

# **LIGHT OF LIFE**

## **Advent Meditations**



**The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.  
—Isaiah 9:2**

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Paintings by Lillas Trotter**

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2022 edition

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## Introduction



Advent means “coming.” In the church calendar, the season of Advent begins four Sundays prior to Christmas Day. It is a time of preparation for the celebration of Christ’s birth much as Lent is a season of preparation for Holy Week—Christ’s Passion and Resurrection.

This devotional is designed as an aid to help you and your family focus on Christ during Advent—a time of year often cluttered with distractions and busyness. Each week focuses on a particular aspect of the story of Jesus in anticipation of His birth: Week 1—the prophets who foretold Christ’s coming; Week 2—the city of David (Bethlehem) where Christ was born; Week 3—the shepherds who first witnessed the baby Jesus; Week 4—the angels who heralded the Incarnation. The story culminates, of course, with the birth of Christ who is the Light of the world.

Each devotional introduces the daily topic, a painting and quotation by Lilius Trotter, related Scripture with several thought/discussion questions, and a meditation. It concludes with a Moment with Lilius and a Heart-Song. The daily readings gradually build a comprehensive picture of the Christmas story, much like a jigsaw puzzle, taking shape with each added piece.

Many churches and families celebrate Advent with a candle-lighting ceremony. Five candles comprise the Advent wreath, each one lit in succession weekly, culminating in the lighting of the central Christ candle on Christmas Eve. The four weekly candles are traditionally deep purple in color to signify the royalty of the Christ child. In some traditions a pink or rose candle is lit on the third week of Advent to signify the joy of the occasion of the shepherds’ discovery of the birth of Messiah in Bethlehem. The Christ candle, in the center, is white, symbolizing His purity, being born of the virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and being without sin in His life. More important than the color of the candles, however, is the symbolism of the lit candles, anticipating the light that Jesus—*The Light of Life*—brought to the darkened world!

**For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.**

**—Psalm 36:9**

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## THE PROPHETS' CANDLE

### First Sunday of Advent

#### The Light of the Hope of the Prophets



“The things that are impossible with men are possible with God” [Luke 18:27]. Yes, face it out to the end. Cast away every shadow of hope on the human side as a positive hindrance to the Divine; heap the difficulties together recklessly, and pile on as many more as you can find: you cannot get beyond that blessed climax of impossibility. Let faith swing out on Him. He is the God of the impossible.

—Lilias Trotter, *The Glory of the Impossible*

#### **Scripture: Isaiah 9:1–7**

In Isaiah 9:1–2, what does the prophet Isaiah say about light?

How is this Light described in verses 6–7?

#### **Meditation on Scripture**

Advent season—a time of anticipation, a time of preparation. As we light the first candle, we see the first flicker of hope: light in a dark world. At first, the prophets—even the angels—were mystified by the exact nature of that hope.

Progressive Revelation was God’s chosen means of making His purpose clear. The special gift of a Messiah, a Redeemer, was revealed bit by bit—each added element of information, a clue in the “mystery” we now know to be Jesus Christ. Early clues were deliberately vague, but each clue shed greater light in a world darkened by sin. Over centuries, clue upon clue, light upon light—a pattern emerged until the world was ablaze with light—the birth of Christ! Light of life.

During this week, while we focus on the Prophets' Candle, we will first consider the context in which this gift was promised: The Plan; Paradise Lost. Then we will look for the clues: The Promise—the light of hope of the prophets.

O most Mighty! O most Mighty!  
Far beyond the seraph's thought,  
Art Thou then so mean and lowly,  
As unheeded prophets taught?  
O the magnitude of meekness!  
Worth from worth immortal sprung;  
O the strength of infant weakness,  
If eternal is so young!  
—Christopher Smart

### **A Moment with Liliias**

“Let faith swing out on Him. He is the God of the impossible.”

What does this mean for you now, at the beginning of the Advent season?

### **Heart-Song**

O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.  
—“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” a Latin hymn

## First Monday of Advent

### The Plan

*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*  
—Genesis 1:31



The morning star is so perfectly marvellous these days. It hangs in the dawn like a great globe of silver fire. Of all the images of Christ it seems the one that is almost more than an image—it is so utterly like Him in its pure glory. And it sets one's heart crying for the promise “I will give him the morning star” [Revelation 2:28]—the revelation of Himself to the watching ones.

