



HOW TO ADVENT

(BETTER)

Ideas + inspiration for preparing for Christmas, in good times + bad

"What if scarcity is just a cultural construct, a fiction that fences us off from **gift economies**?"

- Robin Wall Kimmerer in [The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance Essay](#)

"The whole hive knows that they will survive only if they **shiver together**."

- The Honey Bee from Advent Day 6 in [All Creation Waits](#)

"God has prepared **earth** like a cradle."

- from the Advent liturgy of the Trappist monks in [Of Gods and Men](#)

"We have **everything** we need"

- Danielle Strickland in The Better Samaritan's episode [How Churches Should - and Shouldn't - Respond to Clergy Sexual Abuse](#)

"Surely, I am coming quickly." Amen. **Come**, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with **all**. Amen.

- the [very last words](#) of the Bible

Curated by [Vanessa Caruso](#), Spiritual Director & fan of [The Better Samaritan Podcast](#)

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Why?

Advent responds very well to a [little forethought and creativity](#). It means “arrival” or “coming,” and marks the four weeks leading up to Christmas. In Advent, we not only look back to Christ’s first coming as a human born to refugees (“[and they ran and they ran and they ran](#)”), but we also look forward to Christ’s second coming. There’s a connotation of waiting with Advent, but for me it’s less like waiting at a stop light, and more like my computer’s spinning cursor, which says at once: “Hold your horses, slow down,” as well as “Working on it ... something’s coming.”

Before you peruse this guide, here are **7 features of Advent** that I have come to care about. I offer them to you for consideration as you wonder about what’s important to you this season, and how God is inviting you to respond:

- 1. Attention:** Advent isn’t about how much time I have or how much money I have to spend on gifts, but that one of the best gifts I can give God and others is my attention. Attention is free ([ish](#)) and a little can go a long way! How do we respond to those spontaneous bids for our attention that happen throughout the day, initiated by the Spirit, people we love, and by people we may not even know?
- 2. Longing:** Advent’s main invitation to me is always some version of getting more in touch with my longings, turning the volume up on desire, not down, becoming more human, not less. What are God’s dreams for the world and its inhabitants? What are mine?
- 3. Darkness isn’t “bad”:** Like a bright star against a night sky, the themes of darkness and light show up a lot during Advent. Every year I need to remember the false correlation between darkness as bad and light as good, and how that translates to a racially-insensitive hierarchy of whiteness over blackness. For a beautiful introduction into these themes for children and adults alike, see [God’s Holy Darkness](#) by Sharei Green, Beckah Selnick and Nikki Faison.
- 4. December is sad:** The original Advent and Christmas held life, yes, but also death; wonder of course, but also [weeping](#). The commercialization and sentimentalism of Christmas prep can numb me to the reality that this “most wonderful time of the year” can simply also be the hardest time of the year, because of how it highlights who is near and dear to us, and who is not, and the families and resources we do or do not have.
- 5. Beware of baby:** All of the pregnancy, birth, baby and family imagery of this season can be especially painful for those who have experienced miscarriages, the loss of a child, unexplained infertility, or the desire to be partnered or pregnant. May we all become more sensitive to not only how triggering these Christmas themes can be for people in different seasons of life, but also to the empowering reality that most often the words we most need to hear come through each other.
- 6. 111 Women:** In her introduction to [Year W](#) (a women’s lectionary), Rev. Wil Gafney says that there are at least 111 named women in the Hebrew testament and that most of us probably can only come up with 10! In Advent, I want to pay attention to “Scripture’s most neglected population” — women and girls.
- 7. Help!:** I can’t do Advent alone, I need help. I’ve never regretted the time and money spent on an Advent retreat (see below), a [conspiring dialogue about how to consume less](#), or a reflective conversation with friends about what we’re hoping for this season, what’s important, and what gets in the way. It’s authentic to Advent to admit that we can’t do this alone, that everything’s crowded, that we need mercy, and that together, we can do Advent better.



