open my heart to hear your call during this holy season. May I eagerly answer "Yes" and make this time of waiting a time of seeking you and seeking your will for my life. Amen.

TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Child's Play

...[Jesus] rejoiced [in] the holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike." **LUKE 10:21**

With more of us shopping online, we might miss something: watching children at stores getting ready to meet Santa. Last year, my wife and I found ourselves at the mall for some last-minute shopping. We passed Santa's photo spot. There they were: Kids lined up, clutching their parents' hands with excitement.

Maybe we need to take a lesson from children. Give in to amazement. Surrender to wonder, to mystery, to awe, to the miracle of this season.

Our God entered history as a newborn baby—and grew into a man who marveled at the simplicity and innocence of "the childlike." I like to think he delights in our wonder—holding our hands in reassurance, tenderness and love.

This season, feel his closeness and squeeze his hand!

God of Wonder, fill my heart with joy, that I may seek you in the faces of children and live this season grateful for your extravagant love. Amen.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Seeking Comfort

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God. **ISAIAH 40:1**

For some of us, December can be the cruelest month. Merriment is elusive. Joy is scarce. We look toward the holidays with an unspoken dread. Maybe there will be an empty place at the table. There might be hurts that haven't healed, memories that won't fade or anxiety about what the new year will bring.

Yet, into this comes a prophet, calling out to a broken world: "*Comfort, give comfort to my people.*"

Advent reminds us that the Christ who came into our world 2,000 years ago *continues* to come into it. He is reborn in each of us with every whispered prayer, every tender embrace, every chance encounter with an old friend or a moment of indescribable grace.

Emmanuel, God-with-us, is *still* with us.

For an aching, yearning, wounded world, that may be the greatest comfort of all.

God of Consolation, thank you for your presence, your reassurance, your love. Stay close to all who are in pain. May I always remember that you are with me, dispelling the darkness and helping all of us know hope. Amen.

THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Common Sense

Then he touched their eyes and said, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.” And their eyes were opened.

MATTHEW 9:29-30

Do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear?

How can we miss it? The decorations, the music, the persistent aroma of baking cookies, roasting chestnuts and fresh-cut evergreen trees—the world in December goes into sensory overload.

Consider the Scriptures. So much of the Christmas story is about *seeing*. Mary sees an angel; the magi see a star; shepherds travel to Bethlehem to see the mother and her child.

Reading the Gospels, we realize that so much of Jesus’ life is about vision, helping those who are blind be able to see. Again and again in his miracles, Jesus offers the priceless gift of sight. Eyes are opened. Seeing is believing.

As we check off shopping lists and a thousand small chores of the season during these busy weeks, let us try to keep our eyes and hearts open.

Take time to look for God’s grace at work in the world—and in each of us.

God of Vision, open my eyes to see the world anew this season and to be grateful for the light you bring into my life. Amen.

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Award-winning author Deacon Greg Kandra offers a winsome and wise collection of daily Scripture-based Advent reflections and prayers for adult Catholic readers, young and old. Advent is a special time of year to be aware not only of God's coming into human history through the person of Jesus but also to express our gratitude and wonder at his continuing presence in our world. God is with us! It is a season heralding hope. The Scripture selections, reflections and prayers inside this booklet encourage readers to journey through Advent once again, reassured that we do not go alone. God is at our side—and on our side.

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