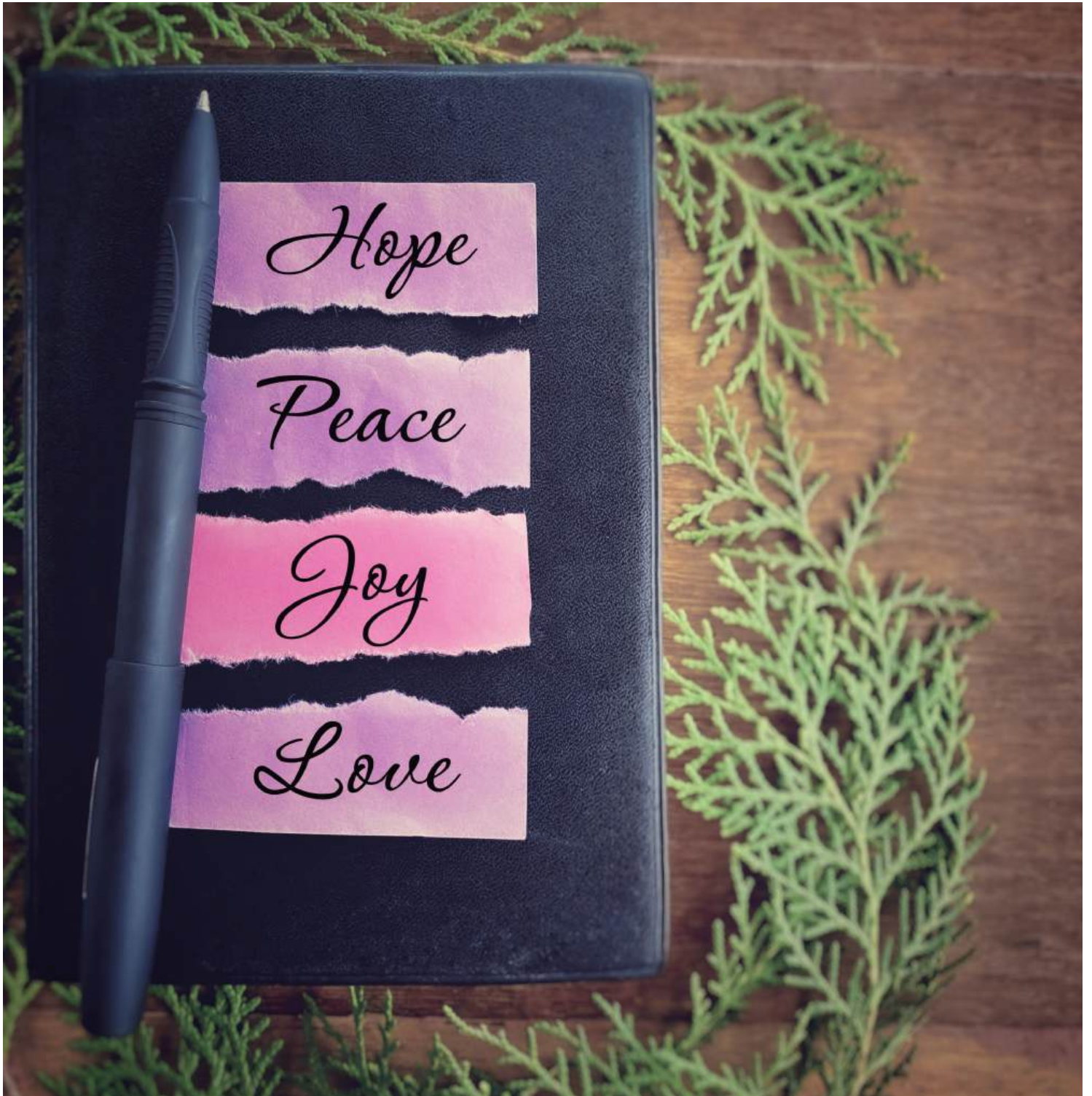


STILL POINT

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ADVENT SEASON

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Editor: Sharon Devo
Content (Pages 9-22): Tammy Winn
Design & Layout by Christine Ciancesi
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ADVENT: WHEN DID IT START AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

On the first Sunday of Advent, the Advent season begins. Between then and Christmas Eve, many families spend time preparing the house for Christmas day while also racing to finish the Christmas shopping.

