

Advent Ponderings

These advent devotions provide an opportunity for women of all ages to set aside the hustle and bustle of holiday preparation and focus their minds and hearts on the birth of Christ.

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Advent Ponderings

Dear Sisters in Christ,

Christmas is coming! Do those words cause panic or peace in your heart? If you are like me, they may cause you to feel at least a bit anxious as you try to quickly calculate in your mind just how soon it is coming. Maybe your heart is especially heavy this year due to a multitude of different reasons only you and the LORD know about. Or, sometimes, with all the hustle and bustle of preparations for Christmas we can tend to overlook the preparation of our hearts in order to "welcome" the Christ Child who came to earth to be the Savior of the world. Whatever your situation might be these devotions are for you.

Advent means "coming". The Advent season proceeds Christmas as a time to prepare for Jesus' coming. Advent is a time for treasures and pondering, and God's Word is rich with both. That's why these devotions are called "Advent Ponderings". The Sunday devotion will set the tone of the week ahead and help you "fix your eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). You will read from God's holy word (Psalm 119:130) and will take a few moments to ponder what God is saying to you. You'll respond to God in song (Isaiah 65:14a) and/or prayer (Ephesians 6:18a). The week of devotions will end with opening wide your heart (2 Corinthians 6:13) to others.

Even though it may seem there is absolutely no time to fit one more thing into an already full schedule, please do! Maybe it means getting up just 10-15 minutes earlier than usual to give yourself this special time with your LORD – make yourself a hot cup of coffee, pour a glass of juice or sip a cup of soothing tea. Light a candle if you like. Gather together your Bible and hymnbook, if you have one. Then ask the LORD to bless these few minutes you are about to spend with Him.

May Jesus' birthday find you exclaiming with the hymn-writer,
 "Redeemer, come! I open wide My heart to you; here, Lord, abide!
 Oh, enter with your saving grace; Show me your kind and friendly face.
 Your Holy Spirit guide us on Until our glorious goal is won.
 Eternal praise and fame We offer to your name." (CW #3 verse 5)

A blessed and God-pleasing Advent to each of you!

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart Luke 2:19

We Begin in God's Holy Word (Psalm 119:130)

Read Luke 1:26-38

We Respond in Song (Isaiah 65:14a)

Out loud if you can – in your heart if you must

"Blessed Jesus, at Your Word"(verses 1 & 3) Refer to the Song Sheet or CW #221

We Respond in Prayer (Ephesians 6:18a)

*We do not know what to do but our eyes are upon you. "(2 Chronicles 20:12b)
Wonderful Counselor, I am overwhelmed as I look over the next few weeks on my calendar and see all that will require my time and attention before December 25, I don't know what to do! Help me keep my eyes on you as I make out my many lists and try to prioritize my time, talents and energy among family, home, church, friends and community. Help me to remember that December 25 is not just about deadlines to be met, but about Your birth, my Savior. Amen.*

MONDAY

The Birth of Jesus Foretold – Introduction

The foretelling of Jesus' birth didn't begin with the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would become the mother of the Savior, but rather it began thousands of years before. This week's Advent Ponderings will include "Passages of Prophecy" in which God gave to His people, through certain Old Testament prophets, clues about the details of the coming Christ Child.

Read - Luke 1:26-28 and Daniel 9:20-27

Isn't it interesting to note that it is the angel Gabriel who is sent to Mary to announce Jesus' birth and it was Gabriel who hundreds of years before appeared to Daniel and foretold of Jesus, the Anointed One's, death? What does that tell you about our God? What confidence and comfort does that give you?

As you read the end of verse 28, how can these words help as you busy yourself with the preparations of heart and home for Christmas?

Passage of Prophecy – Isaiah 9:1&2

TUESDAY

Read – Luke 1:29-33

Can we even begin to imagine what Mary might have been thinking as Gabriel made his announcement – "favor with God" – "with child" "a son" "the name Jesus" "Son of the Most High" – "the throne of David" – "reign over the house of Jacob forever". Maybe passages of prophecy flashed in her mind while she attempted to sort out what the angel was saying.

Oh, LORD, help me set aside a moment to reflect on what was prophesied so long ago by men and angels. Amen.

Passage of Prophecy – Isaiah 9:6&7

WEDNESDAY

"Behold, a Branch is Growing" (verses 1&2) Refer to the Song Sheet or CW #47

THURSDAY

Read – Luke 1:34-37

Continuing on from our reading from Tuesday, we see how quickly in verse 34 that Mary's thoughts come back to Gabriel's original announcement to her impending pregnancy and she sincerely asks, "How will this be since I am a virgin?" Note Gabriel's final words in verse 37 to Mary. What other possible answer could there be? How can Gabriel's final words fit in your life today?

