



# Prepare the Way

## Second Sunday of Advent - Love

Mark 1:1-8

*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

*The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*

December 7, 2014

## Thought For The Week

Thanksgiving is now a fond memory and so the whirlwind to Christmas Day begins—parties, concerts, family engagements, travel. Did you know that traditionally, the holiday cheer didn't begin until Christmas Day? December 25th is just Day One of a twelve day season of Christmastide that doesn't end until January 6th!

Does that make your head spin? Some of us are beginning to already feel the holiday stress in the air. Twelve days of Christmas after we've already been Jingle Bell Rocking for weeks doesn't sound appealing, it sounds exhausting. But maybe the problem isn't with the twelve days of celebration, maybe the problem is that our culture has lost the beautiful season of Advent amidst all the hustle and bustle.

Most families are completely wiped out by December 26th. We stuff ourselves with holiday cheer from Halloween to December the 24th, and we're ill by Christmas. We jump right into feasting well before Thanksgiving and by the time Christmas actually gets here, we're usually very tired of the holidays and are itching to get the tree out to the side of the road (or down the basement into storage) as soon as the presents are unwrapped.



So what's the solution? Not celebrating? Just ignore the holiday? By no means!

We want to celebrate Christmas and we should. After all, the Incarnation of Christ is a feast of feasts. The solution to holiday burnout is simple, but it's difficult to practice because it flies in the face of the holiday madness. Let me introduce you to my good friend, Advent.

There is no better way to truly delight in the Christmas season than stepping back, slowing down, and giving ourselves the grace to observe the true season of Advent, a quiet time of reflection, spiritual preparation, fasting, and soul-searching.

Set your family calendar with intentionality so that you are spiritually nourished instead of thoroughly exhausted by Christmas morning. This quiet time is a gift from all Christian Churches, practiced by Christians throughout the ages—giving you the space to prepare your heart for Jesus.

Advent is not a pre-Christmas countdown. And it's not a list of things you have to add to your already bursting at the seams calendar. It's your permission to slow down and say yes to only the things that will help you prepare your heart for Christmas. Advent is like the quiet waiting in the early morning for the sun to come up. It's dark, but hopeful. But how do we set that tone of joyous, quiet expectation?

### How Do I Observe Advent?

Don't worry, you don't have to add more "stuff" to this busy time of year to observe Advent. There are some simple traditional ways to mark the season, but the whole point is that you should do less stuff. But doing less can be difficult when packed

holiday schedules pull you this way and that. It will require some thoughtful intentionality on your part.

Hang on! Am I saying you can't do any Christmas stuff before Christmas? No, you do what suits your family. Some families prefer to wait until Christmas Day for all the festivities. That doesn't mean you have to adhere to a list of rigid rules to observe Advent.

Take a middle of the road approach. While meals are simple, music is tranquil, and parties are few for many households during Advent, there are a handful of special traditions that we hold dear and we keep those in the calendar. It could be the local performance of *The Nutcracker*, the community sing-along of Handel's *Messiah*, Caroling throughout your neighborhood with friends, and cutting down a Christmas tree with extended family. Most families have special events that would be painful to give up and I'm not recommending you do. But anything else that fills up our calendars and could contribute to holiday burnout shouldn't be committed to without careful consideration.

The Advent wreath is a common custom to mark this season of the year and a simple one to start with. It's a wreath of evergreens with four candles (three purple and one pink) and having the visual reminder definitely helps families focus on waiting for the Light of the World.

One candle is lit each Sunday of Advent (purple, purple, pink, purple.) The purple is chosen because it's the color of penitence and preparation, the color of the bruised heart. We look at ourselves and see, wow! We need Jesus! The pink is chosen for rejoicing on the third Sunday of Advent, reminding us that the joy of Christ's coming is near and that we wait with hope and gladness. Many churches have Advent wreaths, our does, and it is always a welcomed part of our service, that we all readily participate in.

*Happy Birthday Lenore (12/5)*

## Prayer For The Week

Great Spirit, Allah, Jesus, Adonai, God of all nations and all peoples, by whatever name you are known, we come before you in praise and thanksgiving. Forgive our sins of selfishness and pride, we humbly ask.

Guide us into the joy of being and the desire of joyful peace for all peoples. We especially remember the people of Liberia this day. Work on the hearts of the leaders that they may hear the cries of the people for peace in their land.

We also have personal concerns. Hear us we ask, Great God, and enlighten our minds to ways we can minister in your stead.

Hear our collective prayers, O Prince of Peace, that your peace may become the peace of this world. Amen.

## Stewardship Thought For The Week

Advent is a time to prepare ourselves & family members for the birth of Jesus. As with the anticipation of any celebration, we think about past activities and plan actions for the future.

Preparation could involve quiet reflection on such topics as *Is Jesus proud of me?* or *Did I serve others as God has asked?* This preparation in our hearts can lead to active stewardship to others.

The numerous charities in the Metropolitan Detroit Area, consist of multiple programs serving children, teens, families, homeless individuals and the community. Each year, tens of thousands of individuals are served by these charities with the help of youth, families, groups and individuals.

Numerous opportunities for youth and adults to share time, talent or treasure are available within the charities. The opportunities range from collecting needed items to making sandwiches to participating in a musical performance. Additional stewardship ideas are encouraged through conversations with other volunteers and charity officials.

Be a contributor not a detractor. Walk in the stead of Christ!