—Lilias Trotter, January 1899

### Scripture: Genesis 1:26–31

In what way did God set humankind apart from all of creation?

What instructions did God give the man and woman concerning His creation?

What was God's assessment of what He made?

### Meditation on Scripture

Genesis gives an account of the very beginning of the history of humankind: the crown of God's creation. The Plan—God's intention—was Paradise: Humankind governing the created order; all relating in harmony with one another. “It was very good.” *Perfection*.

Today with our natural resources tainted, if not depleted, it is difficult to visualize planet Earth in its perfect, undefiled state. It must have been breathtaking: fish, birds, and all the land creatures living in harmony with in an unspoiled Paradise. Although we have no conscious memory of such perfection, humans carry at heart even to this day a longing, a homesickness for a Paradise—a God-given sense of what it could have been, what it was when humankind lived in the unsullied garden.

### **A Moment with Liliás**

In the context of Liliás's amazement at seeing the natural world's beauty in the "morning star," consider Jesus's description of Himself, the Promised One who will make all things **new**: "I am the root and descendant of David, the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16).

### **Heart-Song**

Of the Father's love begotten  
ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the Source, the Ending He,  
of the things that are, that have been,  
and that future years shall see,  
evermore and evermore!

This is He whom heav'n-taught singers  
sang of old with one accord,  
whom the Scriptures of the prophets  
promised in their faithful word;  
now He shines, the long expected;  
let creation praise its Lord,  
evermore and evermore!

—"Of the Father's Love Begotten," ancient hymn by Marcus Aurelius  
Clemens Prudentius



## First Tuesday of Advent

### Paradise Lost

*The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.*  
—Genesis 3:22



This is the true inward vision, the faith of seeing, as distinct from the faith of deductive proof. It is an illumination that abides from the beginning, not merely flashes of light that visit you from time to time when you have reached a certain stage. For this light is not to be sought within the recesses of your being but outside yourself and away in another, even in Him whom God has sent to be the Light of the World.

—Lilias Trotter, *The Way of the Sevenfold Secret*

### Scripture: Genesis 3:1–24

What did God tell Adam and Eve they could not do?

What was the immediate result of their disobedience?

How did Adam and Eve respond to God’s inquisition?

What consequences did Adam and Eve suffer for their disobedience?

Why do you think we include this story in our Advent readings?

### Meditation on Scripture

In his book *Telling the Truth*, noted novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner said, “The gospel is bad news before it is good news. It is the news that man is a sinner, to use the old word, that he is evil in the imagination of his heart.” Darkness. Paradise Lost. Creature fallen . . . and the rest of creation follows: Eve, Adam, right on down to each of us, today. “All have sinned,” says Romans 3:23, or, as the *Book of Common Prayer* reads, “There is no health in us.”

With the crime come the consequences: pain, toil, banishment, alienation, death. “The gospel is bad news before it is good news,” for without darkness, there is no need for light; there is no need for salvation. It was into this sin-darkened world that the first dim light flickered, the light of the hope of the prophets.

### **A Moment with Lili**

“It is an illumination that abides from the beginning.”

What does this say to you about the light of Christ—in the world and in your own life?

### **Heart-Song**

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel’s strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.

—“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus,” by Charles Wesley

## First Wednesday of Advent

### The Promise

*Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.*  
—Genesis 22:18



Our meeting place with God and our beholding His glory, lies not in our going up to Him, but in His coming down to us in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. “God who commended the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ” [2 Corinthians 4:6], the divine radiance for our souls.

—Lilias Trotter, *The Way of the Sevenfold Secret*

### Scripture: Genesis 22:1–18

The first hint of a redemptive plan is indicated in Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” To Abraham, additional light is given.

With what provision did God spare Isaac’s life?

What significance do you see in the name Abraham gave to the mountain site?

What promises are made to Abraham concerning his offspring?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

The first faint flicker of light—the first clue—was directed to Satan in the presence of Adam and Eve: “I will put enmity between you and the woman.” Though Satan will “strike the heel” of their offspring, their offspring will crush his head. The death blow goes to Satan. The final victory to man. But how?

