



ADVENT
2021

THIS PILGRIMAGE ... IS BETTER WITH YOU

The Coming
by R.S. Thomas

And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows: a bright
Serpent, A river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.

On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many People
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.

ADVENT
2021 DEVOTIONAL

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Cover Art by Ruth Sze

Second Sight
by David Whyte

Sometimes, you need the ocean light,
and colors you've never seen before
painted through an evening sky.

Sometimes you need your God
to be a simple invitation,
not a telling word of wisdom.

Sometimes you need only the first shyness
that comes from being shown things
far beyond your understanding,

so that you can fly and become free
by being still and by being still here.

And then there are times you need to be
brought to ground by touch
and touch alone.

To know those arms around you
and to make your home in the world.
just by being wanted.

To see those eyes looking back at you,
as eyes should see you at last,

seeing you, as you always wanted to be seen,
seeing you, as you yourself
had always wanted to see the world.

WELCOME

Advent. That time of waiting, waiting even more trembling and terrible than the waiting between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. But what are we waiting for? Why? We're not waiting, as we so often are taught as children, for Christmas, for the baby Jesus to be born in a stable in Bethlehem. We're waiting for something that has not happened yet, that has never happened before, something totally new. We know only what the end of this waiting has been called throughout the centuries: The Second Coming. What is it, the coming of the Christ in glory? The return of Christ to earth? What's it going to be like? We don't know. We don't know anything about this event that is new, that has never before happened...The only thing I know about the Second Coming is that it is going to happen because of God's love. God made the universe out of love; the Word shouted all things joyfully into being because of love. The Second Coming, whenever it happens and whatever it means, will also be because of love.

— Madeleine L'Engle

The following daily reflections include themes of

- FAITH - by way of weariness and waiting
- PEACE - by way of refuge and rest
- LOVE - by way of God-love and neighbor-love
- JOY - by way of expectation and faithfulness

There are invitations for the heart, imagination and body.

There are prayers and blessings to offer up with your voice.

Each Wednesday there is an invitation to a Prayer of Examen. This is a devotional exercise developed by St. Ignatius to help us become more self-aware and aware of Christ's presence in our lives. Detailed instructions are on the next page.

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

3 min | Opening Prayer of Invitation

- Find a comfortable position and sit in stillness and, if possible, silence.
- Be reminded that God brings structure out of the chaos of our days.
- Invite the Holy Spirit, who searches our hearts, to guide you through this prayer.

3 min | Reviewing the Past Week's Events

- Remembering that each day is a gift from the Lord, review your week and write down a basic chronology of what happened.
- Does any particular event, meeting, conversation, or place stand out to you? In the rush of your days, it is easy to overlook so much. Think about the things you ate, saw, smelled and heard. Remember that God is even in the details.

3 min | Considering Your Emotions

- Our emotions are an important expression of the desires in our hearts; however, we can become unaware of our emotions given the frantic pace of our lives. When we are not aware of our emotions and the desires that underlie them, we can too easily become ruled by them.
- Reflect on the week's events and list the feelings that you experienced — fear, anxiety, boredom, happiness, resentment, elation, hope, anger, compassion, etc.

5 min | Choose One Feature and Pray for It

- As you examine the events and emotions of the week, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to something you could pay more attention to. This can be something unexpected or seemingly insignificant at first glance. It can be something positive or negative.
- Pray for this particular thing. How could God want you to pray for this? What could God be wanting you to know or learn? How could God be affirming you or leading you to change?
- Invite the Holy Spirit, who searches our hearts, to guide you through this prayer.

2 min | Closing Prayer

- Remember that God patiently leads us each day. This week's mistakes are redeemable and today's victories do not guarantee success tomorrow. How might you be able to apply what you've learned today into next week?
- What action can you take tomorrow as an expression of faith and dependence upon God's abounding grace in Christ?
- Ask that you would be more aware of God's guiding presence tomorrow.

WEEK 1

SUNDAY November 28

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.

