

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2020 LIGUORI
PUBLICATIONS,
A REDEMPTORIST
MINISTRY.

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG

PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

C2011A

NOVEMBER 2020

Advent Day by Day

A MISSION TO REJOICE IN POSSIBILITIES

MARY KATHARINE DEELEY

Advent is the season to get our priorities straight—to remember what is important to us and why—and to figure out how to let go of what we want so we can embrace with joy what we really need. Mary Katharine Deeley's Scripture selections and reflections help us find this peace during the hustle and bustle of the season so we can prepare the way of the Lord in a way that's guaranteed to enhance our faith.

First Week of Advent

SUNDAY Find Your Mission Statement (Luke 1:45)

In the beginning of our spiritual year, we should ask, what is my mission this Advent? Let us enter this season of preparation in a deeper way. What does the coming of the Messiah mean for us? We find answers in a myriad of strange images: valleys raised, mountains made low, peace between lions and lambs. We hear the answers in commands to stay awake and keep watch. Our mission in Advent is to embrace what God says is possible and to give witness to these possibilities. Light can shine in our darkness, and a stable can be the birthplace of a king.

MONDAY Rejoice in the Season (Isaiah 12:3)

How can the mere act of waiting be joyful? Any pregnant woman can tell us. We dream about what the baby will look like; we anticipate the first touch and laugh. Suddenly we realize our hearts have chosen to be joyful—to overlook the discomfort, inconvenience, and even uncertainty in favor of what is to come. This is how Advent is for Christians. It is deep joy in the face of occasional discomfort, inconvenience, and uncertainty. We know this God who came to Bethlehem, and we know God will come again. Then, as before, the whole world will rejoice!

TUESDAY Adapt to God's Schedule (John 1:39)

The signs of God's presence are here and now. Christ is born in the hearts of emergency workers who rush to the aid of those caught in disasters. Christ is born in those who share what they have—in every season of the year—with those who have less. Christ is born any place where service to others and the praise of God is a way of life. The question is not whether we're ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25. It's whether we see where Christ is being born right now.

WEDNESDAY Learning Over a Lifetime (Isaiah 43:19)

About the time we find ourselves managing the details of our own lives, the deduction we made as teenagers—that our parents are dumb—tends to disappear. It's much the same with Advent. When we settle into complacency, supposing we've seen it all, God shows us how much we don't know of compassion, justice, and righteousness. "Lord, how do we love our enemies? How do we know the right thing to do?" Our questions help us discover humility in our ignorance, and they open us to the grace of discipleship.

THURSDAY Be a Light in the World (John 1:5)

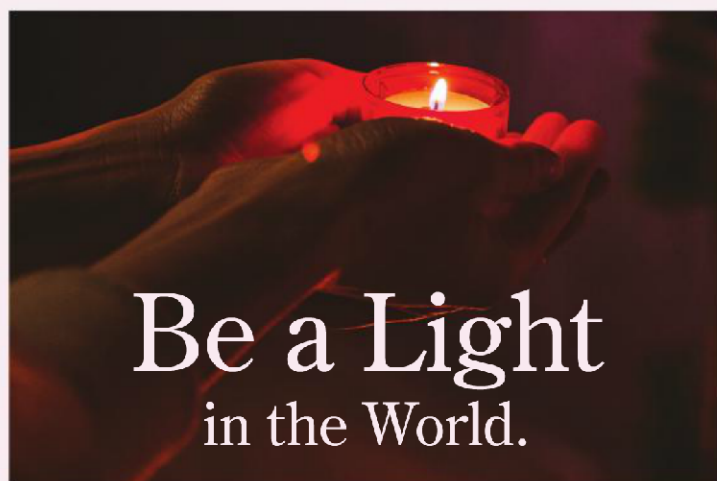
The experience of Jesus for those who lived more than 2,000 years ago echoes in us. Today, the spirit of Jesus dwells in the hearts of believers who gather in his name and pray. Today, the work of Jesus—truly divine and truly human—continues in the Church, which strives to be the body of Christ to the world. How do we best allow the light that is Christ to shine in us so that those who live in darkness can see it? May we become the echo of the word of God that will lead others to faith.

