

ADVENT

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Day 15 | Third Sunday of Advent, Dec. 13

Courage to admit you need help

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized — John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

— John 3:22-30

Reflect – What would it mean for you to decrease and Jesus to increase? How can you raise Him up in your life and take second place? Is there a specific area where God is wanting you to trust Him and defer to His ways, saying yes to Him even though that means you might mean to say no to yourself?

Pray – Tell God that you want to Jesus to increase in your life. Tell Him in what ways you want that to be true. Ask God to show you how that can happen in a specific way. Ask Him what it would take for Jesus to increase and you to decrease.

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Day 16 | Monday, Dec. 14 A light in the darkness

Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. Now if people say to you, "Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living, for teaching and for instruction?" surely, those who speak like this will have no dawn! They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry; when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will curse their king and their gods. They will turn their faces upward, or they will look to the earth, but will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness. — Isaiah 8:16–22

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined. —
Isaiah 9:1–2

Consider – As you look around you, where do you see darkness and uncertainty? We can see in part, but we can't see in full. The future is always uncertain. That's part of living on earth, it's part of the human condition. As you contemplate where that uncertainty is most profound, where do you need light? We are told that God is light. Jesus is the light of the world. He provides us the light we need for our next step and for walking well. Now we see through a glass darkly, but one day we will see face to face. In what ways does God want you to seek more light from Him?

Pray – Ask God to remove the scales from your eyes that keep you from seeing more clearly. Tell Him that you are wanting more of His light in your life and that you want to move closer to His light. Ask Him to show you the areas that you are still in darkness, that He is calling you out of.

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Day 17 | Tuesday, Dec. 15

The courage to stick close to Jesus

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance.

When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. — Luke 22:54–62

Consider – There were moments at the beginning of Jesus' life where He was rejected and despised. There were also times at the end of His life where even His closest friends left Him. Even though He is our Lord and King, we can stray away and deny His rightful place in our lives. In what ways have you wandered away, maybe even unknowingly, or over time, or just carelessly? He is always calling us back, inviting us to return. His mercy is new every morning.

Pray – Tell God that His mercy amazes you. Thank Him for His faithfulness to you, even when you have been unfaithful to Him. Ask that He would give you future grace for temptations you haven't even experienced yet. Tell Him that you want to stay close, clinging to Him for life and peace.

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Day 18 | Wednesday, Dec. 16

The courage to look forward

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

— Mark 1:1–8

Consider – One of the roles of John the Baptist was to prepare the way for Jesus to be born. He reminded people of the importance of repentance, asking people to make a clean break from their sins and turn to God in devotion. That is still the way to prepare for Jesus, to turn away from wickedness and darkness and sin in order to turn more fully to Jesus.

Pray – Thank the Father for sending His Son. Tell Him what you are thankful for about Jesus, what you are in awe of. Tell God that you want more of the presence of Christ in your life, more of Jesus. Ask God to show you how you can prepare for Jesus and to reveal to you what you should give away, give up, and let go of.

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Day 19 | Thursday, Dec. 17

Finding the courage to give what little we have

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." — Matthew 3:1-12

Consider – Why is reverence and even godly fear good for us spiritually? In what ways does it affect you when you see Jesus as Judge and the one who brings justice to the injustices of this world? Have you thought about how Jesus sees you and what He is pleased with, as well as what He would ask you to change?

Pray – Ask God to give you His eyes related to How He sees you. Invite Him to show you, to tell you what He thinks of you. Let Him affirm you and show you His deep love for you. Let Him tell of your safety and security in Him, that you are not rejected but are accepted. Invite Him to also search and sift your heart and see if anything displeases Him. Thank Him that He cares for you.

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Day 20 | Friday, Dec. 18 The courage to allow others to speak

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak. — Ephesians 6:10-20

Consider – Francis of Assisi once said, “At all times preach Christ, and when necessary use words.” Sometimes actions are all that is needed. Sometimes, nothing replaces words. Have you thought about how we are to know when each is appropriate? Is God asking you to speak today? Is He putting a message on your heart for someone?

Pray – Ask God what He wants you to speak today. Ask Him for a new boldness and courage to speak the truth in love. Tell Him that you are willing to be His mouthpiece today. Ask for an opportunity and for His prompting to be clear. Thank Him for speaking in our life and for revealing Himself to you.

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Day 21 | Saturday, Dec. 19 **Courage to trust all will be well**

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God.

They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years. When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea.

They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. —

Revelation 20:1–10

(continued below)

Consider – Have you thought how Christmas sets up the events at the end of the world where Jesus will rule and reign over everything completely and perfectly? He was born a humble, suffering servant who would bear the sins of the world. He will also one day be the final, perfect, victorious king who conquers all forces of evil. Jesus is both, the Lamb, and the Lion. Turn your eyes to Him today and realize He is Savior and King.

Pray – Thank Jesus for all He is and why you are grateful for what He has done for you. Tell Him that you are also trusting that He will put everything aright one day. Thank Him that there will be no more crying, no death. Express your amazement at His power and your gratitude for His love.