



WEEK 1

# ADVENT

## *Devotional*

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*An invitation to pause and savor the anticipation of Advent as we wait for our Savior.*

*Each week, worship through a carol, reflect on a Scripture passage, and respond to God in personal prayer.*



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

# HAIL TO THE LORD'S ANOINTED

*James Montgomery*

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
great David's greater Son!  
Hail in the time appointed,  
his reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
to set the captive free;  
to take away transgression,  
and rule in equity.

He comes with succor speedy  
to those who suffer wrong;  
to help the poor and needy,  
and bid the weak be strong;  
to give them songs for sighing,  
their darkness turn to light,  
whose souls, condemned and dying,  
are precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers  
upon the fruitful earth;  
love, joy, and hope, like flowers,  
spring in his path to birth.  
Before him on the mountains,  
shall peace, the herald, go,  
and righteousness, in fountains,  
from hill to valley flow.

To him shall prayer unceasing  
and daily vows ascend;  
his kingdom still increasing,  
a kingdom without end.  
The tide of time shall never  
his covenant remove;  
his name shall stand forever;  
that name to us is love.

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2

### Read

The LORD said, “The time is coming when I will fulfill the promise that I made to the people of Israel and Judah. At that time I will choose as king a righteous descendant of David. That king will do what is right and just throughout the land. The people of Judah and of Jerusalem will be rescued and will live in safety. The city will be called ‘The LORD Our Salvation.’

JEREMIAH 33:14-16

### Reflect

The future is bleak. Besieged by a foreign army, the best the Israelites can hope for is exile. Jeremiah insists that Israel has brought disaster on themselves by choosing evil instead of good. The golden reign of King David will dissolve into memory, and then even the memory will be extinguished as the once-Israelites lose their government, their culture, their homes. To silence his foreboding message, Israel’s King Zedekiah imprisons Jeremiah.

Israel’s king represented the people before God. If the king was crooked, the nation followed him. If the king was diligent and just, the people were too. If the king pursued other gods, made bad alliances, and ignored the true God’s prophets, the people suffered.

Imprisoned by a weak and corrupt king, Jeremiah hears God speak again. This time, it’s a message of hope. God promises that he’ll “raise up” a king who will be like David. This future king will be known for fair dealing, for compassion, for doing the right thing. His people will be protected by his righteousness.

Six centuries after Jeremiah heard God’s promise, the angel Gabriel visited a young woman to tell her that she was pregnant with a son. Gabriel said that God would give her son “the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32 ESV). Later, when Jesus had grown up, Nathanael met him and exclaimed “You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49).

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we listen to the promises made to Jeremiah. We look to King Jesus, who represents us before God.

**Respond**

Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas, means *coming*. The season is marked by reflecting on Christ's two comings: the first, as a newborn infant delivered by his mother outside in the cold; the second, when he will come back as a reigning King. Use these daily Scriptures, reflections and prayers to meditate on who Jesus is. As you read, ask yourself: Why should Jesus's coming matter to me?

**Pray**

Almighty God, we want to know you better this season. Show us your glory. Let us learn to long for you. Amen.

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 3

### Read

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a Roman officer met him and begged for help:

“Sir, my servant is sick in bed at home, unable to move and suffering terribly.”

“I will go and make him well,” Jesus said.

“Oh no, sir,” answered the officer. “I do not deserve to have you come into my house. Just give the order, and my servant will get well. I, too, am a man under the authority of superior officers, and I have soldiers under me. I order this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes; and I order that one, ‘Come!’ and he comes; and I order my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”

When Jesus heard this, he was surprised and said to the people following him,

“I tell you, I have never found anyone in Israel with faith like this.”

MATTHEW 8:5-10

### Reflect

Capernaum was a fishing village: small boats lined up on the beach, nets strewn over the rocks, drying in the sun. Roman soldiers were posted there to represent the occupation government, distant in Jerusalem and even further in Rome. This centurion is himself an occupier. Yet we learn in Luke’s Gospel that he had been generous to the Jewish people of Capernaum, even building them a synagogue. His own culture’s religion offers many gods to worship, but he’s chosen to honor the one God of Israel.

Maybe a background of Roman polytheism allows him to imagine that a god could take the form of a human. Whatever the reason, this foreigner is able to identify Jesus’s divinity. “I’m not worthy,” he says—something the Jewish leaders of the synagogues have never said. “Only say the word,” he pleads (verse 8 ESV). Somehow, he knows that Jesus does not have to be physically present to heal his servant. To the centurion, Jesus wasn’t merely a miracle-worker. Behind Jesus’s humanity, he saw God. He recognized Jesus as God’s commissioner, whose words wield authority from heaven.

And this recognition, Jesus calls faith. The Israelites watching Jesus’s interaction with a foreign soldier must have been surprised at Jesus’s commendation. But Jesus’s kingdom was open to people from every background. All that was required was to believe in the King’s powerful word.

