

# THEY WILL CALL HIM EMMANUEL: EMBRACING THE GOD WHO IS WITH US



ADVENT & CHRISTMAS 2022  
saint mark's episcopal church, palo alto

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SEASON

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” In theologian and writer Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” (*John 1:14*).

During Advent, we reflect on the astonishing truth that the God of creation entered our world – our “neighborhood” – taking on all the limitations and vulnerabilities of human life in order to draw near to us in love. In doing so, God forever elevated and made precious our material, physical reality. Our bodies. The natural world of trees and birds, moss and mammals, mountains and oceans. The “stuff” of ordinary life – food and drink, labor and rest, celebration and sorrow, strangers and friends. Because of the Incarnation, everything in and around us shimmers with the sacred, and calls us to both loving attentiveness and faithful stewardship. If Jesus “moved into the neighborhood” on our behalf, we too are invited to move with compassion into the spaces of pain and suffering in this world, confident in the knowledge that God is with us, redeeming and restoring all things. And if Jesus became flesh, we are called to see and honor Christ in *all* flesh – the people who are like us, and the people who are not.

During this holy season, join us as we consider the many rich and life-giving implications of the Word becoming Flesh. How might the Incarnation shape our understanding of who God is and what God cares about? How might it challenge our ideas about justice, suffering, joy, and celebration? How can we draw nearer to the Christ who draws near to us?

As we await the birth that changed the world, we pray that this devotional booklet, filled with scriptural reflections, poetry, art, and liturgy, will help you to come and keep watch with us. May the One who is our light and our life transform us ever more deeply into his likeness.

# PRAYERS WHEN LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

## Week 1

Blessed are you, holy God:  
you called our ancestors to live by the light of faith and to journey in the hope of your promise. May Christ be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, that we may truly live into that promise.  
May we welcome Christ into our hearts and go forth into the world filled with your love.  
Amen.

## Week 2

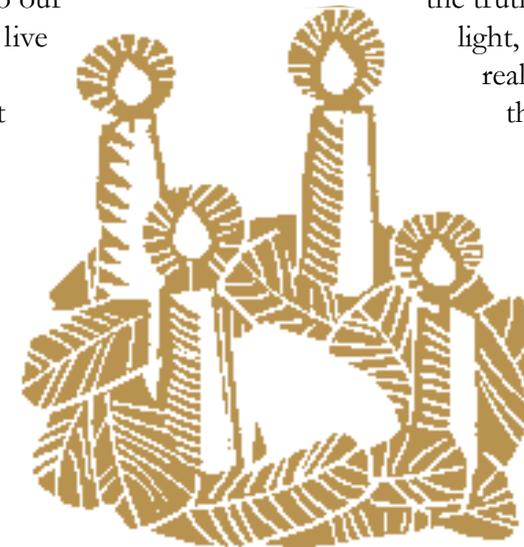
Blessed are you, holy God:  
of old you spoke through your prophets, and now we hear your call in the voice of Jesus. Help us to hope in your dream and walk in your light, that we may proclaim good news. Prepare our hearts to be transformed, give us the faith to trust your guidance, and grant us the beautiful respite of peace. Amen.

## Week 3

Blessed are you, holy God:  
your prophet John the Baptist was witness to the world’s need as a truth-teller and shining light. May we also tell the truth and walk in Christ’s light, that your will may be realized. Fill us with joy that cannot be contained, and help us to see your grace and goodness in the world around us.  
Amen.

## Week 4

Blessed are you, holy God:  
your light has shone in our world through the willing spirit of blessed Mary; grant that we who have seen your glory may live the promise of your grace each and every day. Giver of life, magnify your love within us. May we abide in you and feel nourished in your grace. Bless us as we await the final joy of the coming of the Christ. Amen.



## ADVENT I    SPEARS INTO PRUNING-HOOKS



### Collect of the Day

Creator God, from whose womb the sea burst forth: Be with us now as we seek with your grace to give birth to a new creation filled with justice and peace, harmony and concord, unity and love for all; in the name of your Child whom we await, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalms 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

**Sunday Preacher** The Rev. Rebecca Lyman

### The Risk of Birth *Madeleine L'Engle*

This is no time for a child to be born,  
With the earth betrayed by war & hate  
And a nova lighting the sky to warn  
That time runs out & the sun burns late.  
That was no time for a child to be born,  
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;  
Honour & truth were trampled by scorn—  
Yet here did the Saviour make his home.  
When is the time for love to be born?  
The inn is full on the planet earth,  
And by greed & pride the sky is torn—  
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

### Reflection *The Rev. Rebecca Lyman*

In our desert climate of California I am always astonished by the sudden transformation of our autumn landscape into the vibrant electric green of winter. In

northern climates, Advent comes with the bleak habitat of snow, gray, and short dark days: the texts of divine judgment resonate as the Christmas lights go up to keep us cheerful during the shopping countdown to feasting and family. In California, however, we “wake up” to God’s presence at Advent surrounded by the transformation of a dry land into a blooming paradise.

