HOPE ✳ PEACE ✳ JOY ✳ LOVE



✳ ***Advent Prayers for the Holiday Season*** ✳

CALVARY
CHURCH OF SANTA ANA

Advent Prayers

This guide is designed to help you open to the Lord and embrace the Christmas season with purpose and intention. May it stir your heart's affection and mind's attention toward the coming of Jesus, our Messiah.

Each week there is content and prayers to help you further engage with our Advent series, "The Spirit of Christmas" and remember that the Holy Spirit is with us as Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

"For God alone

my soul waits

in silence; from

him comes

my salvation."

PSALM 62:1

✳ ADVENT ✳

What is Advent? Advent is from a Latin word that means "coming," referring to the coming of Christ. The four weeks of Advent are a time that help us to reflect, remember, and anticipate Christ's birth and the second coming of Christ some day in the future. Advent is an invitation to journey with the Spirit of God in a particular way during the Christmas season.

Advent is not a story about what we can accomplish through our determination or the power of the human spirit and will to overcome every challenge we face. It is also not the story of humanity recognizing its brokenness and doing all they can to earn God's healing.

Rather, Advent is the story of God coming to us to love, heal, and save us. Advent reminds us that we are not strong enough to overcome everything on our own, but that we can depend on God who God is able and who is more than enough. It reveals the depth of his love, his persistent pursuit of us, and his desire to meet us exactly where we are.

At Advent we can use our will to open to the Spirit of God and say, "Yes, Lord. Here I am. I long to receive your presence this Advent season as I experience you as Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Holy Spirit, come."



✳ THE SPIRIT OF GOD AS HOPE ✳

Week 1: November 29 – December 5

Opening Prayer:

"Lord, here I am. I open my heart to you today. As I consider you with me as Hope this week, may your Spirit come and move within me, and speak whatever you desire. Amen."

Scripture:

Slowly read the Scriptures of the week:

"Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old." - Luke 1:6-7

"At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God..." Luke 2:25-28

"But if we **hope** for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Romans 8:25-26

Before the sun rises each morning, there is a dark night. Before each birth, there is a baby being formed in the darkness of the womb. Before a flower blossoms, there is a seed hidden in the darkness of the earth.

Every good arrival is preceded by a waiting, a suspension, an in-between moment. **So it is with hope**. It must begin with an awakening... with a felt awareness of what is not and what cannot be. After all, hope is only necessary when life feels desolate, when circumstances seem unrepairable, and when the road ahead looks like it only leads toward greater pain, grief, or loss.

Take a moment and consider: what is your current pain point, longing, grief, or loss?

It's important that we allow ourselves to feel the weight of our pain, longings, grief, and/or loss. In doing so we remember that neither we, nor this world, can fix ourselves. Because until we acknowledge our own limitations and the brokenness around us, we may never make room for the miracle of hope. It's not until we acknowledge our own limitations and the brokenness around us, that we make room for the miracle of **hope**.

Luke begins the story of Advent with a barren woman named Elizabeth. She follows God, she is righteous, blameless even, but lacking in what was likely her very greatest longing... to have a child. To live in the spirit of Advent is to believe that God is present and at work even in these places. It is to anticipate his coming in the midst of our deepest longings and unmet needs.

When we allow ourselves to honestly acknowledge our pain, to feel the weight of what is broken and the ache of what we long for, we begin to make room for hope. It is right there, in the midst of our darkness and longing, that the first light of hope can begin to break through.

Christ is coming. And with him comes the hope that all things can be made new.

Prayers:

Ask the Lord...

- *"What is my most vulnerable grief or hope this Advent season?"*
- *"What does it look like for me to hope in you? As I consider what I am carrying and walking through right now, how do I hope in you alone?"*
- *"How do I wait in hope? What would it be for me to hope in the dark, in the mystery of what is going on in my life?"*
- *"Lord, renew my hope in you! What would change in my heart and life if my hope was renewed?"*

Closing Blessing:

Open your heart and posture yourself to receive this Advent blessing.