Later, another clue sheds further light. After testing Abraham’s obedience—would he give up his son?—God promised to bless all nations through Abraham’s offspring. God reaffirmed that promise to the patriarchs—Abraham’s son Isaac and grandson Jacob—keeping the light of hope alive in their hearts.

But how? When? Through the following centuries, God would reveal more of His Plan through the prophets, keeping the light of hope alive in the hearts of later descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Consider the words of C. S. Lewis in his book *Miracles*: “For the Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle . . . what is uncreated, eternal came into nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing nature up with Him.”

### **A Moment with Liliias**

“Our meeting place with God . . . lies not in our going up to Him, but in His coming down to us.”

What does this mean to you personally?

### **Heart-Song**

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,  
And with fear and trembling stand;  
Ponder nothing earthly minded,  
For with blessing in His hand,  
Christ our God to earth descended,  
Our full homage to demand.

—“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence,” Gerard Moultrie, from the Litany  
of St. James

## First Thursday of Advent

### The Plan Unfolds

*“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.”*

—Jeremiah 23:5



The sun must come to us, that is clear, for we cannot go to it. It sends forth its rays, we know not how. They are of one nature with the sun and come down to earth, and bring the sun as it were to our doors, but with its light and warmth softened till we can bear the radiance and rejoice in it.

—Lilias Trotter, *The Sevenfold Secret*

### **Scripture: Jeremiah 23:5–6**

What clues does Jeremiah reveal about David’s descendant?

What will He be called?

What do we learn about the King’s rule from Isaiah 9:6-7?

How will people respond to His rule?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

Many years after God's promise to the patriarchs, He revealed more clues through His prophet Jeremiah. "I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely." Isaiah proceeded to elaborate on the nature of His reign, describing a creation at peace within the scope of His rule.

Imagine the outsiders' response to this added light: that all nations would rally to Israel's king! As for the insiders, the nation of Israel, they heard the king-part and anticipated the royal reign. But they missed the very essence of this king.

They were looking for a king  
to stay their foes and lift them high;  
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing  
that made a woman cry.  
—George MacDonald, "That Holy Thing"

### **A Moment with Lili'as**

"[The rays] bring the sun as it were to our doors, but with its light and warmth softened till we can bear the radiance and rejoice in it."

Write a sentence that relates Lili'as's metaphor to God the eternal Son, come to earth as one of us.

### **Heart-Song**

What child is this, who, laid to rest  
On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet  
While shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the King  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud  
The babe, the Son of Mary.  
—What Child Is This? by William Chatterton Dix

## First Friday of Advent

### Details Revealed

*The Lord himself will give you a sign.*  
—Isaiah 7:14



For if the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon our hearts there is an ocean of grace and love and power lying all around us, an ocean to which all earthly light is but a drop, and it is ready to transfigure us, as the sunshine transfigured the dandelion, and on the same condition—that we stand full face to God.

—Lilias Trotter, *Focussed*

### **Scripture: Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:10–14**

What clues does Micah reveal concerning the Messiah's birthplace?

Why was this a surprising birthplace?

According to the prophet Isaiah, what sign will be given to distinguish the promised king?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

As the “fullness of time” draws nearer, the Old Testament prophets reveal clues yet more specific in nature. Micah states the place of birth—Bethlehem “small among the clans of Judah.” What a surprising birthplace for one who would be ruler over Israel!

Isaiah provides a yet more astonishing sign—the baby would be born of a virgin! Did they really hear the prophet? What did they think? And could they even begin to fathom the significance of the name chosen for this royal son? Immanuel: God with us.

By now the sky of Old Testament history was literally studded with stars of prophecy, lighting the horizon for that great coming day!



We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
from the Father before all ages,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God.  
—from the Nicene Creed

### **A Moment with Lillas**

“If the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon our hearts there is an ocean of *grace and love and power* lying all around us.”

Consider the three italicized nouns. What does each mean for you in your walk today?

### **Heart-Song**

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here;  
And drive away the shades of night  
And pierce the clouds and bring us light!  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heavenly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.  
—“Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” a Latin hymn



## First Saturday of Advent

### Prepare for His Coming

*Make straight the way for the Lord.*  
—John 1:23



“Until the daystar arises in your hearts” [2 Peter 1:19]—that has been lit up these last days with a sense of God’s unfolding: the inner revelation of the coming Jesus that must come before the outward. Such an absolutely new thing as when this morning star flashes up from behind the dark ridge of distant mountains—poised for an instant like a flame kindled on the crest and then soaring slowly upward.