— *Isaiah 2:3a*

| Reflection

Advent means “coming” or “arrival”. Advent symbolizes the present situation of the church in these “last days” as God’s people wait for the return of Christ in glory to consummate his eternal kingdom. The church is in a similar situation to Israel at the end of the Old Testament: in exile, waiting and hoping in prayerful expectation for the coming of the Messiah. Israel looked back to God’s past gracious actions on their behalf in leading them out of Egypt in the Exodus, and on this basis they called for God once again to act for them. In the same way, the church, during Advent, looks back upon Christ’s coming in celebration while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the coming of Christ’s kingdom when he returns for his people.

— AME Church

| Invitation

Take a quiet moment and ask God what it could look like for you to walk in the way of Christ’s kingdom during this Advent season.

| Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

— BCP

Inhale: Lord, I am waiting.
Exhale: Show me the way.

MONDAY

November 29

*In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.*

— Isaiah 40:3-5

| Reflection

In the wilderness, we can often recognize disorientation as an embodied experience. There can be confusion around our relationships with ourselves, our friends and our God. Doubts can spring up or be uncovered. Fear not; our lives are journeys, guided and sustained by Christ's love and mystery.

| Invitation

Call to mind a doubt about life in God you hold or have once held. Consider how doubt can be an invitation into deeper faith and how faith is learning to rest in mystery.

| Prayer

Transcendent Christ, we thank you for each person on their unique faith journey, guided and sustained by love and mystery. We thank you for ground that is not yet level. We pray that your church might fully embody the beauty at its core, that it might welcome questions kindly and help envision new possibilities. Open our eyes to the joy of unknowing and the life-giving practice of resting in your presence. Let our spirits trust the Holy Breath that holds us together.

TUESDAY

November 30

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

— Matthew 11:28

| Reflection

Loneliness
Always happens
Just before
The hurt
And the healer
Collide.

— Michael Nelder

| Invitation

Identify a burden that weighs heavy on you. Imagine coming to Jesus with this burden and resting in silence. What images come forth when the hurt and the healer collide?

| Blessing

You have traveled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.
Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.
Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.
Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of color
That fostered the brightness of day.
Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.

— John O'Donohue

WEDNESDAY December 1

Prayer of Examen

2 min | Opening Prayer of Invitation

3 min | Review the Past Week's Events

3 min | Consider Your Emotions

5 min | Choose One Feature and Pray for It

2 min | Closing Prayer

Notes

THURSDAY December 2

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God.

— Psalm 62:5

| Reflection

Silence has a life of its own. It is not just that which is around words and underneath images and events. It is a being in itself to which we can relate and become intimately familiar. When we connect with silence as a living, primordial presence, we can then see all other things—and experience them deeply—inside that container. Silence is not just an absence, but a primal presence. Silence surrounds every “I know” with a humble and patient “I don’t know.” It protects the autonomy and dignity of events, persons, animals, and all created things.

— Richard Rohr

Silence isn’t the word that I often use. Just simply because of the problem for people of color, and women, who have been silenced... I tend to use the language of stillness, of centering, and of embodied ineffability.

— Dr. Barbara A. Holmes

| Invitation

You may have heard at one time, “Silence is a member of the group.” This week, pay attention to the moments when *silence* enters your space and kindly invites you to hold attention. Pause. Acknowledge *silence*. If you are in the company of others, relax any awkwardness and embrace a possibility *silence* offers - to be formed together in quietness and rest.

| Prayer

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we will be saved, in quietness and confidence will be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— BCP

FRIDAY December 3

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

— John 14:18

| Reflection

The holiday season can give rise to a torrent of emotions around our relationships. Any experience of loss is sharpened - loss having to do with conflict, loss having to do with death, loss having to do with an elusive homecoming that has always been longed for and rarely, if ever, experienced. The archetype of the orphan steps into the spotlight.

| Invitation

Become present to an area of loss and longing. Remember some ways God has met you in your grief. Ask God to provide a haven and meet you there.

| Blessing

But your loss brought you here to walk
under one name and one name only,
and to find the guise under which all loss can live;
remember, you were given that name every day
along the way, remember, you were greeted as such,
and treated as such and you needed no other name,
other people seemed to know you even before
you gave up being a shadow on the road
and came into the light, even before you sat down,
broke bread and drank wine,
wiped the wind-tears from your eyes:
pilgrim they called you,
pilgrim they called you again and again. Pilgrim.