Voices of Advent

The church history book that got hold of me told me that my own annual **December sadness** was no reason for guilt. It was a sign of being wide awake in the world, awake enough to sense loss. And furthermore, there was a way to engage that sadness.

That way was Advent."

- Gayle Boss in [All Creation Waits](#)

"I **love** people who teach children that most holidays are a product of capitalism and have little to do with love—which would never care about money or greed."

- Alex Dimitrov in his poem [Love](#)

"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

"We've surrendered our values to an economic system that actively harms what we love....What if scarcity is just a cultural construct, a fiction that fences us off from **gift economies?** . . . Hoarding won't save us . . . All flourishing is mutual."

- Excerpts from Robin Wall Kimmerer's [The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance](#) Essay

"The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. **Life is Advent;** life is recognizing the coming of the Lord."

- Henri Nouwen

"He knows our **need**, our weakness is no stranger."

- O [Holy Night](#) (by [The Spirituals Choir](#))

"Real hope is hard. I confess how hard I find it to open daily to my own pain. Let alone hold my heart open for a hope that's wide enough to envelop **Aleppos, Haiti, Don Dale,**

Manus, Baghdad, Hebron, the Great Barrier Reef. Or even just enough hope for reconciliation with those from whom I am estranged this Christmas . . . Sometimes hope must be sung. Trust and trembling are heard in song."

- Jarrod McKenna

"Sometimes **tears** are the glasses that we need to see Jesus."

- Pope Francis

"It's this radical simplicity that will save her. And deep within it, at the heart of her stillness, something she has no need to name, but something we might call **trust:** that one day, yes, the world will warm again, and with it, her life."

- The Painted Turtle in [All Creation Waits](#)

"The seed is in the ground. Now may we rest in hope, while **darkness does its work."**

- Wendell Berry

"Those of us with impossible prison sentences are exiles, modern scapegoats in the most profound sense . . . if we can remember that even in exile God has not forgotten us—our names are etched upon God's heart. One day they could be etched upon the hearts of men and women again, so I hold on. I struggle.

Each day of my life I wait in Advent."

- Jacob Davis, inmate #308056, Tennessee prison system

"Would I invite John (the Baptist) to dinner? God, no. What would he say, sitting at my table in his skins, licking honey from my knives. But I need John and his sharp tongue. And I need Emily (Dickinson) and all her heavens and hells. **Their wild words help me survive a wild world."**

- Padraig O' Tuama



24 Practices

Try this 20 Minute Free Writing Exercise with Bethany Hiser.	Get the free Spiritual First Aid Resource Pack and review the 12 Practices for Resilience, noting one item that draws you & one that challenges you.	Buy and stream with friends Backs Against the Wall about Howard Thurman , along with 4 other documentaries in this award-winning series.
Be inspired by these testimonies of Advent experiments and experiences from Advent Conspiracy.	If you enjoy the Enneagram, listen to this episode , and read through this short Enneagram Sermon on Christmas and see if any of their reactions or Jesus' invitations call to you.	Make an Advent Wreath and try this Candle Lighting Litany with family or friends.
Make a plan as a household to donate money this month and consider how to "do no harm" while you're at it .	Practice this 10 Minute Embodied Prayer by Livan Huska a few times a week and see how it affects you.	Limit your electricity for Advent by using only candlelight at breakfast or dinner.
Watch this Ted Talk on light pollution and the need for darkness .	Find a Longest Night Service or Blue Christmas in your area, or one online (like this one) and invite a friend who is grieving.	Use this 3 Minute Test about disillusionment and hope to spark reflection on where you're at, from the authors of The Gift of Disillusionment .
Set out for a walk and listen to Robin Wall Kimmerer on The Economy of Abundance .	Go vegan or vegetarian for Advent, or limit alcohol or dessert to weekends.	Decide to invite one neighbor over for brunch or dinner this month.
Take social media and your internet browsing apps off your phone for Advent.	Aim for 8 hours of sleep a night, inspired by Greg Atkinson's talk on the Power of 8's for the Church Mental Health Summit 2022.	Spend some time (with housemates or kids?) seeing how the rest of the world lives, via Dollar Street .
Set a timer for 20 min and try this Lectio Divina with a current event/news story .	Watch this 20-minute film Horizons in honor of Barry Lopez & meditate on the relationship between darkness & beauty, a beautiful death & beautiful life.	Listen to Katherine May on On Being: How Wintering Replenishes .
Read this poem and then write one of your own, in order to awaken to the goodness or beauty in your life and in the world.	Listen to A Womb More Spacious Than Stars about Mary from Yale Divinity School.	Take an evening walk in your neighborhood, or set an alarm for early one morning and go with housemates to watch the sunrise.