Passage of Prophecy – Isaiah 7:14

FRIDAY

Read – Luke 1:38

What does it mean to be "the Lord's servant"? What do you see as your calling right now? How does being the LORD's servant help you respond to your calling? May Mary's response be our response to God's calling to us no matter what that calling may be. Jesus was, of course, the perfect Servant. How thankful we are that He was willing to leave His throne in heaven and take on the form of a servant. May we show our thankfulness by willingly accepting our role as a servant of the LORD as he has determined for each of us.

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for my calling. Help me be a faithful servant. Amen.

Passage of Prophecy – Zechariah 3:8

SATURDAY

We Open Wide Our Hearts (2 Corinthians 6:13)

Personalize Luke 1:38 by writing it out and including the changes below. Post it somewhere where it will serve as a constant prayer and reminder throughout the days ahead.

I, _____ (your name here), am the Lord's servant May it be to me as you have said, Lord.

NOTES

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart Luke 2:19

We Begin in God's Holy Word – Luke 1:39-45

We Respond in Song

"Blessed Jesus, at Your Word" (verses 1&3)

Refer to the Song Sheet or CW #221

We Respond in Prayer

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Habakkuk 3:18). My reason to be joyful, I come to you with all that needs to be done this week and ask you to take my excuse of "-but I'm too busy, Lord", and create in me a heart of joy. With Christmas cards and letters to write out, packages to be wrapped and mailed, and Christmas Eve and Day plans to be finalized, it's so easy, LORD, to get caught up in schedules and deadlines. Keep me focused on the joy of your advent and all that it means. 'Restore to me the joy of your salvation. " (Psalm 51:12a) Amen.

MONDAY

Mary Visits Elizabeth – Introduction

If you are unfamiliar with the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth or need to refresh your memory, you can find this Bible story in Luke 1:5-25. Also read the fulfillment of these verses in Luke 1:57-80. What joy we see expressed all throughout this week of Advent Ponderings! "Passages of Joy" are included.

Read – Luke 1:39&40

In these two verses you can feel the joy of Mary, can't you? She can't get to her relative, Elizabeth, fast enough so she can share her good news and hear all about Elizabeth's miracle which Gabriel told her about in verse 36. The first thing Mary wants to do is to share her joy. Do we anticipate the joy of sharing Christmas with family and friends or has it all become somewhat of a chore?

Help me refocus, LORD, on You and the joy Your birth brings me. Then fill my heart with thankfulness that I have family and friends to share my Christmas joy with. Amen.

Passage of Joy – Psalm 86:4

TUESDAY

Read – Luke 1:41

Isn't the development of a little baby from conception to birth a wonderful miracle?

Oh, LORD, open the eyes of those who claim the killing of the unborn is only "the removal of insignificant masses of tissue" and move them to see the preciousness of life in the womb. Amen.

Passage of Joy. – Proverbs 12:20

WEDNESDAY

Joy to the World (verses 1&2)

Refer to the Song Sheet or CW #62

THURSDAY

Read – Luke 1:42-44

Have you ever been so filled with joy you couldn't keep from expressing it? Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and He granted her the words to rightly express the joy that filled her heart. Christmas cards and letters should be mailed out soon. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and share the joy of Christmas with those you have included on your Christmas list.

Passage of Joy – Luke 6:23

FRIDAY

Read – Luke 1:45

Elizabeth was a woman of encouragement. Her words should serve as a good reminder to us to encourage our sisters in Christ as they seek to serve the LORD according to their calling; especially at this time of the year when we might tend to take on more than we can handle or are feeling a heaviness of heart. Are you feeling a lack of joy in

your calling right now? Ask yourself what you can do to regain some of that joy you know the LORD has given you through His Son, Jesus.

Passage of Joy—Romans 15:13

SATURDAY

We Open Wide Our Hearts

Copy the "Passage of Joy" from yesterday on a pretty card or sheet of paper and give it to someone you know who could use some encouraging and uplifting words of Scripture in their calling right now.