The meaning of the word Advent comes from the Latin Ad (to) and Venire (come) and translates as arrival. In this sense, Advent is the period of time when Christians wait for the arrival of Jesus who, according to tradition and custom, was born on Christmas day. Advent is a special family time where people wait together and share in the excitement and anticipation of the arrival of Christmas Day.

The length of Advent changes each year, since the first Sunday of Advent is a moveable feast, whilst Christmas Day itself is fixed. Advent always begins on the Sunday closest to St Andrews Day and officially ends on Christmas Eve.

Calendarr.com

THE SUNDAYS OF ADVENT

In Christianity candles are used to mark each Sunday. There are traditionally 5 candles, and each one has a specific symbolic meaning:

- The purple candles represent the sovereignty of Jesus, as described in the bible. They also signify solemn devotion to him, often expressed through fasting and repentance. The purple candles are usually lit on the first, second, and fourth Sundays of Advent.
- The pink candle represents the joy and celebration of a child's birth. It is traditionally lit on the third Sunday before Christmas.
- The white candle in the center represents Jesus. White has historically been associated with purity and perfection. This candle is often lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, sometimes during midnight Mass on Christmas Eve to welcome Christmas Day.

Each Sunday during Advent has a theme that the preacher often reflects on during the morning service:

The First Sunday of Advent

The first Sunday usually has the theme of prophecy. On this day, the prophets of the Old Testament who foretold the coming of Jesus are remembered. For this reason, the first candle—also known as the Prophecy Candle—represents the hope found by Christians in the anticipation of Jesus' arrival.



The Second Sunday of Advent

Known as The Bethlehem Candle, the candle lit on the second Sunday of Advent reminds Christians of the journey Mary and Joseph took to from Nazareth to Bethlehem. For many Christians, it serves as an example of trust in God and a demonstration of Faith. It is called the Peace Candle.

The Third Sunday of Advent

The third candle is pink and represents the joy surrounding the birth of Christ. It is also known as the Shepherds'

Candle. In the Bible, the shepherds were the first to receive the announcement of Jesus' birth from the angels. The angels said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." It is this joy that Christians commemorate on the third Sunday of Advent.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

The last Sunday before Christmas Day is when the fourth candle is lit. This candle is known as The Angel's Candle and represents love, which is at the core of Christmas.

The Advent Calendar

One of the most popular ways to observe Advent is with an Advent calendar. A typical calendar has 24 or 25 windows, one of which is opened each day in December. By the time the final window is opened, the celebrations of Christmas Day are beginning.

History of Advent

While the exact origins of Advent are unknown, records of the season exist as far back as the year 480. According to St. Gregory of Tours, Advent was introduced in the 5th century by Bishop Perpetuus and was initially a period of fasting that lasted from November 11 until Christmas Day. It was also known as the Nativity Fast. Throughout the centuries, fasting fell out of fashion, stopped being compulsory, and

