

The Gifts of Advent:

*Four Reflections
for the Advent Season*



*Prepared by members of the Montana Synod Mission Table
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*The Montana Synod of the ELCA
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You are invited...

Advent is a season all about preparation. From gift-buying to decorating our homes, we do a lot of things to prepare for the holiday season. As we do all of these things, we hear at the same time about our preparations, as Christians, for the coming of Christ; both in the manger and into the world a second time.

We invite you to prepare your hearts this season with four reflections on the gifts that this season brings to our lives; from the gift of music to the gift of salvation, from the gifts we have received to the ones that we may give.

Take time each week to reflect. Make time with your family to share these passages of scripture, the devotions, and a moment of prayer. Then, share with everyone the answers and reflections you have. Weekly, we will share the results of each reflection with all the churches by email... so look for it in your bulletin or on a bulletin board!

We pray that these reflections will enrich your preparations!

Fourth Week of Advent

Check out Matthew 2:1-12.

If you were the fourth wise man (or woman or person or magi or whatever), what gift would you bring to the baby Jesus? If I was a wise man? Now that's a stretch. I've been called many things in my life, but I don't believe that "wise" was ever among them.

If I was a wise man, perhaps I would realize that there is nothing really that I could bring to this child, nothing at least in comparison to what Jesus has brought to me. If I was a wise man, perhaps I would recognize that in the innocent face of one so young I was seeing more than just the king of the Jews, but the King of all creation. If I was a wise man, perhaps I would understand that merely kneeling down and offering worship could never be enough of a gift for one who has given so much.

If I was a wise man, I would know that what Jesus asks of me is my whole self. If I was a wise man, I would seek to do as he had bidden – that I love others just as he has loved me. If I was a wise man, I would humbly acknowledge that it is only by the gifts that he gives me – forgiveness and life and salvation, the fullness of God's love in the flesh – that I could ever hope to be wise at all. And if I was a wise man, I would see in the face of all those around me God's own image, and share with them the gifts he has given me.

We give thee but thine own, Lord Jesus. You have called us by name, we are yours. Amen

***What would your gift be to the Christ-child?
Share your generosity with everyone!***

Text "adventgift" to 84700

Or call your answer in at 877-253-9566

Third Week of Advent

Check out John 14:25-27.

Among the joys of Christmas is the excitement of watching others open their gifts, particularly the ones they have received from you. I take a special interest in this, perhaps in part because I was such an ungrateful child, but also because I am a notoriously reluctant shopper. While I love giving, I despise the process of buying. Until I have a definitive list of exactly what I need to get, I cannot force myself to go and I try to do so as quickly and painlessly as possible.

So I watch with eagerness at how my gifts are received. Most of the time my giving has been rewarded. My wife would tell me that I had good taste when I would buy her clothing, though I must admit I would usually bring the girls along to help. And the kids were always delighted when among the candy canes in their otherwise flat stockings they would find a picture of President Grant. The bank is a good place to shop.

The God who gives blesses us with the abundance of creation and with the Son. The Son who gives offers us the Holy Spirit and the peace that surpasses all understanding, gifts that the world cannot give. The Spirit who gives bestows the gift of faith and empowers us to know that it is in giving that we receive the most.

O Giver of all good things, fill our hearts with the joy of receiving and giving. Amen

What would your Christmas be like without gift-giving?

Share your reflection with everyone!

Text "adventgiving" to 84700

Or call your answer in at 877-253-9566

All things came into being through [the Word], and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1.1-5 NRSV

A Prayer of Anticipation for Our Advent Season

Word of God,

Through you, all creation finds life. Through you, we find salvation.

In this season of dark and cold nights, awaken us! Help our eyes to search the dark world around us for your glowing presence. Help our ears listen for your Good News. Help our hearts yearn for the warmth of love and grace which you bring to all people.

We thank you for these gifts, which you freely give. And, we wait for your return.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen

First Week of Advent

Check out Psalm 100.

Growing up, we spent our Christmas Eves at my grandmother's house. There never was a standard meal, though Nanny always claimed there was. Some years we would have oyster stew, other times sandwiches would be served, and occasionally a Christmas goose would find its way to the table. But one thing always took place on our Christmas Eve. After the presents were opened, Nanny would insist that we sing Christmas carols. We would join in as many verses as we could remember - not just the hymns of the church but also the songs about "Santy Claus" as she called him - until our vocal cords could hardly make another peep.

From the time the angels lifted their voices in the heavens, lifting up a resounding "Glory to God in the highest," our voices have sung the wonders of the Savior born in Bethlehem. Without the familiar melodies that announce that God has come among us, our Christmas would be empty. Our carols sweep us into that midnight clear, silent night when angels harked to shepherds keeping their flocks and cattle lowed over the One who slept away in a manger.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. For unto us is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

We sing your praise, O God, for Emmanuel who has come. Amen

Share your favorite Christmas Carol with your fellow Brothers and Sisters throughout the Montana Synod!

Text "adventcarol" to 84700

Or call your answer in at 877-253-9566

Second Week of Advent

Check out Isaiah 9:2-7.

Advent is always a time of anticipation, though what we might anticipate isn't always consistent with the spirit of the season. As so many other children did in those days, we would spend hours poring over the Christmas wishbooks. We would generate fantastic visions of what we would receive on Christmas Day.

But when that great and glorious day arrived and we ripped open our gifts with gusto, we were usually disappointed. Socks and underwear. A hand-made shirt. While our cousins exulted in all the latest toys and gadgets they received, we sulked in a pile of socks and underwear and usually endured a mini-lecture: "It's not what you wants, it's what you gets that makes you healthy" (a favorite saying of my dad).

Nowadays I rejoice in the gifts of necessary items like socks and underwear. And since my mom is no longer here to make any more, I cherish every one of the shirts I have from her and will wear them until they fall off my back. I have learned that all gifts are tied with a ribbon of love.

Still the greatest gift of all comes in the fulfillment of a promise. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us. God breaks through the disappointment and heartache and despair of a world far too focused on things and possession and gives us God's own Son as a gift, a Son who will live among us, die for us, and rise again so that we can live forever. Joy and peace become ours forever in a wrapping of swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

Gracious God, we rejoice in the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

Share your favorite Christmas gift that you have received!

Text "adventrecieve" to 84700

Or call your answer in at 877-253-9566