Retreats & Courses

Retreats

- [An Illuminated Advent 2022](#) with Jan Richardson
- [Leaning Into Blessing](#) - an Online Advent Retreat with Mercy Center
- [A Shelter in the Shadows](#) - an In-Person Advent Retreat with Debie Thomas
- [The Spirituality of Waiting](#) - an Online Day Retreat with Stillpoint
- [Birthing the Holy 2022 Advent Retreat](#) with Christine Valters Paintner and Abbey of the Arts

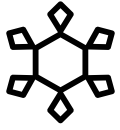
Courses

- [Community Conversation: How do we practice anti-consumerism in the Christmas Season?](#)
- Hosted by Kateri Boucher and Lydia Wylie-Kellermann
- [The Secret Life of Hope: Reading the Beatitudes](#) with Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat on Zoom
- [Peace on Earth and the Politics of Christmas](#) - a Virtual Bible Study with Alternative Seminary
- [The Christmas Stories](#) - 4 Week Online Course with John Dominic Crossan
- [Artful Advent](#) - 4 Week series on Advent for parents of young children with Marina Gross Hoy
- [A Collection of Advent Courses and Offerings](#) from Spirituality & Practice



Tried & True Recipes

1. [The Golden Door's Delicious Broccoli and Basil Soup](#) (include the smoked cheddar!)
2. [World Peace Cookies](#) by Dorie Greenspan (delicate and delicious)
3. [Shaved Asparagus Pizza](#) by Smitten Kitchen (raw shaved asparagus is weirdly good!)
4. [Momofuku's Ginger Scallion Noodles](#) (so many scallions and so much ginger; salty)
5. [Vegan Spice Pumpkin Pancakes](#) from Minimalist Baker (kids love the texture and taste)
6. [Christmas Enchiladas](#) by Cookie & Kate (never regret these)
7. [Olive Oil Granola with Dried Apricots & Pistachios](#) from NYT Cooking (go-to granola)
8. [4 Corners Lentil Soup](#) from My New Roots (comforting & healthy)
9. [BBQ Cauliflower Tacos](#) from The [Weekday Vegetarians](#) (everyone loves these!)
10. [Cacio e Pepe](#) from Delish (don't skip steps or skimp on parm!)
11. [Chickpea & Chorizo Tostadas](#) from Bon Appetit (so quick and satisfying)
12. [Foolproof Slow Roasted Salmon with Herbs](#) from Kitchn (go-to salmon recipe)
13. [Crispy Chicken Katsu Bowls](#) from Half-Baked Harvest (this chicken = family favorite)



Writing Prompts

*Don't think too hard - these are just to get the reflection and prayer juices flowing!

If you took some time on December 25th to look back at your 4 weeks of Advent, what would a "good Advent" have looked like to you?	A Good Advent =
...and, what would have made it an even better Advent?	A Better Advent =
To become more aware of your own longings, finish this sentence 10x in writing:	I'm waiting for _____
Finish this prayer 10x and see if anything surprises you:	I want to want to _____
Name your top 3 priorities this Advent:	1. 2. 3.