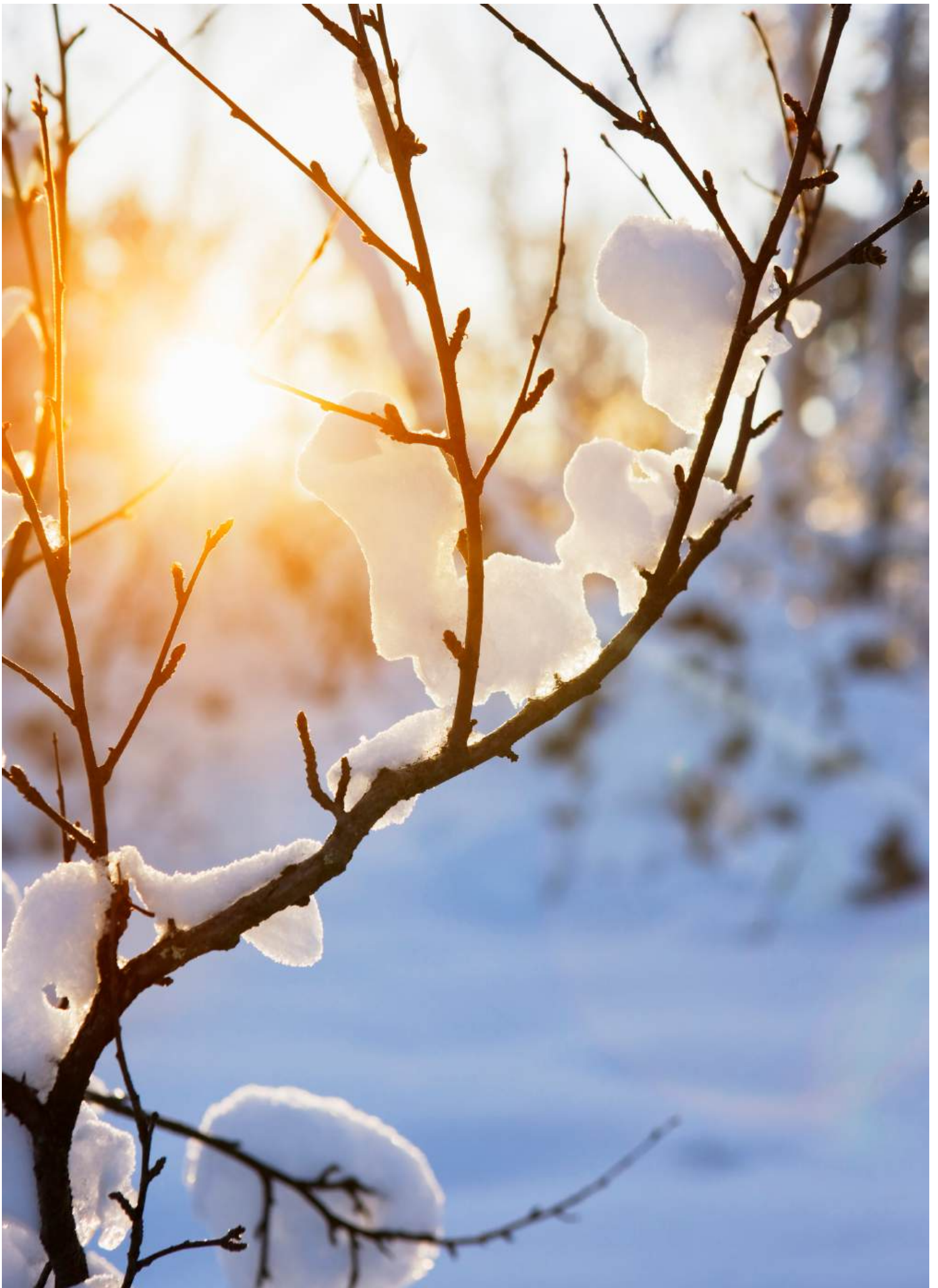
instead became an optional observance during Advent. Only the most devout Christians fasted for the whole of Advent, while some practiced fasting for just a few days before Christmas.

The official liturgical color of Advent today is purple, or violet, which adorns churches and is worn by the clergy. In the past, however, the liturgical color was black, symbolizing the sense of atonement that accompanied preparations for Christmas. Only in 1963, at the Second Vatican Council, did the spirit of Advent change from fasting and repentance to hope, joy, and anticipation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

— *Advent: 2025*
When Does It Start And
What Does It Mean?
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ADVENT





PILGRIMS OF HOPE: CREATE ANEW

On Christmas Eve last year, the Church opened the Jubilee, *Pilgrims of Hope*, ushering in a time of renewal, reconciliation, grace, and celebration. Some embarked on a physical pilgrimage, while others traveled in spirit — all with hope at the center.

Although the Jubilee Year will officially conclude on January 6, 2026, the door of hope never closes. Indeed, as Advent approaches, we begin again by preparing our hearts with hope.

This season, our beloved Wheaton Franciscan Community invites us to *Create Anew*.

In this spirit, we will explore the four themes of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Additionally, we will reflect upon the significance of Truth (The Nativity), Grace (The Holy Family), and Faith (The Epiphany). Let us journey forward together.

“Sow seeds of **HOPE**
in the lives of your friends
and everyone around you.”

— *Pope Francis*

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT:

HOPE

Hope can range from great confidence to holding on by a thread. In either case, it requires waiting. Yet our culture is not very good at this, for in waiting lie vulnerability and uncertainty. We may wonder and worry, knowing our hope is not a guarantee but an anticipation — a longing that our cherished desire will come to be, that things will improve.

