

Daily Readings

This is the second Sunday in the season we call Advent. Advent includes the four Sundays before the celebration of the birth of Jesus. This is the traditional season of preparation for Christmas. The following passages are some of the traditional Advent passages as we prepare for the coming of the Christ Child of Bethlehem. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, December 7 – Read Isaiah 64:1-9. Isaiah cries out to God for forgiveness and mercy. Verse one is a dramatic call for God to tear open the sky and come down to show the world God's power. The prophet confesses the sins of the people in an effort to reestablish the relationship between God and humanity. How do you see God showing God's power in the world today? As you read this passage, can you confess that which separates you from God?

Tuesday, December 8 – Read Psalm 80. The psalmist cries for mercy from God. In a season of preparation, purity is found in forgiving others and receiving the forgiveness of God. Who in your life do you need to forgive? Have you received God's forgiveness for the failings of your life? Have you forgiven yourself?

Wednesday, December 9 – Read Mark 13:24-37. The gospel of Mark records these words of destruction from Jesus. But with the words of destruction comes a promise, "then he will send out his angels to gather in the elect from the four winds." In the last verses of this passage we are encouraged to stay awake and watch, because no one will know the hour of Jesus coming. Are you ready for the coming of the Christ? In what ways do you watch and wait?

Thursday, December 10 – Read I Corinthians 1:3-9. As Paul begins this letter to the church at Corinth, he reminds us of God's strength – God's strength will be our strength. How have you experienced God's strength in your life this week?

Friday, December 11 – Read Psalm 122. The readings for Advent can be disturbing for many Christians. These readings often include predictions of the end days and the second coming of Christ. Christians have no reason to fear because the second coming of Christ is victory for all creation. In the second coming of Christ, everything that is wrong with creation is made right. True and everlasting peace is ours forever and ever. Use this prayer of King David as a prayer for peace for our time and for our world.



STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, December 6, 2009

Communion

Matthew 1:18-25— *The Word from the Bible (TNIV)*

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Notes on Matthew 1:18-25 — the Virgin Birth

The doctrine of the virgin birth is the biblical affirmation that God actually became man; that God entered the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We do not argue that this Jesus of Nazareth must be divine because of His unusual birth, being born of a virgin, but rather we affirm that God actually came into the world by a virgin birth and thus God became man. The Apostle's Creed, the most universally accepted Christian creed, states that He was "born of the Virgin Mary." In the Nicene Creed we read that Jesus Christ was "very God of very God ... and was made man."

Should one have a problem believing in the virgin birth, other questions relating to the Incarnation must be answered as to how the eternal God actually became human. Matthew affirms that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. He also affirms that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, which means that in some miraculous way the Holy Spirit ushered the life of the eternal Christ into the body of Mary and here a person was conceived and born who is the one true expression of God and the one expression of true man. This person was able to say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9, KJV).

In Greek literature Virgil wrote about the plight of humanity and the need for a new type of person to help man out of his predicament. Such a person, he said, would need to be a virgin-born person who was half god and half man. Pagan mythology had stories of intercourse between a god and a woman or a goddess and a man, the offspring being a "hero" of legend. The New Testament passage is not the story of any such half god and half man but is rather the expression of Incarnation. This affirmation of faith is that God came to us in Jesus of Nazareth so that we may know authentically what God is like. Dr. Karl Barth has said, "Either Jesus Christ was actually God, or

we do not have a full revelation yet.”

The Incarnation is God’s greatest affirmation of humanness. In the Incarnation God demonstrated that He could become human without becoming sinful. Humanness and sinfulness are not synonymous. Sinfulness is the perversion of the truly human, the perversion of the Imago Dei (the image of God) in which we were created. Salvation is, among other things, the restoration of the truly human in our lives, the correction of perversion so that we may be persons who express again the image of God.