— David Whyte

SATURDAY December 4

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

— Luke 1:51

| Reflection

If we want Advent to transform us – our homes and hearts, and even nations – then the great question for us is whether we will come out of the convulsions of our time with this determination: Yes, arise! It is time to awaken from sleep. A waking up must begin somewhere. It is time to put things back where God intended them. It is time for each of us to go to work – certain that the Lord will come – to set our life in God’s order wherever we can.

— Alfred Delp

| Invitation

Alfred Delp also writes, “We need people who are moved by the horrific calamities and emerge from them with the knowledge that those who look to the Lord will be preserved by him, even if they are hounded from the earth.” Consider a reality of oppression and violence you want to be more awake to. Where do you long the most to experience God’s kingdom come? Ask God how you might engage this longing with action.

| Blessing

So let us pick up the stones over which we stumble, friends, and build altars. Let us listen to the sound of breath in our bodies. Let us listen to the sounds of our own voices, of our own names, of our own fears. Let’s claw ourselves out from the graves we’ve dug. Let’s lick the earth from our fingers. Let us look up and out and around. The world is big and wide and wild and wonderful and wicked, and our lives are murky, magnificent, malleable, and full of meaning.

— Pádraig Ó Tuama

WEEK 2

SUNDAY December 5

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

— Isaiah 7:14

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

— Psalm 85:10-11

| Invitation

Enjoy this day of rest and spend time connecting with your community.

| Reflection

The Solitude of nature is mainly silent. This is expressed beautifully in the old Irish wisdom: “Castar na daoine ar a cheile ach ni castar na sleibhte ar a cheile” - that is, “The mountains never meet, but people can always encounter each other.” It is strange that two mountains can be side by side for millions of years and yet can never move closer to each other. Whereas two strangers can come down these mountains, meet in the valley, and share the inner worlds they carry.

- John O'Donohue

| Prayer

Inhale: I am a stranger.

Exhale: Meet me in the valley.

MONDAY

December 6

*Those who look to him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.*

—Psalm 34:5

| Reflection

When you consider the radiance, that it does not withhold itself but pours its abundance without selection into every nook and cranny not overhung or hidden; when you consider

that birds' bones make no awful noise against the light but lie low in the light as in a high testimony; when you consider the radiance, that it will look into the guiltiest

swervings of the weaving heart and bear itself upon them, not flinching into disguise or darkening; when you consider the abundance of such resource as illuminates the glow-blue

bodies and gold-skeined wings of flies swarming the dumped guts of a natural slaughter or the coil of shit and in no way winces from its storms of generosity; when you consider

that air or vacuum, snow or shale, squid or wolf, rose or lichen, each is accepted into as much light as it will take, then the heart moves roomier, the man stands and looks about, the

leaf does not increase itself above the grass, and the dark work of the deepest cells is of a tune with May bushes and fear lit by the breadth of such calmly turns to praise.

— A.R. Ammons

| Prayer

God of abundance, may your radiance beckon my face to turn from shame to praise.

TUESDAY December 7

*But you, O LORD, are a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.
I cried aloud to the LORD,
and he answered me from his holy hill.*

— Psalm 3:3-4

| Reflection

Sometimes, I confess, a little ray of sunshine illumines my dark night, and I enjoy peace for an instant, but later, remembrance of this ray of light, instead of consoling me, makes the blackness thicker still...And yet never have I felt so deeply how sweet and merciful is the Lord.

— Saint Therese of Lisieux

| Invitation

Take a few moments to pray to God with your breath, being mindful of each inhale and exhale. Then recall “a little ray of sunshine” you may have experienced in an otherwise dark night. As you inhale and exhale, hold this image in your body.

| Prayer

God of accompaniment, in a world of injustice and atomization, be with your creatures in our loneliness, whispering into our ears the comfort that only you can provide. Help us to keep vigil with our questions and longings, even in spaces where the light grows dim.

WEDNESDAY December 8

Prayer of Examen

2 min | Opening Prayer of Invitation

3 min | Review the Past Week's Events

3 min | Consider Your Emotions

5 min | Choose One Feature and Pray for It

2 min | Closing Prayer

Notes

THURSDAY December 9

We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.

— 1 John 4:19

| Reflection

And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as any ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, 'What may this be?' And it was answered generally thus, 'It is all that is made.' I marveled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothing for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it. And so have all things their beginning by the love of God. In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second that God loves it. And the third, that God keeps it.