NOTES

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in heart. Luke 2:19

We Begin in God's Holy Word—Luke 1:46-56

We Respond in Song

Blessed Jesus, at Your Word (verses 1&3) Refer to the Song Sheet or CW #221

We Respond in Prayer

Look to the LORD and his strength; see his face always. (1 Chronicles 16:11)
I'm so tired, LORD. It seems as though I'm trying to run in all four directions at the same time. The days don't seem long enough—I'm just so tired! I need your strength, LORD. I need your strong right arm to lift me up. Help me to be more selective in the ways I choose to expend my energy. Help me to use wisdom and discernment in how I fill my Advent hours. Whatever you want me to accomplish this week will be accomplished according to Your will. Help me accept that. I need to seek your face, LORD—to focus on you! You are indeed "the Mighty One" and you have done great things for me. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Amen.

MONDAY

Mary's Song—Introduction

Our entire Advent Ponderings for this week center on "Mary's Song". Isn't it amazing how Mary, at such a young age, has so much knowledge and wisdom about God? Although we don't hear anything about Mary's parents or anything about her upbringing, one thing is certain—her parents must have taken seriously the commandments of God given to Israel through Moses hundreds of years before, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:7). They must have, with believing hearts, taught her to believe in the coming Messiah. This should serve as a good reminder to us that part of our calling is to pass on God's Word to our children (grandchildren, nieces, etc.) and help them stay focused on Jesus, their Savior. May you be strengthened in your calling through the 'Passages of Strength' this week.

Read—Luke 1:46-49

The beginning of Mary's song expresses the love, joy and thankfulness a Christian receives as a believer. All praise is directed to God. All glory is given only to him. The world speaks much of love and joy at Christmas time. However, if you listen carefully, you realize that they have only a temporary, emotional understanding of those concepts. Ask God to help you focus on the real love and joy of Christmas, namely, the lasting joy of knowing that in the Christ Child we have a Savior from sin and through him the sure hope of heaven.

Passage of Strength—Psalm 59:16&17

TUESDAY

Read—Luke 1:50-52

What a testimony as to whom God is and what He does for us! Do you see the strength of God as revealed in Mary's song? Are you feeling in need of God's mercy? Do you need Him to lift you up? Read and believe the "Passage of Strength."

Passage of Strength—Exodus 15:2

WEDNESDAY

Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates (verses 1&4) (Refer to the Song Sheet or CW #3)

THURSDAY

Read—Luke 1:53-55 and Romans 4:16-25

Christmas is the culmination of these verses. We who believe like Abraham are his descendants, and we have the true meaning of Christmas to celebrate.

Merciful LORD, give me strength during these busy days to prepare for the celebration.
Amen.

Passage of Strength—Psalm 29:11

FRIDAY

Read—Luke 1:56

My Bible notes say that Mary remained with Elizabeth until Elizabeth's baby, John, was born. I am sure Mary must have been all eyes and ears watching Elizabeth continue through her last stage of pregnancy, the younger learning from the older. Our society has all but lost that type of teaching among women. Grandma, Aunt Martha and Mom are just too busy fulfilling themselves; and besides, women today are "more sophisticated, independent and educated than the previous generations." Have we lost something God-pleasing and precious? Young women called to be mothers can feel isolated in their own homes with young children to care for continually. Mothers who must work outside of the home can feel over-extended by demands at home and work with no time for spiritual fellowship or refreshment. Single women, handicapped women, widows, older women - women of all ages and circumstances, at one time or another, need the emotional, physical or spiritual strength of a sister in Christ.

Passage of Strength—Titus 2:3-5 and Psalm 18:1

SATURDAY

We Open Wide Our Hearts

Take the time to share a cup of Christmas tea, cookies or whatever you choose with an older or younger sister in Christ who could use the strength of the LORD. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:19

NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

We Begin in God's Holy Word—Luke 2:1-20

We Respond in Song

Blessed Jesus, at Your Word (verses 1&3)

Refer to the Song Sheet or CW #221

We Respond in Prayer

When I said, "My foot is slipping," your love, O LORD, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought, joy to my soul (Psalm 94:18&19).

My Savior, Your birthday is just about here, but I'm not quite ready. LORD there's that one last gift for Suzy, my family's gifts still need to be wrapped, I really should get one more batch of triple chocolate fudge bars baked, there's the church choir party along with the final rehearsal before the concert, AND the school parties for the children (am the room mother, LORD!) Have I mentioned the grocery shopping list that's a mile long with items I need to prepare for Christmas Day dinner for 35 people? Help! I'm losing it, LORD! I've been trying to prepare my heart for Your coming but "my foot is slipping" and I, once again, need to fix my eyes on You. Your love will support me and Your consolation will bring joy to my heart. Fill my heart with lasting peace, my Prince of Peace, and help me to look at that list again and show me ways to cut that list, LORD. Allow me to welcome you in a few days with a heart of peace. Amen.