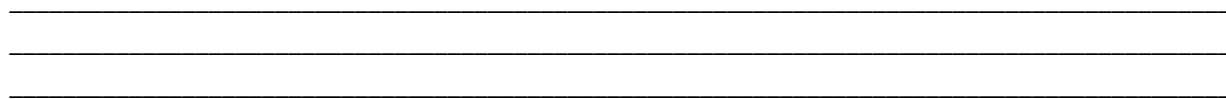
Definition of the season of Advent

The word ‘Advent’ is derived from a Latin root which means ‘coming’ or ‘arrival’, and the season was developed in the Western Church as a preparation for the festival of the Nativity. Councils held in Gaul in the sixth century refer to a penitential period of six weeks before Christmas. There was fasting on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. But the season was already known to Gregory of Tours in the latter part of the preceding century. It may be affirmed that fifth-century Gaul was the place of origin of the fully-organized period of six Sundays, and that the structure of Advent, with regard to its length, was modeled on Lent. Various lectionaries dating from the seventh and eighth centuries, or representing the use of that time, show the six-Sunday pattern in Gaul and northwest Italy. At a greater distance from Gaul, that is, in Spain, northeast Italy and south Italy, we find five Sundays, clearly representing a modification of the original structure.

One of the lectionaries noted above is derived from Reginensis 9, a seventh-century manuscript, containing a complete table of lessons from the Pauline epistles, an early witness to the Ambrosian liturgy of Milan. The table begins with the Christmas vigil and lists the lessons of a six-Sunday Advent at the end of the lectionary. Similarly, with reference to a lectionary not taken into account above, it is evident that also at Rome liturgical conservatism ensured that the inclusion of Advent, a practice introduced from elsewhere, did not at that stage succeed in disturbing the pattern of a lectionary which traditionally began with Christmas.

For the Wurzburg manuscript, Mp. Th. Fol. 62, containing in a table of epistles the oldest Roman lectionary and the usage of the early seventh century, commences with Christmas and places a five-Sunday Advent at the end. The logic of the invention of Advent had not been completely accepted. Eventually at Rome, Advent was reduced from five to four Sundays. As the Roman rite gradually triumphed over the native uses of the West, the four-Sunday Advent became the norm, and the original structure of six Sundays was almost completely obscured.

(from The Westminster Dictionary of Worship)



Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

Remember... someone is praying for you. Here are a few prayers to guide you.

These prayers were written with the season of Advent in mind. They were listed on the Creighton University online ministry page. Often we feel rushed and anxious during December. Hopefully these prayers will help you focus on the presence of God as you start each day or as you face a day full of activities and pressure.

Watching the Sunrise During Dark, Mornings of Advent

Thank you. What a gift this morning from you as I watched the blazing sunrise through a cloudy sky. It is hard getting up these dark mornings, Lord, and yet you gift me with a sight that I miss at other times of year, when the weather is warmer and the sun rises before I get up. I stared out the window at the red and purple light, gloriously framed by the gold of the rising sun. “Be still, and know that I am God” was the only thing that came to me. I watched in silence, filled with a sense of your presence in my life.

I am filled with gratitude this day for such a treasure and could feel it and see it as a gift from you. Thank you for your love. Today, let me carry a sense of how much you love me to send me such a gift. Let that awareness of your love change the way I treat others today. Let me be more reverent in the irritations of the day. I ask your help to move through my errands and holiday preparations today with peace and a sense of your sunrise in my heart. Your glory fills my spirit and I want only to give thanks with my life this day.

Preparing for Visitors to My Home

They are coming! Oh, dear Lord, like the Wise men wandering toward the stable, visitors are heading to my house. I am so excited about this visit. But I can get so side-tracked about how my house looks, or the food that I serve. I can only keep this prayerful with your help.

Help me to stay humble this Advent and Christmas season. You invite us into the humility of the stable where you were born. Help me to remember that humble-ness and the simple joy of your birth. Let me stay focused on my guests, not on myself and my worries about my house. Guide me in rejoicing in who these people are and in loving them freely.

Praying Over My To-Do List

I sit here with my list, Lord, and I know I need help finding a balance. I am so looking forward to Christmas Day, with the family here, the company, the wonderful celebration. But, Lord, there is SO much to do! When will it all get done? How will I maintain any semblance of inner peace in this “peaceful” season?

I think, Lord, that I need some balance in my life. I feel so torn between wanting to cook and fill my house with wonderful welcoming smells, and wanting to finish decorating the house. I have shopping to do, the house to clean and cards to write and mail. When? How?

Help me, guide me, Lord. Help me to set priorities around doing those things that will bring me closer to you. Maybe my house really is clean enough, or maybe I can ask my family for help. Can the cards wait until a quiet afternoon after Christmas? Can my house decorations be simpler? Is there more than a little ego involved when I want so desperately to have my house “magazine perfect” for the holidays?

Help me rediscover the joy of simplicity, Lord. Help me to remember what I am celebrating.

Help me to find it in my heart to call out, “Come, Lord Jesus.”