24 Poems

1. [Making the House Ready for the Lord](#) by Mary Oliver
2. [Joy Is The Justice We Give Ourselves](#) by J. Drew Lanham
3. [Early in the Morning](#) by Li-Young Lee
4. [The Poor](#) by Roberto Sosa, trans. by Spencer Reece
5. [Annunciation](#) by Marie Howe
6. [The Mother of God](#) by William Butler Yeats
7. [Mary](#) by Padraig J. Daly
8. [The Moment](#) by Marie Howe
9. [I'm Going to Start Living Like a Mystic](#) by Edward Hirsch
10. [Those Who Carry](#) by Anna Kamienska, trans. from Polish by David Curzon
11. [The Patience of Ordinary Things](#) by Pat Schneider
12. [Prayer at Winter Solstice](#) by Dana Gioia
13. [Refugee](#) by Malcolm Guite
14. [Song of the Shepherds](#) by Richard Bauckham
15. [This is what was bequeathed us](#) by Gregory Orr
16. [Praise Song](#) by Barbara Crooker
17. [Sweet Darkness](#) by David Whyte
18. [Mimesis](#) by Fady Joudah
19. [On the Mystery of the Incarnation](#) by Denise Levertov
20. [December Morning in the Desert](#) by Alberto Rios
21. [Love After Love](#) By Derek Walcott
22. [A Litany for Survival](#) by Audre Lorde
23. [Rachel](#) by Rev. Garnaas Holmes
24. [The Risk of Birth](#) by Madeleine L'Engle



Prayers

Ana's Prayer in [The Book of Longings](#)

By Sue Monk Kidd

Lord our God, hear my prayer,
the prayer of my heart.
Bless the largeness inside me,
no matter how I fear it.
Bless my reed pens and my inks.
Bless the words I write.
May they be beautiful in your sight.
May they be visible to eyes not yet born.
When I am dust, sing these words over my bones:
she was a voice.

A Prayer for Our Nation

by Judy Chicago

And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh
and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way to the
needs of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's
abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and
the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with each other and
the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once
again.

Now the Work of Christmas Begins

By Howard Thurman in [The Mood of Christmas](#)

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among the people,
To make music in the heart.

*Idea: subscribe to [World In Prayer's Weekly Curated Email](#)
& pray along each Friday in Advent

Advent Prayer 1

By [Dan Miller](#)

Ever coming and always present God,
we have come here this evening
to be present to you.
In the dark winter of our lives
we long for your brilliance— bring us light,
and make us for others the light that you bring.
In the midst of our secret sadness
we long for your comfort— bring us solace,
and make us for others the solace you bring.
In the fury of violence and war
we long for disarmed hearts— bring us peace,
and make us for others the peace that you bring.
In the ravaged lands of this munificent earth
we long for creation's revival — bring us healing,
and make us for others the healing you bring.
O Light, O Solace,
O Peace, O Healing,
Come.

Prayer

By Rev. [Wil Gafney](#)

My prayer is Miriam's prayer, Mother Mary's
prayer – Let it be. Let it be with your
woman-servant according to your word.
With these words the word of God was formed
in the woman of God. On this day, as on that day,
let the daughter of God bring forth the word of
God. Amen.

Christmas Blessing

By Rev. Garnaas-Holmes@ [Unfolding Light](#)

May the coming of Christ deepen your wonder
and widen your gratitude.
May the helpless child bring forth your tenderness
and strengthen your love.
May the gentle mother give you courage to
embrace the holy and find the divine in yourself.
May the child who shares our death bring light
into your darkness and hope to your weariness.
May the holy family in the stable open your heart
to the poor, the homeless, the refugee.
May the child sought by soldiers embolden you to
cry out and empower you to resist injustice.
May the angels who sing above you awaken your
heart and surround you with beauty.
May the One Who Comes remind you of your
belovedness and fill you with kindness and mercy,
and give you joy.