— Julian of Norwich

| Invitation

Today, pay attention to something little in your path. Take a few moments to meditate on God's love for this thing.

| Blessing

May you recognize the creating and keeping love of God. May you regard what seems insignificant in your life with wonder and gratitude.

FRIDAY December 10

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

— *Ephesians 1:16*

| Reflection

Open your eyes and see the friends
Whose hearts recognize your face as kin...

— John O'Donohue

| Invitation

Think of someone in your spiritual community and reflect on an aspect of their way of being in the world. Offer thanks for this person and spend a few minutes dreaming with God about what their future could hold.

| Prayer

God of pilgrimage, I give thanks for the unique Christ-embodiment of all my fellow sojourners. May I never assume the road is level, all the way, for anyone. May I know deeply the power of remembrance, and that attention in the way of prayer can be both balm and buoy.

SATURDAY December 11

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

— Hebrews 4:9-10

| Reflection

Shabbat comes with its own holiness; we enter not simply a day, but an atmosphere. My father cites the Zohar: the Sabbath is the name of God. We are within the Sabbath rather than the Sabbath being within us. For my father, the question is how to perceive that holiness: not how much to observe, but how to observe. Strict adherence to the laws regulating Sabbath observance doesn't suffice; the goal is creating the Sabbath as a foretaste of paradise. The Sabbath is a metaphor for paradise and a testimony to God's presence; in our prayers, we anticipate a messianic era that will be a Sabbath, and each Shabbat prepares us for that experience: "Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath... one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come.

— Abraham Joshua Heschel

| Invitation

What brings you deep rest? Do something today to give your soul rest and reflect on the experience.

| Prayer

O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— BCP

WEEK 3

SUNDAY December 12

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.*

— Isaiah 9:2-3

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

— Psalm 126:5-6

| Invitation

Enjoy this day of rest and spend time connecting with your community.

| Reflection

...new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.

— Barbara Brown Taylor

| Blessing

May the tears we cry today / water the seeds / for a new world tomorrow

May our sorrow / be the soil / from which liberation sprouts.

— Drew Jackson

MONDAY December 13

*Love does no harm to a neighbor.
Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

— Romans 13:10

| Reflection

When you are finally
Roused out of the dream world
In which God is only for you and yours
It will be a rude awakening
When you come to the realization
That God has always been for them
Whoever them is
You will hear the sound of chains breaking

— Drew Jackson

| Invitation

Think of one person, who is your neighbor and who you consider to be in the category of “them”. Spend one minute praying for this person to the rhythm of your breath.

Inhale: A name for God. (God of compassion, God of peace, God of comfort, etc)

Exhale: Hear (_____'s) prayer.

| Prayer

We pray for the imagination of every person or culture that wears violence as an identity, and uses it as a way to interact with other people over empathy and compassion. We pray for the healing of every hatred and division that prevents us from viewing our neighbors as part of Your creation, molded in Your image. We pray to see the end of war, injustice, and oppressive powers - and in its place, to see the peace of Your Kingdom.

TUESDAY

December 14

God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear.

— 1 John 4:17-18

| Reflection

When we experience uncertainty and trepidation, it's easy to armor up. Our curiosity hibernates, our hearts calcify and we can evade invitations, no matter the truth and beauty they may hold. Jesus' love offers us another way to navigate these precarious landscapes of the inner life.

| Invitation

Consider an image of Christ's love for you. Imagine what it might look like, in light of this image, to make a choice in the way of possibility, vulnerability and love, rather than in response to fear.

| Prayer

Jesus, you chose to move towards people, in vulnerability, at the risk of hostility and rejection. Through your Spirit, animate me, your beloved, with an energetic tenderness to engage each invitation of love with imagination, compassion and courage. Would your perfect love cast out all fear.

WEDNESDAY December 15

Prayer of Examen

2 min | Opening Prayer of Invitation

3 min | Review the Past Week's Events

3 min | Consider Your Emotions

5 min | Choose One Feature and Pray for It

2 min | Closing Prayer

Notes

THURSDAY December 16

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

— *Galatians 6:2*

| Reflection

Human beings are so made that the ones who do the crushing feel nothing; it is the person crushed who feels what is happening. Unless one has placed oneself on the side of the oppressed, to feel with them, one cannot understand.