In Isaiah 2:1-5 the prophet teaches judgment as essential to God’s love of us. If Zion returns to divine law, then life will be transformed from the destructive chaos of war and exploitation into the generative society of teaching, justice, and peace. Our sharp edges, our defensive necessities of ego or despair, have no place in such a vision, but our spears can be instead pruning hooks and our swords instruments of planting. God is always seeking to turn us from division and destruction to unity and flourishing. The medieval abbess Hildegard of Bingen invented a word to describe this transformation through God’s infusion into our world: *viriditas*, a combination of “green” and “truth.” “We will awaken from our dullness and rise vigorously toward justice. If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion.” As in Beloved Community when we know each other and ourselves, we can be transformed through repentance into new visions of flourishing life together.



## ADVENT II CRYING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS

### Collect of the Day

Life-giving God, in whom we live and move and have our being: Kindle your love within us as we await the coming of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, that we might humbly serve others in his name, both now and for ever. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

### Sunday Preacher

The Rev. Matthew McDermott

### John the Baptist: 2 Baptism *Malcolm Guite*

Love's hidden thread has drawn us to the font,  
A wide womb floating on the breath of God,  
Feathered with seraph wings, lit with the swift  
Lightening of praise, with thunder over-spread,  
And under-girded with an unheard song,  
Calling through water, fire, darkness, pain,  
Calling us to the life for which we long,  
Yearning to bring us to our birth again.  
Again the breath of God is on the waters  
In whose reflecting face our candles shine,  
Again he draws from death

the sons and daughters

For whom he bid the elements combine.

As living stones around a font today,

Rejoice with those who roll the stone away.

### Reflection *Katie Fantin*

It's hard to know what drew people to John the Baptist. He was not the most well dressed guy.

He was pretty quirky in his food choices, and his message was not the best marketing for a happy-go-lucky faith. In fact, he was preaching a hard message of repentance. But for whatever reason, he attracted droves of people. It seems that people were looking for something. Maybe people were tired of the old way of faith. Maybe they were looking for something concrete and real, something they could embrace that would lead to tangible change in their lives. But not everyone was truly looking. As John saw the religious leaders approach, he laid into them, as their reputation seemed to precede them. Even before they had a chance to speak, John reminded them that they were not true seekers. He knew their expression of faith hadn't made them into people who reflect the compassion and love of God. The fruit they were producing wasn't bringing life.

Fruit that keeps with repentance expresses itself as love, compassion, and the grace of God – not judgment and the oppression of those in need. While John's words are harsh here, they present an opportunity; he invites the religious leaders one more time to a way of hope and love as he proclaims the coming of Jesus. That invitation is available to us this Advent. No matter how we come to this season – whether with joy at what the season will bring, stress at all it entails with our families or schedules, or sadness at the losses we have experienced – we have the chance to begin again. We have the opportunity to bear good fruit, and like John, to draw others to the transforming love of Jesus.



## ADVENT III DRY LAND SHALL REJOICE

### Collect of the Day

O Hidden, Eternal, and Self-giving God, who became human for our salvation: Open our minds, liberate our hearts, and strengthen our souls, that we may live into the fullness of your desires for us; in the name of the Source, the Word, and the Spirit. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:4-9, Canticle 15, or Canticle 3

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

**Sunday Preacher** The Rev. Nikky Wood

### Sabbath Poem VII *Wendell Berry*

The clearing rests in song and shade.

It is a creature made

By old light held in soil and leaf,

By human joy and grief,

By human work,

Fidelity of sight and stroke,

By rain, by water on

The parent stone.

We join our work to Heaven's gift,

Our hope to what is left,

That field and woods at last agree

In an economy

Of widest worth.

High Heaven's Kingdom come on earth.

Imagine Paradise.

O Dust, arise!

### Reflection *Anne Anderson*

Our reading from Isaiah this week paints a vision of God's glory in nature translated into the human heart, where the warmth and love of a homecoming stands in contrast to a desolate wilderness of fear and exhaustion. We are then commissioned to strengthen the weak, and to say to those who fear: "Be strong" and fear not.