24 Gift Ideas

This Earthenware Nativity Set from Noonday Collection * (*named after Isaiah 58:10)	This Sabbath Journal by Ruth Haley Barton with 52 prompts and wisdom from her new book Embracing Rhythms of Rest and Work	Kelly Latimore's 2023 Wall Calendar
Subscription Boxes! like Universal Yums , Girls Can Crate , Raven Reads for Book Lovers or Sips By for Tea Lovers	Find a list of black-owned businesses in your area to buy goods & gift certificates from	Moma Design Store's Activity Book Section or Under \$50 gifts or the stuff that's supposed to be for Kids
A gorgeous dog bed (or blanket) from Salvage Maria	These Horizon Earrings from Haiti Design Co	A subscription to Image Journal or Emergence Magazine
Give an "experience" - a comedy show, sporting event, concert, museum, gallery, National Park, etc.	Uncommon Goods like this color-able tablecloth , these yoga joes or this Solar Powered Rainbow Maker	Get seasons passes to a local playhouse, IMAX theater, trampoline/theme/water park
A group gift for a great neighbor or host/ess	This awesome ball for a basketball fan by Indigenous Designers at Trickster	Peruvian Oven Mitts or this great Plant Stand or this Holding Cross from Bought Beautifully
Give the gift of affirmation via a Group Video or tribute for a loved one	Gift the Premium membership of Lantern to parents or grandparents	Heritage's handmade musical spoons for instrument lovers
All Will Be Well (re: Julian of Norwich!) and God's Holy Darkness for children & parents alike	Salt of the Earth Christians Seasons (Liturgical) Calendar Advent 2022-2023	One of these wonderful holiday gift sets by Re:New Project
Storyworth!	A Feelings Wheel Print for a classroom, office, bedroom, or fridge	Design a special outing with with a niece, nephew, grandkid or take a (cooking, pottery, art, dance) course with a partner or friend



Resources

Books

- [All Creation Waits](#) by Gayle Boss (*my current favorite and you can get a daily e-subscription for just \$10)
- [Silence and Other Surprising Invitations](#) by Enuma Okoro
- [Preparing for Christmas with Richard Rohr](#)
- [Waiting on the Word](#) by Malcolm Guite
- [Celebrating Abundance](#) by Walter Brueggemann
- [Wintering](#) by Katherine May (not a traditional “devotional” but has a similar effect!)
- [The Liturgical Home Advent](#) by Ashley Tumlin Wallace
- [Making Room in Advent](#) by Bette Dickinson
- [Advent Devotionals from Paraclete Press](#)

Online or Digital Devotionals

- [Biola's 2022 Advent Project](#) - Online multimedia devotional
- [The Advent Calendar Project](#) - Collection of videos showcasing female composers
- [The Dawn Chorus: An Advent Devotional on the Wonders of Birds](#) (PDF)
- [Digital Advent Reflections & Advent Liturgies for Families](#) from The Transforming Center
- [Tips for Praying Liturgically with Children](#) from The Transforming Center
- [Advent Journey of Beauty Advent Calendar](#) by Monasteries of the Heart
- [Watch here](#) for Englewood Review's 2022 Advent Calendar

Music

- [Esther](#), Welcome Wagon's newest album
- [Orphans and Songs](#) by Deb Montgomery
- [Refugee King](#) sung by [Liz Vice](#) and [Madison Cunningham](#)
- [O Come O Come Emmanuel](#) by Liz Vice
- [Advent Songs](#) by Porter's Gate
- [Nativity](#) on [Advent](#) by Liturgical Folk
- [Rising](#) by the [Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Music](#)
- [The Spirituals Choir](#) (like their [O Holy Night](#))
- [Slow Down](#) by Jonathan Ogden

Other Resources

- [Image Journal's Advent Calendar](#) from 2021 (check for 2022)
- [Conversatio's Advent Resources](#)
- The Holy Family reimagined [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#)
- [Say Yes! Customizable Short Advent Film](#) by SALT
- [This Sabbath Guide](#) from [Practicing the Way](#)



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