— Simone Weil

| Invitation

Call to mind a fellow human who has been under the weight of oppression and oppressor. Say their name. Close your eyes and see their face. Pay attention to the details of this person's experience: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and emotions. Hold this person in the love and honor of Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your imagination to ways you can advocate for and bear the burdens of this fellow human being.

| Prayer

God of mercy and justice, one who bears the burdens of the beloved - eradicate the evil that pervades systems of oppression, silence the mouths of those whose words crush others with unbearable religious demands, bring low those whose power is not employed for the deliverance and well-being of the marginalized. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

FRIDAY December 17

And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

— Deuteronomy 10:19

| Reflection

Feeling trapped is scary. But God comes to those who are stuck. This was the case in the Old Testament with exiled Israel—caught in a geopolitical and geographical conundrum, with its oppressors on one side and the daunting Red Sea on the other. Nowhere to go but “up,” so to speak—to turn to a God who listens and, critically, one who responds.

In the New Testament, that response is embodied in the Word of God, Jesus Christ, whom we are called to imitate and whose true world we are called to enact. It is a world of emancipation, of a fellow-freeing of the oppressed, of taking Christ down from the Cross, and of living as a resurrected people. It is a response needed by so many: those stranded at our country’s southern border; those on military bases and in Afghanistan awaiting resettlement; and those huddling en masse under bridges, in tents, or worse. And in recent days, a response needed to the fresh horrors have surfaced of migrants being used as pawns at borders in Eastern Europe.

| Invitation

As multiple crises of forced migration continue to dominate the headlines, how might God be calling you to incarnate a Christlike response? How might you manifest Christ’s risenness by welcoming, healing, and empowering our newest neighbors? Whether through service, advocacy, worship, education, or otherwise, how might you catalyze the Body of Christ to illustrate that God’s heart knows no borders?

| Prayer

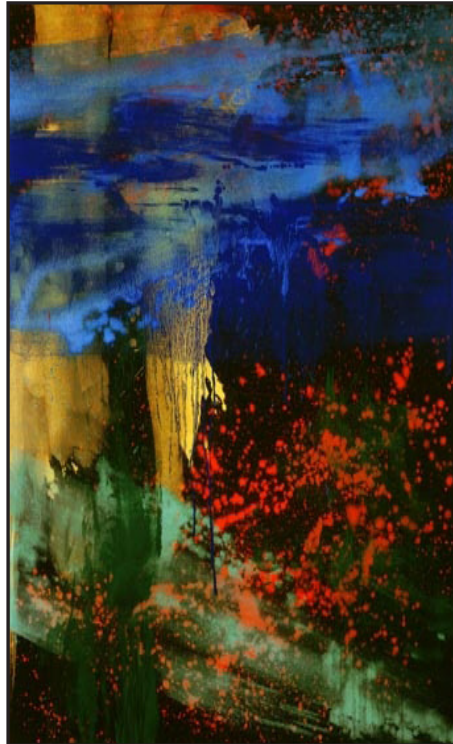
God, we pray for change in a world that idolatrizes borders.

SATURDAY
December 18

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

— *Romans 12:15*

| Reflection



CHARIS-KAIROS (The Tears of Christ)
by Makoto Fujimura

| Invitation

Think of someone who is energized by light and harvest; notice where joy lives in your body.

Think of someone who is enduring a dark night of the soul; notice where grief lives in your body.

| Blessing

May you find the intimacy in being present with laughter and with tears.

WEEK 4

SUNDAY December 19

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord*

— Isaiah 11:2

*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him
Immanuel” (which means “God with us”)*

— Matthew 1:23

| Invitation

Enjoy this day of rest and spend time connecting with your community.

| Reflection

The symbol of the tree is the symbol of sustaining life. The Genesis story has a tree at the center of the garden whose fruit gives life to all who eat of it. Then, in the very last chapter of the vision in Revelation, there is a tree whose fruit is used for the healing of everyone. From the beginning to the very end, the symbol of the tree in our midst is the promise of sustaining life everlasting. That tree is always with us.

— Scott Erickson

| Prayer

Inhale: I will not worked to be loved.