Two personal experiences in recent weeks evoke my own understanding of this beautiful passage.

Our recent rains literally brought about "rejoicing" – a spontaneous cheer, in fact – when a group of women I was with who are dedicated to trees and conservation were gathered for a meeting. It wasn't clear what had happened until I looked outside and saw the rain pouring down. Our years of drought have left many who feel connected to the natural world (and even those who don't realize they are) feeling anxious, worried and even distraught. The horrible wildfires of the last years, and the anticipation of their return this year left us feeling vulnerable and on edge. But the rains this fall gave us hope and reason to rejoice.

My experience with our own Rev. Liz Milner at Elmwood Jail also comes to mind as I read Isaiah. The incarcerated there are in various states of their own wilderness and desolation. They have "anxious hearts," they are away from "home." But armed with the knowledge that God's love provides us with a safe path, and recognizing the God incarnate among us all – not just those like us – Liz understands that hearts and minds can be calmed and reassured. I am in awe of her loving and holy demeanor and its power to transform. And I am inspired to extend this same reassurance to those who are hurting, especially during this season of Advent.

## ADVENT IV DO NOT BE AFRAID



### Collect of the Day

Blessed Jesus, born of our sister Mary, the first and most perfect disciple who fully accepted the will of God and acted upon it: Give us the faith to accept your will for us and the strength to carry it out, to the honor and glory of your name. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

Isaiah 7:10-16  
Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18  
Romans 1:1-7  
Matthew 1:18-25

### Sunday Preacher

Debie Thomas

### Blessing of Hope *Jan Richardson*

So may we know the hope that is not just for someday but for this day— here, now, in this moment that opens to us:	keep quiet and be polite,  hope that knows how to holler when it is called for,  hope that knows how to sing when there seems little cause,  hope that raises us from the dead—  not someday but this day, every day, again and again and Again.
hope not made of wishes but of substance,  hope made of sinew and muscle and bone,  hope that has breath and a beating heart,  hope that will not	

### Reflection *Diane Guinta*

Advent, a season of waiting, of anticipation, of joy. Looking forward to Christmas, I never tire of the story of the brave young couple, each trusting God in the most improbable story, steadfast despite such obstacles. I wonder, what did they pray in their anticipation? Psalm 80 makes me reflect on what my own prayer will be. “Restore us, O God of Hosts; Cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved.” In this Psalm, the people are begging God to save them from their ‘enemies.’ These enemies are their neighbors who “laugh among themselves”

at them. The psalm is full of the imagery of God’s light shining forth and saving the suffering Chosen people. It makes me wonder if anything has changed. Here we are, blue and red states, rural and urban, two realities, enemies, laughing at each other and much, much worse. Meanwhile, we are praying for God to shine a light, a light of hope, a corrective light of justice. Am I asking God to correct them, not me?

And yet, Advent is a season of light in the darkness, the soft glow of starlight shining on a holy child and his amazed and exhausted parents, light leading and shining on regal visitors bearing gifts from afar, light shining on sheep and cows, generating warmth in lieu of a room. The whole story of Jesus’ birth is even more fantastic than his conception, and yet it is so beautiful, so sweet, so real and so foundational for us. I am going to try to pay attention to that light in every place it shines. I am going to remember that God, this child, has saved us and that light and warmth abound. That light has been there for us since the dawn of creation. The sun rises every day, the moon and stars glow every night, sunlight twinkles on the seas, we feel warmth in the love of friends and family and in the friendly greeting of a stranger. God’s light and this warmth are everywhere. And I am going to remember, or try to remember, that this same light shines equally on me as it shines on my perceived enemies. Instead of begging for more light and some sort of sign, I am going to give thanks for the light that is already always here.



THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD  
GOD IS WITH US

**Collect of the Day**

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Scripture Readings**

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14(15-20)

**Preacher** The Rev. Matthew McDermott

**Nativity** *John Donne*

Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,  
Now leaves His well-belov'd imprisonment,  
There He hath made Himself to His intent  
Weak enough, now into the world to come;  
But O, for thee, for Him, hath the inn no room?  
Yet lay Him in this stall, and from the Orient,  
Stars and wise men will travel to prevent  
The effect of Herod's jealous general doom.  
Seest thou, my soul, with thy faith's eyes, how He  
Which fills all place, yet none holds Him, doth lie?  
Was not His pity towards thee wondrous high,  
That would have need to be pitied by thee?  
Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,  
With His kind mother, who partakes thy woe.