In this Advent season, "may the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in **hope**."

Romans 15:13

✳ THE SPIRIT OF GOD AS PEACE ✳

Week 2: December 6 – 12

Opening Prayer:

"Lord, here I am. I open my heart to you today. As I consider you with me as Peace this week, may your Spirit come and move within me, and speak whatever you desire. Amen."

Scripture:

Slowly read the Scriptures of the week:

"The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the **peace of God**, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:5b-7

"One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying. While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar.

Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, 'Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord.'" Luke 1:8-15

Take a moment and in your mind's eye imagine yourself before a still and quiet lake. You grab a rock and toss it in. What happens? What do you see? Probably a disturbance to the still waters, movement, a ripple. Now watch as the water begins to settle again. What feelings come up in you? Perhaps, peace?

When we take the time to feel the barrenness in our lives, it is often accompanied by a quietness. It's where we discover our inner wilderness and where we wonder what God is up to. Perhaps surprisingly, though, our inner wilderness comes with an invitation as it's a place that becomes the very ground where we learn to hear the voice of the Spirit.

In the Gospel of Luke, he moves from Elizabeth's empty womb to her husband, a man named Zechariah, who has an encounter with the angel of God in the temple. As Zechariah is praying and offering incense to the Lord, an angel appears with good news. Zechariah is alone in the temple and he is quiet enough to hear the voice coming to him.

When we allow ourselves to feel our own barrenness this is an entry point to deeper connection with God- making room for God to speak in, perhaps, a new way. How does this voice arrive to us? In a similar way it did to Zechariah with the words of **peace**: "Do not be afraid" (Luke 1:13).

When we quiet the noise around us and cultivate an inner life of prayer, peace becomes something we can return to again and again as we recognize that the **peace** of God "surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 4:7). Through the Spirit's work in us, we can be empowered to respond in the midst of life's tests and trials like Zechariah. "Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy...to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of **peace**." (Luke 1:67, 79)

To prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ this Advent season, we consciously and purposefully create space to be with God and to listen. And as we do, we begin to receive the **peace** of Advent.

Prayers:

This week, find space to hold Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God," in your heart.

Open to him and ask:

- *"Lord, what are specific areas of my life and my heart that need your perfect peace? What are these places that need your fixing, healing, and transformation to make me whole?*
- *In Philippians we are encouraged to not "worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."*
- *Take a few moments and bring all your worries to God and ask him to address them:*
    - » *"Lord, search me. What do I find myself worried and anxious about?"*
    - » *"Lord, how do you feel about my worries? My fears? What is your perspective, what do you say?"*
    - » *Share with him what you need.*
    - » *Thank him for what he has done.*
    - » *Sit with him as long as you need.*

Closing Blessing:

Open your heart and posture yourself to receive this Advent blessing.

In this Advent season, "May the Lord of **peace** himself give you **peace** at all times in every way. The Lord be with you."

2 Thessalonians 3:16

✳ THE SPIRIT OF GOD AS JOY ✳

Week 3: December 13 – 19

Opening Prayer:

"Lord, here I am. I open my heart to you today. As I consider you with me as Joy this week, may your Spirit come and move within me, and speak whatever you desire. Amen."

Scripture:

Slowly read the Scriptures of the week:

"That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. 'Don't be afraid!' he said. 'I bring you good news that will bring great **joy** to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!'" Luke 2:8-11

"They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary pondered all these things in her heart and thought about them often." Luke 2:16-19

"When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." John 14:20

The beauty of Advent is that God has come to us and is in our midst. Like Mary, we are invited to "ponder these things in our hearts" as we know the Spirit of Christ is with us in each season and in every place of need.

As we continue to reflect on Elizabeth and Zechariah who had lived with disappointment and unanswered longing for years, their story reminds us that faithful people can experience deep sorrow without being abandoned by God. In fact, we don't have to pretend everything is good in order to make room for joy. We can bring our grief, unmet desires, and unanswered questions into God's presence as we remember who God is and his heart towards us. Truly, joy and sorrow can both be present with us at the same time.