**Respond**

Are there promises in Scripture that you find hard to believe? Maybe you think some of Jesus's words are too good to be true. Maybe you don't want to welcome Jesus's authority over some areas of your life. Luke records that when the angels announced Jesus's birth, they sang out in exhilarated delight: the kingship of Jesus is *good news*, people. Ask God to increase your faith in his Word this Advent season.

**Pray**

Lord God, we thank you for your mighty works. Thank you for showing us yourself in Jesus. Give us the faith to recognize you and believe in your Word. Amen.

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4

### Read

Teach the king to judge with your righteousness, O God;  
share with him your own justice,  
so that he will rule over your people with justice  
and govern the oppressed with righteousness.  
May the land enjoy prosperity;  
may it experience righteousness.  
May the king judge the poor fairly;  
may he help the needy  
and defeat their oppressors.  
May your people worship you as long as the sun shines,  
as long as the moon gives light, for ages to come.  
May the king be like rain on the fields,  
like showers falling on the land.  
May righteousness flourish in his lifetime,  
and may prosperity last as long as the moon gives light.

He rescues the poor who call to him,  
and those who are needy and neglected.  
He has pity on the weak and poor;  
he saves the lives of those in need.  
He rescues them from oppression and violence;  
their lives are precious to him.

PSALM 72:1-7, 12-14

### Reflect

In the old story of Robin Hood, the outlaws sabotage the unjust sheriff and resist the imposter prince. They haven't heard from their true king in years. They can't be sure he'll come back. Yet in the meantime, Robin Hood and his band insist that the king will return and will right all wrongs. Society has been broken, but the situation is temporary. The outlaws defend the poor while they wait—a stopgap measure.

Psalms 72 holds up to our gaze an eternal kingdom. The king in this psalm makes political and social changes that last “as long as the moon gives light” (verse 7). Robin Hood’s

modest hopes pale in comparison to this vision. This prayer asks God for a king with divine qualities. The desired king mimics God's own goodness in his commitment to justice and his care for the poor. He takes personal interest in the isolated, the lonely, the weak, the financially strapped. Their suffering pains him (verse 14). His worldwide rule is just and gentle.

When Gabriel announced Jesus's birth, he predicted that Jesus's kingdom would never end (Luke 1:33). When Jesus came, the world glimpsed the kingdom described in Psalm 72. We've already met the king who suffers for his people. But we long to live fully under his kingship. We want our world to be characterized by justice and mercy.

### Respond

Read through Psalm 72. Make a list of all the attributes of the king mentioned there—both the explicit qualities and the ones you can infer. What are areas where you need King Jesus's rule in your life, in your family, in the world? Ask the Lord to bring his kingship to those areas.

### Pray

Almighty Father, we bless your name. Thank you that you are a God of justice and mercy. We long for the whole world to see your glory and to imitate you in justice and mercy. Please, let your kingdom come.

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5

### Read

Jesus left there and went along by Lake Galilee. He climbed a hill and sat down. Large crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the dumb, and many other sick people, whom they placed at Jesus's feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed as they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they praised the God of Israel.

MATTHEW 15:29-31

### Reflect

His feet cracked and calloused from walking in the dusty roads, his legs weary, Jesus climbs the hill. Rumors of Jesus's remarkable healing powers have spread even to this non-Jewish region. When he reaches the top of the hill, Jesus sits. The crowd approaches. And Jesus begins to gently, individually heal those infirmities that make our lives bitter—those things we've lost hope for: a son's learning disability, a friend's cancer, a sister's drug addiction.

Isaiah's prophecy uncovers what was really going on: "Poor and humble people will once again find the happiness which the LORD, the holy God of Israel, gives" (Isaiah 29:19).

Medical miracles were only a symbol. The tired healer was reversing the natural order of things. Decay, grief, inability to change—Jesus upended them. Blind people see and bereaved people find joy. And even here among the Gentiles, the people recognize that Jesus has been sent by the God of Israel.

### Respond

Jesus considered it his mission from God to "bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Jesus's ministry continues today in our lives. God sent Jesus to offer healing and the *reversal* of all that grieves you. Identify one thing in your life that you feel can't be changed. Bring it before the Lord and ask him to heal you.

### Pray

Lord Jesus, we long for stronger faith to believe in you. We will glorify you when we meditate on your mighty works! Show us your power. Come quickly, Lord.

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6

### Read

A day is coming when the people will sing this song in the land of Judah:  
Our city is strong!  
God himself defends its walls!  
Open the city gates  
and let the faithful nation enter,  
the nation whose people do what is right.  
You, LORD, give perfect peace  
to those who keep their purpose firm  
and put their trust in you.  
Trust in the LORD forever;  
he will always protect us.  
He has humbled those who were proud;  
he destroyed the strong city they lived in,  
and sent its walls crashing into the dust.  
Those who were oppressed walk over it now  
and trample it under their feet.

ISAIAH 26:1-6

### Reflect

In the north of England, Skipton Castle perches above a busy market town. In the seventeenth century, the castle withstood three years of siege until it finally succumbed to Cromwell's army. When the war was over, the owner of the castle, Lady Anne Clifford, asked Cromwell if she could rebuild what had been destroyed by cannon fire. He agreed, on the condition that the castle walls and roofs be weakened so that they could never withstand another attack. Now the castle was a home, but not a defense.