FRIDAY Provoke Others to Love (Hebrews 10:24)

Sometimes provoking us is the only way to move us out of our comfort zones and into action. Being provoked makes us examine our assumptions, investigate our lives, and discover the need for change. Perhaps the irritating situations and people we encounter is God's way of provoking us into seeing how much more we need love. Let's celebrate what provokes us this season and recall the times we have been provocative for someone else. Then, we can know our need for the grace of God and ask for the peace only God can give.

SATURDAY Embrace Happy Ignorance (Mark 1:7–8)

Jesus' birth heralds our own birth to newness of life in God. At the same time, it also means the death of everything that keeps us from God. And it is difficult to let go of things like the need for control and material wealth, or the ways we fail to love one another. Do we clearly understand what the coming of Jesus means for us? No—it will be everything and nothing like we expect. But that's why we can enter Advent with the same eagerness of new parents looking forward to every change in their infant and in themselves.



Second Week of Advent

SUNDAY Crying in the Wilderness (Isaiah 40:3–5)

Sometime during his formation in the desert, John the Baptist recognized the paradox that happens when God's self-giving love and demand for justice join. The Scripture tells us that rough places will be made smooth and mountains will be leveled. God is sending a servant whose mouth is a two-edged sword and who will make the ultimate sacrifice even for those who mock him. Christmas proclaims the coming of God's reign. The result changes the world—and not always in easy or pleasant ways. No wonder John was depicted as a wild man when he proclaimed this message to the world.

MONDAY Share the Power of Faith (Isaiah 60:19, 20)

Have you believed in something so much you'd spend a lifetime watching for it—and pass on your hope to future generations? The Israelites did exactly that when they embraced God's promise to send a messiah to a broken world. Each generation told the stories of God's covenant and love until everyone knew the promise by heart. Now we are the storytellers who help our children learn what we have always known: Christ will come again, proclaiming the final reign of God. Every year we practice looking for signs to be ready when the moment comes.

TUESDAY Keep Watch (Matthew 25:13)

I wonder what would happen if everything was inscribed with straightforward instructions. Aimed at our bodies: "For best results, eat moderately, exercise daily." What about our spiritual lives? Knowing our penchant for distraction, God may write one inscription at a time. During Advent: "For best results, keep watch." Everything will happen around us whether we are watching or not. Christmas will come, grace will come down from heaven, and our lives will go on. But we are caught both by the simple description and the gentle challenge: "For best results...."

WEDNESDAY Celebrate Freedom (Luke 1:38)

With God's grace, we can make a different choice. We don't have to get caught up in a keeping up with the Jones' lifestyle. We're free to obey God and not our own desires. During Advent, we celebrate the first among us to show what is possible when we're free from the effects of sin. We remember a young woman born in humility. When God came calling, Mary made her decision and uttered a joyful yes. In this season, we celebrate the grace embodied in a young woman whose freedom made it possible to open herself—body, mind, heart, and soul—to God.

THURSDAY Discern Real Value (Philippians 1:9–10)

Most people carry a wilderness in them—loneliness, anxiety, fear, or sin. But the wilderness also is a place where we are less distracted and can easily see what we value. Society says we should value wealth and power. To discern real value requires careful listening to the voice that calls out, “Prepare!” God values the way we love and forgive. Let us find value in the gift of grace that appears in the guise of a friend or a silent moment. Here, God makes the rough places of our hearts smooth so we can see God more readily when he appears.

FRIDAY Seek Transformation (Hebrews 1:1–2)

If we look closely, we can find spiritual life marks that help us find direction. God gave us creation, Scripture, and himself in Jesus Christ to show us the way. The sacraments of the Church guide us step by step toward a transformed life of grace. God wants us to know how far we have come and where we need to go. Advent gives us the luxury of searching for both landmarks and life marks on the spiritual journey in preparation for following the One for whom we have waited our whole lives.