Sometimes we do not receive the happy ending we long for, but that is often where hope grows larger. In our surrender to what is, we move closer to the Divine Hope that whispers “*Love is on the way.*” This is a hope wide

enough to hold all darkness while we await the light that is to come. It is the hope of our ancestors, and we can lean into it as Advent begins.

Reflection questions:

What is the deepest longing of my heart?

In what ways is God holding me while we wait?

How might I bring hope to another?

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, help me **create hope anew** by...

“May the light of Christian **HOPE** illumine every man and woman, as a message of God’s love addressed to all!”

— *Pope Francis*



Advent
Week I
- HOPE -

A green moss wreath is arranged in a circular shape around a purple card. The moss is a vibrant green color and has a feathery, delicate texture. The card is a solid purple color and is placed on a light-colored wooden surface. In the background, a wooden mallet is visible, suggesting a crafting or DIY project.

Advent Week 2:
PEACE

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT: PEACE

Advent reminds us that we are called to be people of peace. We cannot truly foster much peace in the world, however, if we lack it within ourselves. Our lives are often overwhelmed with various forms of clutter — be it material possessions, packed schedules, the constant barrage of negative news, or unresolved ruptures we have delayed repairing. All of this clutter crowds out the space our souls need to breathe and generate peace from within. Many times clutter, in any form, reveals longstanding patterns and points to the importance of healthy boundaries. It can be a cry for reconciliation, asking us to restore balance and harmony to our lives.

Creating room for our souls to reemerge requires intention, and lasting change takes time. That is why Advent is not merely a

single day but a season — one that returns each year to offer another opportunity for renewal. Every time we journey through Advent, we are called to repent: to be honest about what needs to change and to begin again in making those changes. It is a time for preparation, when we make room for the Prince of Peace to abide in us once more.

Reflection questions:

What forms of clutter in my life hinder my sense of peace?

How might I entrust the messiness of my life to God?

What small step could I take to create more room in my life for my soul?

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, help me **create peace anew** by...

“First keep **PEACE** with yourself,
then you can also bring peace to others”

— Thomas à Kempis

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT:

JOY

In the third week of Advent, we start to pivot from preparation to anticipation. Having taken some concrete steps to ready ourselves for the birth that is to come, we can now embrace the joy that has been patiently waiting for us. This is not the fleeting, worldly joy of pleasure or happiness; rather, it is a deep and lasting contentment offered to us by the Ancient of Days — a joy that comes from being in right relationship with God.

Too often, we live problem-centered lives. We place our struggles at the forefront and allow them to consume much of our energy. In doing so, we let our intrinsic, God-given joy be stolen by worry and fear. Yet there is a way to reclaim our authentic joy: by returning God to the center of our lives.

When we live God-centered lives, joy naturally follows. We discover a calm inner gladness — despite our circumstances — because we are confident that “there is a God, and it is not me.” We surrender our illusions of control and rejoice that God has gone before us, is ever-present with us, and will forever pursue us (Deuteronomy 31:8). Experiencing God in this way becomes a source of joy unending.

Reflection questions:

In what ways have I been living problem-centered?

What would it look like for me to live more God-centered?

How might I turn one worry or fear over to God this Advent?

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, help me **create joy anew** by...

“JOY is the infallible sign of the presence of God.”

— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.



ADVENT

WEEK 3

-JOY-



ADVENT WEEK 4:
LOVE

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT: LOVE

Our culture often reduces love to pleasant emotions or something that should come easily. While that notion may mark the beginning of a love journey, it is never its fullness. Love will always ask more of us than we first imagined, and more than we think we have to give. It challenges us to become the people our souls are summoning us to be.

At times, we may feel that the love we have to offer is being wasted because we find ourselves in places we never intended to be — a lackluster job, a difficult relationship, or a season of deep loss. Mary and Joseph knew what this was like. They found themselves facing an unexpected pregnancy that would forever alter the course of their lives. Yet rather than deny or reject their reality, they chose to surrender it to Love. They trusted that the very Love which

had brought them this far would also see them through. We can choose to do the same with the challenging and unanticipated chapters of our lives.

Each day offers us invitations to give the love we have — right here, right now — whatever the circumstances. The choice is less about where we are meant to be and more about what we are meant to do. We are meant to love.

Reflection questions:

How has love required me to give more than I expected?

When have I surrendered an unforeseen situation to Love?