The strength of a city's walls determines how safe it is. When a small group of exiles returns from Babylon to Jerusalem, their first task is to rebuild the walls of the city (Nehemiah 2:17). One translation of today's Scripture passage says that God's salvation *is* a wall to us. The people inside those walls are not afraid. They know that God himself is their salvation, so they have "perfect peace" (verse 3). Jesus is the "cornerstone" of God's salvation (see Psalm 118:22; Luke 20:17 ESV). He also promised to give his disciples his own peace that would protect them from fear and anxiety. In the words of an old hymn, "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing."

**Respond**

During Advent, we pause to consider the weak, defenseless areas of our lives. Family relationships, health or financial needs, discontent—sometimes we want to hide from all the struggles we face. But the apostle Paul writes that our lives are “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). Ask God to increase your trust in him this season. Ask him to be a wall of salvation to you.

**Pray**

Holy God, it is better to take refuge in you than to trust in anything else. We thank you because Jesus has won us your unshakeable love. Let us rest and rejoice in your salvation.

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7

### Read

Jesus left that place, and as he walked along, two blind men started following him. “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” they shouted.

When Jesus had gone indoors, the two blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I can heal you?”

“Yes, sir!” they answered.

Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “Let it happen, then, just as you believe!” — and their sight was restored. Jesus spoke sternly to them, “Don’t tell this to anyone!”

But they left and spread the news about Jesus all over that part of the country.

MATTHEW 9:27-31

### Reflect

Imagine the two blind men stumbling towards Jesus. Perhaps one of them tripped and fell. Perhaps the crowd shouldered and shoved them as they forced their way forward. By crying out “Son of David,” the men declare that they believe in Jesus’s authority. He is the Messiah, the one that God has sent to rule in King David’s place. But in addition to declaring him as king, Jesus asks them to declare their faith.

Faith isn’t only recognizing Jesus’s power (although it includes that). One theologian defines it this way: “Faith embraces the mercy and fatherly love of God along with his power, and the generous design of Christ along with his ability to save.” Jesus’s healing demonstrated that God had given him authority over human bodies and plant life, over weather patterns and even the grave.

But Jesus’s healings *also* demonstrated his generosity and mercy and love. Though the blind men were ignored by the crowd, sidelined by society, in the eyes of the world, worthless—Jesus reached out and touched them. He asked them a question and listened to the response. He commended them for struggling toward him and for believing that he was as kind as he was powerful.

**Respond**

Sometimes it can be hard to have faith. Amid difficult circumstances, we often doubt that God is powerful, or kind, or both. Using this passage, write down what is true about Jesus. Ask God to help you believe what you've written. The more faith we have in Jesus's past coming and his presence with us now, the more joyfully we anticipate his coming again.

**Pray**

Lord Jesus, have mercy on us. We need your healing touch. We believe, Lord—help our unbelief.

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8

### Read

But the LORD God called out to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden; I was afraid and hid from you, because I was naked.”

“Who told you that you were naked?” God asked. “Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to eat?”

The man answered, “The woman you put here with me gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

The LORD God asked the woman, “Why did you do this?”

She replied, “The snake tricked me into eating it.”

Then the LORD God said to the snake, “You will be punished for this; you alone of all the animals must bear this curse: From now on you will crawl on your belly, and you will have to eat dust as long as you live. I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring’s heel.”

And the LORD God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and his wife, and he clothed them.

GENESIS 3:9-15, 21

### Reflect

Adam and Eve believed a lie. The result: their deep shame. It’s an old story. Some of its details are mysterious, as if we are peering through mist to understand. But there’s nothing distant about the lies that attach themselves to our hearts. They’re as fresh and as painful as a wound. So often, the lies we believe make us ashamed. They do their insidious work, and increasingly we find ourselves hiding—from others, from ourselves, from God.

The story is sickeningly familiar. But it doesn’t end in despair. God’s words to Adam and Eve spark the first hope of Christmas, the same hope we cling to during the weeks of Advent. God promises that the woman’s offspring will destroy the source of lies. It’s known as the “protoevangelium,” the first preaching of the good news.

And in a gesture of good news, God makes animal skins to cover their shame. God's tender provision of animal skins hints at the sacrifice that Jesus will make. Blood was shed to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness; Jesus's blood will be shed to cover our shame. Long before Jesus came to earth, Adam and Eve heard the first whisper of him.

#### Reflect

During Advent, we light candles to remember how God's light overcomes darkness. Think of something about yourself that you're ashamed of. Is there a lie behind that shame? Imagine God tenderly crafting the skins for the man and woman to wear. Remember that Jesus's blood and his goodness cover any shame we bear. Ask God to shine his light in your heart. Ask him to help you believe what is true.

#### Pray

Father God, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins. When Jesus died in our place, you canceled forever the list of our failures and weaknesses. We praise you for our great salvation! Come, Holy Spirit.

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