Exhale: I am beautiful in this stillness.

— Cole Arthur Riley

MONDAY December 20

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

— Revelation 22:2

| Reflection

Maybe you need to write a poem about grace.
When everything broken is broken,
and everything dead is dead,
and the hero has looked into the mirror with complete contempt,
and the heroine has studied her face and its defects
remorselessly, and the pain they thought might,
as a token of their earnestness, release them from themselves
has lost its novelty and not released them,
and they have begun to think, kindly and distantly,
watching the others go about their days—
likes and dislikes, reasons, habits, fears—
that self-love is the one weedy stalk
of every human blossoming, and understood,
therefore, why they had been, all their lives,
in such a fury to defend it, and that no one—
except some almost inconceivable saint in his pool
of poverty and silence—can escape this violent, automatic
life's companion ever, maybe then, ordinary light,
faint music under things, a hovering like grace appears.

— Robert Haas

| Prayer

Gracious God, in your kindness and wisdom, help us to see how ego-love, a weedy stalk, can be transformed into Christ-love, a tree with leaves for the healing of the nations.

TUESDAY December 21

And suddenly the star they had seen rising went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight.

— Matthew 2:9-10

| Reflection

There are between 200-400 billion stars in our galaxy and every star that you see in the night sky is bigger and brighter than our sun. It is no wonder that the stars fill us with delight and capture our imaginations. Think of all the art and songs that have been inspired by the stars. In Matthew we are introduced to Magi, men who have been called wise. They were following a star that they believed led them to a King. To their surprise they were led to a powerless and vulnerable baby in a manger.

| Invitation

Perhaps you can find a night to spend a few minutes outside with the stars. If a night sky is not available to you, try to find a piece of art to reflect upon. Just as the Magi were following their star, we too must follow our stars. The Creator of the stars asks us to trust Him as He leads us to places and people we might not have gone to on our own. Maybe you are following a star of reconciliation or forgiveness or a star that leads you to places of suffering and oppression. As you spend time delighting under the night sky, ask God to show you the stars He has placed in your life for this season and for the courage to walk towards them.

| Blessing

I hope a star comes out for you today. A new one that you've never seen before. I hope it's bright and bold. A prophetic star, piercing your darkness and helping you to see the things you really need to see.

— Macrina Wiederkehr

WEDNESDAY December 22

Prayer of Examen

2 min | Opening Prayer of Invitation

3 min | Review the Past Week's Events

3 min | Consider Your Emotions

5 min | Choose One Feature and Pray for It

2 min | Closing Prayer

Notes

THURSDAY December 23

There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

— 1 Corinthians 15:40-41

| Reflection

Lord God,
you took great big handfuls of
chaos and made galaxies
and stars and solar systems
and night and day and sun and rain and snow
and me.
I take paint and crayon and paper
and make worlds, too,
along with you.

— Madeleine L'Engle

| Invitation

Consider what worlds you are creating with your energy, attention and imagination. Take a few moments to dream about these worlds and ask the spirit to show you the sweetness of creating with God.

| Blessing

May you recognize the sacred possibilities of your imagination.

FRIDAY

December 24

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son,
who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

— John 1:14

| Reflection

Bodies. Elemental, full of spores and liquid and supernova dust. He lived as a body too, and in his flesh was word and story, grace and truth. Jesus unified that which had been split: spiritual and physical, reminding us that we began in a garden, naked, with a stamp of transcendence. It would take a baby—naked, with a stamp of transcendence—to show us that home is the body. Your body, Christ's body, our body.

| Invitation

Notice each of your senses, one at a time. What can you hear right now? What can you feel touching your skin? How might these moments be Jesus' Word made flesh to you? If you were to assign a word to each sensory detail, what would it be? What holy story would it be telling you?

| Prayer

Embodied One, you with blood and bone, earlobes and elbows, you experienced the constraints and pleasures of life in a body. May we be invited into a more animated experience of ourselves, others, and you—to feel Love at a cellular level. May we celebrate this gift of incarnated wonder. Christ, become flesh to me.

Lord,
it is night.

The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.

The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
rest in you.

The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys,
new possibilities.

In your name we pray.
Amen.

— A New Zealand Prayer Book