—Lilias Trotter, January 21, 1899

### **Scripture: Malachi 3:1; Luke 1:11–17, 76; John 1:6–9**

By what means would God prepare His people for Christ’s coming (Malachi 3:1)?

Who was the messenger who would prepare the way for Christ?

What would be the thrust of his preparation?

What further information about this man and his mission is given in John 1:6–7?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

As God anticipated man’s clouded vision, He not only offered prophetic clues to clarify His intention, but He also promised a “messenger” to prepare the way for the Lord, the long-awaited Messiah.

An angel prepared the prospective father, Zechariah, of his future son and also of his message: to give the people a knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

So at last, when John finally fulfilled his mission as a witness to the Light, the stage was set. For those who had hearts to believe and eyes to see, “the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (John 1:9). “Make straight the way for the Lord” (v. 23).

For us who have the additional light of hindsight, the message of Advent is the same. The true Light is coming. Repent and prepare your hearts. Make straight the way for the Lord.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

—2 Peter 1:19

### **A Moment with Lili**

“The inner revelation of the coming Jesus that must come before the outward.”

In what ways has God prepared your heart with inner revelation, as the sun provides light before the moment of sunrise?

### **Heart-Song**

Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding,  
“Christ is nigh,” it seems to say;  
“Cast away the works of darkness,  
O ye children of the day.”

Wakened by the solemn warning,  
From earth’s bondage let us rise.  
Christ, our sun, all sloth dispelling,  
Shines upon the morning skies.  
—from a Latin hymn

## THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE

### Second Sunday of Advent

*The Light bearing witness to the Savior who was born in Bethlehem.*



The first impression of Palestine was of the strangely small scale of everything. But before nightfall one came to realize that this is an intrinsic part—that God wants to show us that nothing is great or small to Him who inhabited eternity in its dimensions of space as well as of time. It is a pivot land—and pivots are apt to be small things in the eyes of those who do not understand their meaning.

—Lilias Trotter, March 26, 1924

#### **Scripture: Luke 2:1–7**

For what reason did Joseph leave Nazareth to go to Bethlehem?

What is the significance of Joseph’s lineage: “the house and line of David” (v. 4)?

Describe the birth of Jesus.

#### **Meditation on Scripture**

This week the action narrows down to a place—Bethlehem; to a habitat—a stable outside an inn; to a crib—a hay-filled manger; to a baby—the long-awaited Christ. In preparation for the great event, the principal characters—Mary and Joseph—are given a special light.

As we focus on the light shining on Bethlehem, we will consider the simplicity of the setting God selected to bestow His incomparable gift, a baby: God incarnate.

We will consider His choice of a humble cast: the supportive characters of young Mary and Joseph the carpenter and the long-awaited King, in the form of a helpless baby.

And, as we consider His gift to us, we will reconsider our efforts of this week, giving to others—card writing, present buying and wrapping, and the sheer energy expended—as a direct response to God’s gift to us.

Moonless darkness stands between.  
Past, the Past, no more be seen!  
But the Bethlehem-star may lead me  
To the sight of Him who freed me  
From the self that I have been.  
Make me pure, Lord: Thou art holy.  
Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly;  
Now beginning, and alway:  
Now begin, on Christmas Day.  
—Gerald Manley Hopkins, “Moonless Darkness”

### **A Moment with Lilies**

“Nothing is great or small to Him who inhabited eternity.”

What does this mean to you as you face the coming week?

### **Heart-Song**

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.  
—“O Little Town of Bethlehem,” by Phillips Brooks

## Second Monday of Advent

### The Annunciation

*For nothing is impossible with God*

—Luke 1:37



We love to see the impossible done. And so does God.

—Lilias Trotter, *Glory of the Impossible*

### **Scripture: Luke 1:26–38**

What messenger brought Mary the birth announcement?

What was Mary's initial response?

What details did the angel offer concerning the child Mary was to deliver?

How did the angel answer Mary's question: "How will this be since I am a virgin? (v. 34)?"