SATURDAY Herald the Good News (Luke 2:10)

To proclaim to the world that Christ is near is the work of Advent. The heights we climb are more subtle. Our proclamation comes in living lives of goodwill. If we’re lucky, the strength of our proclamation lasts long past Christmas Day, reminding us that the poor do not suddenly disappear the day after Christmas. What we proclaim and do during Advent sets the tone for the entire year. Our mountain is wherever we find ourselves this year. We are heralds for the Good News of God.

Third Week of Advent

SUNDAY Heart of my Heart (1 John 3:2)

It is Christ, this Child whose birth we celebrate, who brings us to the light of faith. Christ gives us a voice to follow and becomes the way by which we walk. Christ, and the mother who gave him life, and the father who nurtured him dare us to journey into the world with passion, courage, and hope. If we do it right, the world will see our hearts beat and know that God’s heartbeat provides the foundation for our lives. Then, at the end God will look at us and say in soothing tones, “Heart of my heart.”

MONDAY See Hope in Brokenness (Psalm 147:3)

God is not deterred by the worst the world has to offer. Each time the cares and sorrows of the world threaten to overwhelm us, God counters with a message of love given shape by a child in a manger and a man on a cross. In these acts, God tells us that nothing is so broken or completely unholy that God cannot enter and transform it. When we leave our churches on Christmas, we become witnesses of God’s grace in a world where God’s grace is sorely needed.

TUESDAY Stand on Holy Ground (Exodus 3:5)

Where is God burning in the world this Advent? Perhaps he burns in the peacemakers and in those who work for a just world. God burns in those who ask for the grace not to say the word *need* when they mean *want*. We’ve been standing on holy ground without knowing it. Moses took off his shoes—the command of God but also a sign of awe and respect. But it also meant he chose to stay and listen to what God had to say. Perhaps this Advent we can follow God’s commands.

WEDNESDAY Live Life on the Edge (Ephesians 5:8)

For the early Christians, living on the edge was life lived in expectation and wonder. It meant praying together and believing that an unspeakable act of cruelty heralded the reconciliation of God and humankind. Advent proclaims the arrival of the season of Incarnation. Here, a Child calls us to live on the edge by loving our enemies, caring for the poor and disenfranchised, and believing that God loved the world so much he became one of us. If we’ve never allowed ourselves to embrace the adrenaline rush of this edginess, it’s time to start.

THURSDAY Bear Witness to Grace (Isaiah 9:5)

How do we give witness to God’s mystery? First, we carry in our words and actions the free gift of life from God and eternal life through Christ. Second, we bear witness to love because the heart of the Incarnation is love—spilling over into the waiting world. Our love for one another is made possible because God first loved us. Finally, we bear witness to communion: We live with and in God, with and for one another. Jesus was born to make us one in love and in God. Our faith gives us certainty of this. Our lives witness that truth.

FRIDAY Revel in the Incarnation (Luke 2:16)

While beautiful churches evoke a sense of the holy, God’s coming is a miracle of humble origins. God chose to be carried in the womb of a girl, clothed in flesh rather than surrounded by a gold tabernacle and stained-glass windows. The Incarnation is the reason we dare share the secrets of our hearts with God. We reveal our loftiest ambitions and our unholy thoughts and place them in God’s hands so he might turn them to good. We know we’re not alone and that we’ve been given a gift in our hope for the feast to come.

SATURDAY Let Go of the Schedule (Isaiah 55:8)

God often comes in the middle of things that throw our calendars into chaos. Birth, death, suffering, and profound joy don’t come to us as neatly planned appointments. God’s hour comes in the fullness of God’s time, not ours. To embrace Advent, we must make room for God to enter our lives in any mundane, spectacular, or grief-filled moment. We must demonstrate our belief that God can transform the world one person at a time—beginning with us. To be an Advent person is to make God’s hour and God’s plan our own.

