



Meditations
for **ADVENT**
KING UNIVERSITY 2023



KING
UNIVERSITY
— 1867 —



The four weeks of **ADVENT**

Our lives are full of uncertainty, individually and collectively. But the rhythms of life — the seasons, the natural progression of aging, birth, and death, and the habits and rituals and schedules we create — give order and structure and some sense of predictability to what would otherwise be chaos and confusion. These markers in life do not remove uncertainty, but in a very real sense they replace it with confident expectation.

The Christian calendar does likewise — and more — putting us in sync with the great events and themes of God's revelation in Christ, reminding us and teaching us of these anew each year, and melding them with the cadence of our everyday lives. The Christian year begins with Advent, the season of expectation before we celebrate the Incarnation at Christmas some four weeks later. Advent is a time of preparation, penitence, and self-examination, to be sure, but it is most of all a time of confident and excited hope. We enter Advent sure that God will fulfill his promise of redemption to a broken world and broken lives through the greatest expression of his love: the gift of his son Jesus.

It is our prayer that this small devotional for this season of Advent will help you as you prepare for Christmas and the year ahead.

ALEXANDER WHITAKER
PRESIDENT, KING UNIVERSITY



Sinful man, be blithe and bold,
For heaven is both bought and sold,
Through and through.
Come to Christ, and peace foretold:
His life he gave a hundredfold
To succour you.

So let us gather hand in hand
And sing of bliss without an end:
The Devil has fled from earthly land,
And Son of God is made our friend.

*from the earliest known
English Christmas carol - circa 1300s*





The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land
of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they
divide the spoil.

Isaiah 9:2-3

First Sunday of **ADVENT**

And, you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Luke 1:76-79

We look about us at the state of the world, our own nation, even at our own lives and wonder what God is up to. Perhaps Zechariah is anxious about these same things. Then, while he prays alone, he is startled by a Presence. God is saying: Don't be afraid. I am about to do a new thing for you and all my troubled children. And Zechariah's anxious fear turns to hope in a hymn of wonder and gratitude upon the birth of the son he had long ago given up hoping for.

Isn't this the word for us in this year of anxiety and heartbreak? Don't be afraid. Open your eyes to the light that was promised to Zechariah. Begin now to open your hearts to the wonder of each new day, whether in the tiny hummingbird outside your window, the surprise gift from a friend, the unexpected kindness of a stranger, the undeserved grace that forgives and sustains your every breath, and know that Immanuel is here and at work among us. Then, like Zechariah, let's lift hearts and voices in joyful hymns of thanksgiving.

KATHERINE WOMELDORF PATERSON '54
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS LIVING LEGEND





Second Sunday of **ADVENT**

“What are you waiting for?” my mother used to inquire if I failed to respond immediately to her directive. More often than not, her question set me into motion, as the consequences of not complying with a certain urgency were far more dire! Research suggests we spend at least six months of our lives waiting. We wait in lines at concerts, movies, banks, tourist attractions, and restaurants; we wait for planes and trains to arrive and depart; we wait for the traffic light to change. Visiting the doctor or dentist requires that we sit in a room aptly dubbed “the waiting room.” Not all of our waiting occurs in the mundane realm, though. We wait for the right person to come into our lives, for the dream job to be offered, for home ownership to finally come to fruition.

Simeon spent years waiting for the anticipated arrival of the Christ Child (*Luke 2:25*), and the widow Anna waited eight decades to see the infant Redeemer. What are you waiting for today? What am I waiting for? Are we waiting for opportunities to serve, love, and bless others—or do we seek to be served, to be loved, to be blessed, with little regard for our fellow sojourners and their needs? Frederick Buechner offers, “We watch and wait for a holiness to heal us and hallow us, to liberate us from the dark. Advent is like the hush in a theatre just before the curtain rises” (*The Clown in the Belfry*, 1992).

As we celebrate this busy season of Advent, may we hush long enough, just now, to embrace His holiness and to bask in His light.

What are we waiting for?

RANDALL GILMORE '85

RETIRED PROFESSOR, KING UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Third Sunday of **ADVENT**

In churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, the Gospel reading for the second week of Advent is always John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand!” (*Matthew 3:1*) John the Baptist doesn’t bring us holly, jolly Christmas greetings. He’s right at the front of the gospel story, calling people names, “You brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (*Matthew 3:7*) John the Baptist is the sidewalk preacher you cross the street to avoid. John the Baptist is like the elder sister, pointing her finger and saying, “You’re gonna get in trouble for that.” But we have to get past John the Baptist and his call for repentance in order to receive Christ’s invitation to reconciliation.

High on everyone’s Christmas To-Do List should be examination of conscience and confession of sin. My favorite analogy for the act of confessing our sins is that of preparing a plot of ground to be a garden. Confessing our sins is like pulling the weeds and chucking the rocks out. It’s hard work, but it makes it possible for something new and life-giving to grow in that space. In this analogy, perhaps John the Baptist is like the plow that comes in first and churns the soil up. He’s disruptive, but for a very good purpose.