Your personal list will look different. Whatever your circumstance in life may be right now, you may feel your "foot is slipping" and you, too, need the LORD's support and peace.

MONDAY

The Birth of Jesus —Introduction

We've arrived—FINALLY! The beautiful, familiar, precious story of Jesus' birth is about to unfold during our last week of Advent Ponderings. Enjoy the "Passages of Peace."

Read—Luke 2:1-7

And so we begin—God, the Father, has set all the pieces in place and all the players in motion—and He still does! Looking at what lies before you in your life these final days before Christmas, how can that thought of God being in control help you deal with it? Please look at the last phrase of verse 7 and ask yourself, "Have I made room for Jesus or has He almost been in the way of all my serious and sincere Christmas preparations?" It's not too late—Have mercy on me, O LORD Bring peace to your servant. Amen.

Passage of Peace—Micah 5:2-5

TUESDAY

Read—Luke 2:8-12

In these verses, especially verses 10 and 11, we hear the Christmas message by the angel to the shepherds proclaimed in beautiful simplicity. How did Christmas become so complicated? What are some ways you can UN-complicate your Christmas?

Passage of Peace—Colossians 3:15

WEDNESDAY

Silent Night (verse 1)

(Refer to the Song Sheet or CW #60)

THURSDAY

Read—Luke 2:13&14

Imagine! A host of angels joined together in a song of praise to glorify God on EARTH! For the next minute or two try to quiet your mind and block out all the noise of this world and listen. Can you hear their proclamation of God's peace to you? What does that proclamation of peace mean to you this Christmas as you ponder its truth in your life at this time?

Passage of Peace—Philippians 4:7

FRIDAY

Read—Luke 2:20

We hear of the shepherds "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen." It appears that the lyrics might have included words of thanksgiving as well as praise. It would have been interesting if God has chosen to include the "Song of the Shepherds" in His inspired Word but He did not, so we can only imagine. Angels and shepherds . . . heaven and earth, all were praising the God of all creation. On a sheet of paper or in your mind create your own original Christmas "song of praise."

Passage of Peace—Ephesians 2:14-18

SATURDAY

We Open Wide Our Hearts

Share the "Prince of Peace" with others this Christmas by inviting someone over to your home for birthday cake!

NOTES

CHRISTMAS EVE

Read—Luke 2:15-18

It is Christmas Eve and with the shepherds let us go and see; but let's not stop at the manger and go no further. Let's be like the shepherds and spread the word concerning this Child . . . my Savior . . . the Peace of the World. "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JESUS!"

Passage of Peace—Luke 19:38

CHRISTMAS DAY

Read—Luke 2:19

What about you, dear sister in Christ? Have you been able to find time to treasure up and ponder the things that matter this Advent and Christmas? If you have prepared your heart as well as your home to "welcome" the Christ Child, your celebration will be a blessing to you and to those you love. "MERRY CHRISTMAS!"

Passage of Peace—Numbers 6:24-26

SONG SHEET***Blessed Jesus, at Your Word***

Blessed Jesus, at your Word We are gathered all to hear you.
 Let our hearts and souls be stirred Now to seek and love and fear you
 By your teachings sweet and holy Drawn from earth to love you solely

Gracious Savior, good and kind, Light from Light, from God proceeding
 Open now our heart and mind; Help us by your Spirit's pleading
 Hear the cry your people raises; Hear and bless our prayers and praises

Christian Worship #221 vs 1&3

Behold, a Branch Is Growing

Behold, a Branch is growing Of loveliest form and grace,
 As prophets sang, foreknowing; It springs from Jesse's race. And bears one little flow'r. In
 midst of coldest winter, At deepest midnight hour.

Isaiah had foretold it In words of promise sure, And Mary's arms enfold it, A virgin meek and
 pure. Through God's eternal will This child to her is given At midnight calm and still.

Christian Worship #47 vs 1&2

Joy to the World

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King;
 Let ev'ry heart prepare him room. And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n and nature sing,
 And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ,
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

Christian Worship #62 vs.1&2

Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates

Lift up your heads, you mighty gates! Behold, the King of glory waits
The King of kings is drawing near, The Savior of the world is here.
Life and salvation he will bring; Therefore rejoice and gladly sing.
To God the Father raise Your joyful songs of praise.

Fling wide the portals of your heart; Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use for heav'n's employ, Adorned with prayer and love and joy
So shall your Sov'reign enter in And new and nobler life begin
To God alone be praise For word and deed and grace!

Christian Worship #3 vs 1&4

Silent Night! Holy Night

Silent night! Holy night! All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

Christian Worship #60 vs 1