Fourth Week of Advent

SUNDAY Reach Out in Love (1 John 4:7)

Christianity demands that we be in a relationship of love with others—that we recognize them as children of God with their own dignity before God and worthy of our time and effort. It's far easier to write a check, drop a coin, or turn our backs. Before he made us, God loved us. The love of God is a deep well that never runs dry. From that well we can extend a hand to family, strangers—even enemies—and be a model of love and the true sign of God's presence in the world.

MONDAY Find the Silence (Psalm 131:1–3)

It never fails that the closer it gets to Christmas, the noisier it gets. But after the last present is wrapped, the last prayer said, and the last child tucked away, a holy silence unfolds and our world holds its breath. It is the coming of our Lord. His birth was long ago, but still there is something special about this silent night that makes us turn in love to family and friends or reach out to a stranger. “And the Word became flesh,” John tells us, “and made his dwelling among us” (1:14).

TUESDAY Forego the Darkness (Isaiah 9:1)

Darkness is an inadequate word to describe a world where children starve in gut-wrenching poverty. Something more than darkness makes companies topple under the weight of their own greed. Still, the great call of Isaiah echoes through the centuries: We see evidence of God's light in the people who make their mark on this world by selflessly giving their time and treasure to others. It's our turn now. The light invites us to turn away from darkness and to follow God—the source of all light.

WEDNESDAY Cherish Realities (Mark 10:45)

Every time we taste something delicious or smell something pleasant, we are reminded that God feeds us with love, hope, and the Body of Christ around the Lord's table. We should recommit ourselves to sharing the gifts we have received—whether food, kind words, or our own faith in God. It is time to pass on these gifts that cannot be wrapped with gift paper or decorated with a bow, to someone who has not yet experienced them. It will mean more than anything we can buy.

Mary Katharine Deeley, MDiv, PhD, earned a master of divinity degree from Yale Divinity School and a doctorate in Hebrew Scripture and Early Christian Literature from Northwestern University. She currently serves as the pastoral associate and director of Christ the Teacher Institute for the Sheil Catholic Center at Northwestern.

THURSDAY Spiritual Revelation (1 Corinthians 13:12)

We are all little churches who come to know God through the unfolding of our lives. Just as churches are places in which we come together to worship God, so are our lives. We witness birth, death, and resurrection in profound moments of gratitude and despair. These are the instruments of God's revelation to us. That revelation reaches its fullness in Jesus Christ, and God's invitation is to stand erect in Christ's presence, lifting our hearts and minds in joyful praise. We experience the deep awareness of the mystery that surrounds us.

FRIDAY Reflect What Time Means (Ezekiel 34:16)

Every family has its symbols of the season. Each year we lay them out with love and care because they lend meaning to the holiday. The edges may be frayed and the figures worn, but we carefully preserve what we can and replace what we cannot. In truth, we are a little more frayed and worn out as well. But just as we will always keep Christmas with our symbols, God will always keep us close. Regardless of how tattered we may become over the years, we are God's own people now and always.

SATURDAY Model a Simple Life (John 13:35)

Simple living cultivates gratitude for the small things in life—the laughter of a child, the beauty of a waterfall, and the love of a friend or spouse. The focus is on receiving what others offer and sharing what we have. After his birth, Jesus received presents of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, the love of his mother and foster father, and the love of his Father in heaven. What stayed with him was the love he shared with others and the call to love he asked of those he encountered.



SHUTTERSTOCK

December 25, Christmas

In 1914, soldiers on both sides in World War I found out just how compelling the peace of Christ can be when they called a Christmas truce on Christmas Eve. They sang carols and played soccer. For one magical night, they began to know each other as men. The story is immortalized in the song “Christmas in the Trenches” by John McCutcheon. The peace Jesus brings is not a temporary halt in a seemingly endless war. Rather, the peace of Christ lies in the understanding that God reigns over all and that nothing in this world can overcome God's love for us. May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts, now and always.