Repentance is one of the primary themes of Advent because Advent isn’t just about cleaning up our homes for guests, it is about cleaning up our lives for the guest who wants to be with us always. Repentance makes way for restoration. It creates fertile ground for a relationship with our Lord and Savior, the one who brings hope, peace, joy, and love.

ELIZABETH PATRICK
ASSISTANT TO THE CHAPLAIN’S OFFICE AND
THE KING INSTITUTE FOR FAITH AND CULTURE

PRAYER:

*Gracious Lord, help
me to take a good
hard look at my
life – my thoughts
and my actions. Give
me the humility to
see my sin and the
motivation to turn
from it, so that I might
be fully, faithfully,
and joyfully ready to
receive the coming of
Your Son, our Savior,
Jesus Christ. In whose
blessed name we pray,
Amen.*



Fourth Sunday of **ADVENT**

I recently asked my students, “What does the world really need?” Some answers focused on relationships: empathy, honest conversations. Several had political overtones: peace, equality, or a good president. One said, “We need more Jesus in the world.” On one level, that last student is right: Jesus is the answer. But how we understand the answer depends a great deal on what we think the question is.

The Hebrew Scriptures model some ways of asking the Big Question. Not unlike my students, Israel often framed its longing politically. On the one hand, the people longed for God to return to Israel and be their king forever. On the other hand, they had seen God work through humans; God had even made eternal promises to David’s line. So they also wondered when a human king (messiah) would restore Israel. Jesus became the answer that reframed the questions.

As his followers realized who he was, their questions fell into place—but in utterly surprising ways. God incarnate as king! A son of Israel, at last fulfilling Israel’s role in the covenant! Then extending his rule to the gentiles! He answered the questions, but in a way no one had expected. Sometimes we can intuit a question, but we don’t quite know how to express it. Our questions take too much for granted, or they rule out possibilities. They betray our limited imagination.

This Advent, let’s lift up our questions, but with open hands. Let’s ask God to grow in us an open-hearted longing for his will. Because when Jesus appears, we re-learn what we’ve been waiting for all along.

ABIGAIL WOOLLEY CUTTER
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, KING UNIVERSITY

Christmas Eve

My father made a Christmas Eve ritual for himself many years ago. He felt that on this night, after a month of parties and decorations and carols, he needed a way to find at least a taste of the waiting, the quiet, the darkness, the emptiness of Advent.

So every Christmas Eve, he would walk outside on his own, irrespective of the weather, and look at the stars. He'd pray while listening to the muffled sounds of a winter's night, and looking through the dark at heavenly lights that didn't need to be plugged in. It wasn't a big production, it didn't take long, and he never drew attention to it. But every Christmas Eve, he'd disappear for a little while and come back with a genial peace radiating from him.

I've done it myself, now, for years. I feel close to my father as I step out into the cold, quiet night, even for a moment. Here I share his hunger for the feast of the Savior's birth, just before it begins, and I find the same peace that carried him into joyous celebration the next morning. I invite you to try it, too.

MARTIN HOLT DOTTERWEICH
DIRECTOR, KING INSTITUTE FOR FAITH AND CULTURE
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, KING UNIVERSITY



A green pine wreath with a large red bow hanging on a brick wall.

Christmas Day

Do you remember the great expectation and anticipation of Christmas morning when you were a child? If you were like me, you couldn't sleep the night before because of your eagerness to get under the tree on Christmas morning to see what gifts you received. We were elated to discover those wonderful gifts wrapped under the tree that were there just for us. What a response we had! It's our response that makes the Christmas moment so special.

And since we've matured to understand the true meaning and message about Christmas as we have grown in Christ, how much more excited should we be of what this season means? Christmas means that we must respond to the Christ of Christmas. And we will demonstrate our response to him whether we realize it or not. We have the choice to respond indifferently, in hostility like Herod, or joyfully as the Wise Men. We are excited for the gifts under the tree, but we ought now be even more grateful for the gift of grace. We recognize that it is not just the presents, but it is the true presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives each and every day. We ought to respond joyfully and thankfully to our Savior who was born to die for us! These wise men teach us what it truly means to respond to the Christ of Christmas. They respond in worship, in reverence, and in awe, offering their best gifts to Him with a grateful heart.

This Christmas season, how will you respond? My prayer is that we respond like these wise men who rejoiced and worshipped when they found the best Christmas gift in Jesus Christ.

REV. JAMES T. SCALES III '16 & '18
MINISTER AND TEACHER; COACH AT DOBYNS-BENNETT HIGH SCHOOL



And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11



I cannot think unless I have been thought,
Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken.
I cannot teach except as I am taught,
Or break the bread except as I am broken.
O Mind behind the mind through which I seek,
O Light within the light by which I see,
O Word beneath the words with which I speak,
O founding, unfound Wisdom, finding me,
O sounding Song whose depth is sounding me,
O Memory of time, reminding me,
My Ground of Being, always grounding me,
My Maker's Bounding Line, defining me,
Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring,
Come to me now, disguised as everything.

"O Sapientia" by Malcolm Guite

From *Sounding the Seasons* (Canterbury Press 2012)

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*We wish you a blessed Advent season
and all the joys of Christmas.*

Alexander and Maria Whitaker