## Reflection *Debie Thomas*

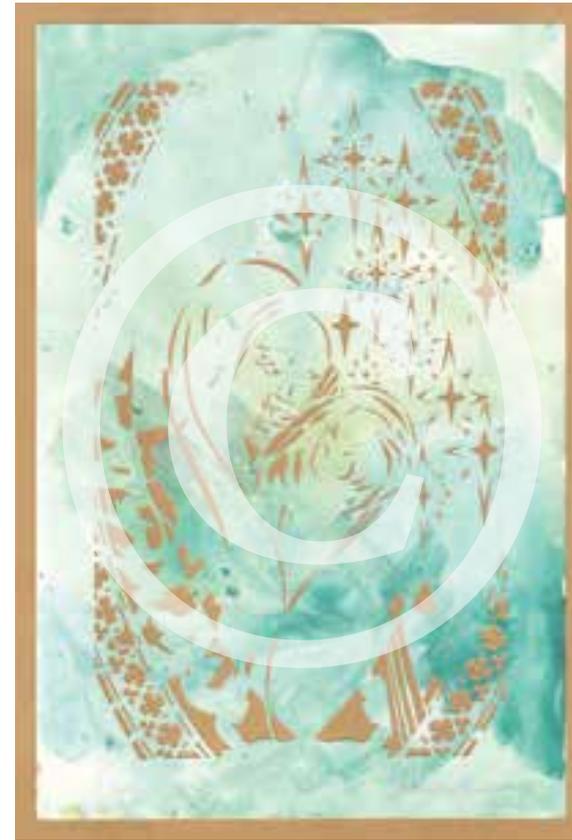
On this high feast day of Christmas, we welcome the holy child, the Incarnate One, the Redeemer of all things, into the world and into our hearts. We enter with joy and gratitude into the sacred space of the stable, the manger, the hushed holiness of a Bethlehem night two thousand years ago that changed the world forever. We sing with the angels and express our adoration with the shepherds. We ponder with Mary, and keep watch with Joseph. We kneel before the incarnate God who has moved into the neighborhood with us, forever bridging the chasm between the human and the divine with a boundless and kenotic love.

Presbyterian minister Frederick Buechner describes the paradoxical gift of Christmas this way: “Those who believe in God can never in a way be sure of him again. Once they have seen him in a stable, they can never be sure where he will appear or to what lengths he will go or to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation he will descend in his wild pursuit of humankind. If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious of all events, this birth of a peasant’s child, then there is no place or time so lowly and earthbound but that holiness can be present there too. And this means that we are never safe, that there is no place where we can hide from God, no place where we are safe from his power to break in two and recreate

the human heart, because it is just where he seems most helpless that he is most strong, and just where we least expect him that he comes most fully.

“For those who believe in God, it means, this birth, that God himself is never safe from us, and maybe that is the dark side of Christmas, the terror of the silence. He comes in such a way that we can always turn him down, as we could crack the baby’s skull like an eggshell or nail him up when he gets too big for that. God comes to us in the hungry people we do not have to feed, comes to us in the lonely people we do not have to comfort, comes to us in all the desperate human need of people everywhere that we are always free to turn our backs upon. It means that God puts himself at our mercy not only in the sense of the suffering that we can cause him by our blindness and coldness and cruelty, but the suffering that we can cause him simply by suffering ourselves. Because that is the way love works, and when someone we love suffers, we suffer with him, and we would not have it otherwise because the suffering and the love are one, just as it is with God’s love for us.”

(Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*)



## SERVICES

**Christmas Eve 12/24**  
4p Pageant and Eucharist

9p Hymns and Anthems  
9:30p Eucharist

**Christmas Day 12/25**  
10a Eucharist with Carols

All services will be held in person and will be livestreamed on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/c/StMarksEpiscopalChurchPaloAlto>

## PRAYERS WHEN LIGHTING A CHRISTMAS CANDLE

### Christmas Eve

God of promises fulfilled, we thank you for this night, for the grace and hope that have entered into this world filled with troubles and despair. May your love shine in every corner of the world, bringing your peace. May every heart show forth your goodness. Be with us and stay near us, O Christ. Amen.

### Christmas Day & Season

Incarnate God, because you came to us as a helpless little baby, we are reminded that each of us, young and old alike, are your children. Through the incarnation of your Beloved, Jesus the Christ, the Word has been made flesh and has lived among us, full of grace and truth. Open us to your revelation once again. Call us to come and see where Christ leads, that we might know your presence and walk in your way. Amen.

## Prayer and Image Credits

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Advent IV: "The Courageous Choice" by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Nativity: "Mary's Golden Annunciation" by Carmelle Beaugelin

Services: "Ponder" by Hannah Garrity

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