

An Advent Journey: Preparing Your Heart

Heesnag, the 50-day period preceding Armenian Christmas, is a time to prepare for the coming of Christ, for the celebration of His birth... an opportunity for us to think about the *why* of Christmas – why the greeting cards, the decorations, the gifts, the family gatherings? There are weeks and days of fasting. There is the church lectionary to nourish us with the Word of God.

We might use the time to look within our hearts to see if there is anything that stands between us and the Good News of Jesus' birth.

During Advent, we can rededicate ourselves to Christ through all we do, think, and say. Perhaps Advent can also be an occasion to discover God's gifts all around us. We need to have an open heart to receive Christ – God's greatest gift of all.

If Christmas seems too commercial, there *is* a way to live out the *real* "reason for the season." Try this: Beginning with the first Advent Sunday, spend a few minutes a day on your *spiritual* preparation. If you do, Christmas will mean a great deal more to you this year.

Week 1 (November 26-December 2): Preparation

Numbers 28: 1-2

The Lord told Moses to say to the people of Israel: Offer sacrifices to me at the appointed times of worship, so that I will smell the smoke and be pleased.

Reflection: A Ready Heart

Unless our heart is ready, worship is meaningless. The people of the Bible had to undergo a period of preparation to insure their hearts were ready for worship. By spending this much time and preparation in worshipping God, they gave idolatry little time to influence their lives. God is pleased by hearts that are prepared to receive his guidance.

- What are some things that you do to prepare for Christmas?

Be an Advent Observer

Notice at least one thing each day that the world around you is doing to get ready for Christmas. What is the spiritual significance, if any?

Week 2 (December 3-9): Expectation

John 6:18-21

A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they rowed three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, but he called out to them, "I am here. Don't be afraid."

Reflection: Faith as Expectation

Faith includes great expectation. The disciples were frightened – they did not expect Jesus to come, and they weren't prepared for his help. But faith is a mindset that *expects* God's presence. When we live with this expectation, we can overcome our fears.

- Sometimes things happen when you least expect them to. Think of an example when this has happened to you and made a difference in your life.
- What are your expectations for this Christmas?

Be an Advent Observer

List an expected and/or unexpected joy each day. At week's end, compare the expected and unexpected joys. Which of these were more satisfying to you?

Week 3 (December 10-16): Giving

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each of you should give as you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under pressure, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Reflection: Gracious Giving

The point of giving is not so much the amount we give, but why and how we give. Giving is a response of love and joy for God and others. God does not want gifts given grudgingly. Instead, he wants us to give out of dedication to him, love for fellow believers, the joy of helping those in need, and because it is right to do so. Giving actually benefits the giver, as well as the recipient. A gift can also serve as an act of worship to God and can inspire other people's giving.

- Do you see yourself as a cheerful giver?

Be an Advent Observer

On each day of the coming week, *give*; it could involve money, your time, a talent, something you own.

Week 4 (December 17-23): Family

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise - "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life."

Reflection: Family Honor

A living faith is evident at home in our relationships with those who know us best. Families have a responsibility to each other. Children should honor their parents. Parents should care for and guide their children. Children and parents will ideally relate to each other with love and thoughtfulness.

- Think of the words "honor" and "obey." What do these words mean to you? How do they differ? How do they play out in your life?

Be an Advent Observer

Each day this week, be self-aware in your dealings with others, whether siblings, parents, children, friends, teachers, colleagues at work, and even the people you encounter daily such as store personnel, delivery people, etc. Treat them with the courtesy and care that all God's children deserve.

Week 5 (December 24- 30): Miracles

Psalms 106:2

Who can ever list the glorious miracles of God? Who can ever praise him half enough?

Reflection: Miracles happen more than you realize

This week we celebrate Christmas with the Western Church on December 25. For many of us, this is a day for family celebrations and gift-giving, marking the miracle of Jesus' birth. The more we think about what God has done throughout time, the more we can appreciate what he does in our lives. If you think that you have never seen a miracle, look closer. You will see God's power and loving intervention in your life.

- If a miracle is defined as "*an extraordinary event, beyond natural and scientific explanation, made possible by God*" can you think of a miracle that has happened in your life? Or a miracle that has happened in world events?

Be an Advent Observer

For each day, try to identify one miracle that you have witnessed or experienced. This might be as simple as an extraordinary act of human kindness that defies selfish human nature.

Week 6 (December 31-January 6): Happy New Year! Merry Christmas!

Luke 2:8-14

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Reflection

A new year has arrived and the celebration of a new chapter in human history. God entered our story as the baby born to Mary, destined to redeem humankind; indeed in many ways the old order of things had passed away then and there with his birth and everything had been set in motion to be new (Rev 21:4-5).

- What does the Good News of Jesus' birth truly mean to you?
- In the spirit of New Year's resolutions, in what ways can your life be more God-pleasing?

Be an Advent Observer

Each day this week, write a New Year's Resolution responding to what God asks of us. On January 6, offer these up to Him as your sincere gift.

Christ is born and revealed!
Blessed is the revelation of Christ!
Kreesdos dzunav yev haydnetzav!
Orhnyal eh haydnootyoonun Kreesdosee!