What daily invitations to love have I received this Advent?

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, help me **create love anew** by...

“It is **LOVE** alone that gives worth to all things.”

— St. Teresa of Avila

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD: TRUTH

Throughout the thousands of years of Judeo-Christian history, countless names have been given to God. Examples from Scripture include *Mighty One*, *Unshakable Refuge*, *Anointed One*, *Abba*, *Advocate*, and *the Alpha and Omega*. Another title, highlighted during Christmas Mass, is *the Word*. In the Gospel of John (John 1:1–18) we hear: “In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God.” The text goes on to proclaim that through God all things came to be.

Imagine, for a moment, this Creator of the universe — a universe that spans billions of years and contains hundreds of billions of galaxies, with countless solar systems and planets. Oh, the vastness of God!

The Gospel continues: “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” This is what we celebrate today — *Immanuel*, God with us. Oh, the intimacy of God!

The Word, the Divine Source of all that is, takes on flesh to become “the light of the human race.” This “true light, which enlightens everyone,” is Jesus of Nazareth. He is “full of grace and truth.” And the illuminating truth that Jesus brings to humanity is what eventually sets us all free: we are beloved children of God! We are the image-bearers of the One who created us!

Merry Christmas, Alleluia!

Opportunity:

Share a part of the truth that you incarnate, your experience of God, with another.

“Each of us has a piece of the **TRUTH**.
If we don't tell our truth, the whole truth can't be known.
We each have a piece of God to incarnate.”

— Sr. Gabriele Uhlein (paraphrased)





FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY:

GRACE

Grace is defined as a gift of God's favor, sometimes recognized as the good that emerges in spite of an unfortunate situation. The Holy Family certainly faced their share of hardships, yet grace followed them closely. For instance, Joseph had a dream that warned him to flee to Egypt to escape the violent wrath of King Herod. That dream itself was a grace. Still, they must have felt the fear any family would feel while taking a perilous journey far from their home.

The Holy Family remained in Egypt until Herod's death, then sought to return to Judea. However, upon learning that Herod's son was ruling there, they once again changed course and settled in Galilee. We can imagine the graces that sustained them as they migrated from place to place, for grace often

shows up in the ordinary — in the ways we care for one another.

It is safe to assume that the members of the Holy Family were themselves agents of grace, extending help to others whenever possible. Jesus grew up to teach what he had lived and known to be true: we are to be people of compassion who carry grace to one another. We are called to welcome the stranger and to look out for those on the margins of society. This is our shared work as members of the human family.

Every small act of kindness we offer becomes a channel through which more of God's grace flows into the world.

Opportunity:

Find someone for whom you can be an agent of God's grace today.

“The gifts of GRACE increase as the struggles increase.”

— St. Rose of Lima

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD:

FAITH

The story of the Epiphany begins with noticing. The Magi noticed a peculiar star and, confident in its significance, followed it all the way to Bethlehem. By paying attention to divine guidance, they found their way. This is what faith looks like — living in relationship with God and responding to the promptings of the Spirit.

The Magi did not know where the star would lead, yet they took one step at a time, leaning into the promise of what was to come. Their journey brought them to an epiphany — the visible image of our invisible God: the Christ Child.

Faith, we are told, is “the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1). It is the bridge between what we know and what we trust — a deep inner awareness that something greater holds everything. When we choose to enter the sacred dance of faith, it will inform each movement of our lives.

Opportunity:

Invite a friend to join you in setting some faith-inspired resolutions for the year ahead.

“Our **FAITH** is authentic when it embraces our whole life, when it becomes a criterion for our decisions, when it makes us women and men committed to doing what is right and who take risks out of love, even as Jesus did.”


— Pope Leo XIV



The Work of Christmas

By Howard Thurman

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.

The background image features three lit candles on a grey, textured surface. On the left is a purple candle with a flame. In the center is a white candle with a flame. On the right is another purple candle with a flame. A silver, five-pointed star ornament with intricate cutouts is positioned in the foreground, partially overlapping the white candle. A sprig of green pine needles is visible on the left side. A white rectangular box with a dotted border is centered over the candles, containing text.

“God never gives someone a gift
they are not capable of receiving.
If he gives us the gift of Christmas,
it is because we all have the ability to
understand and receive it.”

– Pope Francis