Joy is not necessarily confidence that life will unfold as we hope, but it can be a growing openness to the possibility that God is at work in ways we cannot yet see.

Advent **joy** is living in the delight of what God is going to do, as much as what he already is doing. One day Christ is coming again, but in Mary's story we discover that he's also already here. Sown in our midst, growing up within us, pouring out his peace and love.

Prayers:

- *"Lord, where am I finding it hard to have joy in my life currently? What is making it hard to have joy in my current situations/ relationships/life circumstances?"*
- *"Lord, what would it be to enter into your joy?*
- *Sit with John 14:20 for a bit and consider these words: "When I am raised to life again … I am in you." Becoming more aware of Christ's presence within you, allow his joy to shape the way you live each day.*

Closing Blessing:
Open your heart and posture yourself to receive this Advent blessing.

In this Advent season, "may the God of hope fill you with all **joy** and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." - Romans 15:13

✳ THE SPIRIT OF GOD AS LOVE ✳

Week 4: December 20 - 26

Opening Prayer:

"Lord, here I am. I open my heart to you today. As I consider you with me as Love this week, may your Spirit come and move within me, and speak whatever you desire. Amen."

Scripture:

Slowly read the Scriptures of the week:

"So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing **love** and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son." John 1:14

"If you **love** me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you... Jesus replied, "All who love me will do what I say. My Father will **love** them, and we will come and make our home with each of them." John 14:15-17, 23

"This is **love**: not that we loved God, but that he loved us." 1 John 4:10

"God is **love**, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world." 1 John 4:16-17

From Elizabeth and Mary's miraculous pregnancies to the messages of peace and hope they carried, Advent is ultimately the story of a God who relentlessly pursues us. As God pursues us, he does so with his extravagant **love**. In fact, God *is* love, so Love Himself pursues us.

God gives himself freely to us and faithfully brings to completion all that he has begun in us. What does he ask for in return? Our simple, "yes." Throughout this month of Advent, this is what our feeling, anticipating, listening, and pondering have been preparing us for: gently making room in our hearts for the arrival of Christ, who is always drawing near, meeting us again and again in deeper ways.

Because God's **love** is continually being formed in us, we learn day by day to receive him now in our souls just as humanity did then when Christ was born. To be in communion with God is to take the time to receive *His* **love** into our hearts, minds, and bodies. It doesn't happen by accident, but by intentionally turning toward our God, the one who goes to any length to have us and who thinks good thoughts about us long before we think about him.

While it is important to know about and believe in God's love, it is the *experience* of his love that is transformational. When we experience God loving us in our brokenness, our hurt, our bad, and our shame, he takes the wounds of our heart and speaks truth to them. This is where we ultimately find healing, freedom, and transformation happening.

The truth is, God's love isn't something we earn through performance or worthiness, but it is completely unconditional. Because of this, we can rest in the assurance that he loves us exactly as we are, not as we think we "should" be. Our truest self is the one who knows we are deeply loved by God and so live from that belovedness. And since our very identity flows from this reality, we know that we are those who are found and formed in the **love** of God.

Prayers:

- *Take a few moments and just open to God and his love: "Lord, show me what it means to simply rest in the truth that you love me as I am, not as I think I should be."*
- *"Father, I receive your love for me into my heart, mind, and my body."*
- *"Lord, what parts of myself still resist being loved by you? What would it look like to let your love touch those hidden or unworthy places?"*
- *Read Romans 8:35-39 slowly. "Lord, what am I drawn towards? What am I resistant towards? Lord, am I convinced that nothing can separate me from your love?"*

Closing Blessing:

Open your heart and posture yourself to receive this Advent blessing.

In this Advent season, "may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his **love** is. May you experience the **love** of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

Ephesians 3:18-19

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Come celebrate the good news
of life with Jesus by the Spirit
this Advent season.

Our prayer is that you experience
more of God's hope, peace, joy, and love
through each of our Sunday services and
special events this Christmas at Calvary.

CalvaryLife.org/Christmas