What was Mary's final response to the news of the angel?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

Is it possible for us to imagine the improbabilities of this dramatic narrative? For starters, an angel visitation was not a common occurrence, but consider the news Gabriel brought: Mary, a virgin, will be with child! As if this phenomenon was not staggering enough—consider the description of the child—the baby would be a son, a king destined to rule over the house of Jacob, a never-ending kingdom. In view of all that Mary was processing, the angel's P.S.—your elderly cousin Elizabeth also is pregnant—may have hardly fazed her.

The bottom line of the angel's announcement is stated in Luke 1:37: "*For nothing is impossible with God.*" Is that not the bottom line of the Advent message as well? *Nothing* is impossible with God. Imagine: from Bethlehem, "small among the clans of Judah" (Micah 5:2)—inconsequential among the nations of the world—the Light has shined, to bring people of all nations "out of the darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Let our heart response be as Mary's: "I am the Lord's servant." So be it.

This is the irrational season  
When love blooms bright and wild.  
Had Mary been filled with reason  
There'd have been no room for the child.  
—Madeleine L'Engle, "After Annunciation"

### **A Moment with Liliás**

"We love to see the impossible done."  
What does this mean to you at this point in life?

### **Heart-Song**

The Word whom earth and sea and sky  
Adore and laud and magnify,  
Whose might they show, whose praise they tell,  
In Mary's body deigned to dwell.

Blest in the message Gabriel brought,  
Blest in the work the Spirit wrought,  
Most blest to bring to human birth  
The long-desired of all the earth.  
—Latin hymn

## Second Tuesday of Advent

### The Visitation

*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!*  
—Luke 1:42



Our experiences, the blessed hours of opened heavens, must be held with a loose hand.  
—Lilias Trotter, *Parables of the Christ-Life*

#### **Scripture: Luke 1:39–45, 56**

What did Mary do after the angel left her?

What was Elizabeth's inner response to Mary's greeting?

What was Elizabeth's outward response to Mary?

#### **Meditation on Scripture**

We can only speculate the thoughts of Mary after the angel's departure. Did she worry what people might think? Did she ever doubt her perception of an angel visitation? Did she puzzle, why *me*? Why was I singled out from all women for this singular honor?

We do know Elizabeth's testimony, however, of how her baby leapt in her womb for joy at the sound of Mary's greeting. Surely any reservations, fears, or doubts were erased upon hearing Elizabeth's declaration "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" (v. 45).

Try to imagine the three months these two pregnant women spent together leading up to the birth of Elizabeth's baby, John. They must have compared notes of their pregnancies, the older woman instructing and encouraging the younger. They must have prepared the layettes for their babies, talking together as they sewed, going over again and again the details of their respective experiences: Zechariah's encounter with an angel in the temple; the same Gabriel's announcement to Mary!

### **A Moment with Liliās**

"Our experiences, the blessed hours of opened heavens, must be held with a loose hand."

Considering what you know about the rest of Mary's faith journey, do you think Liliās's comment here would have been relevant to her? To Elizabeth? How does it relate to you personally?

### **Heart-Song**

John, still unborn, yet gave aright  
His witness to the coming light;  
And Christ, the Sun of all the earth,  
Fulfilled that witness at his birth.

—"The Great Forerunner of the Morn," by the Venerable Bede, trans. John  
Mason Neale



## Second Wednesday of Advent

### Mary's Song

*My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*  
Luke 1:46



“Faith is the link which joins our uttermost weakness to God’s almighty strength.” I came on that the other day, and it is so true. Faith that comes from the depths has a spring in it, like the water pressed down into a low narrow channel, that can rise into a fountain.

—Lilias Trotter, September 12, 1898

### **Scripture: Luke 1:46–55**

Why did Mary praise God (vv. 48–49)?

To whom does God’s mercy extend (v. 50)?

Contrast God’s treatment of the humble with the haughty.

How has God “helped his servant Israel”?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

Mary’s response to Elizabeth’s greeting is one of the loveliest “songs” recorded in Scripture.

My soul glorifies the Lord  
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

—Luke 1:46–47

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months the Scriptures say—until Elizabeth delivered, no doubt—and then she returned home. Mary’s anticipation of her coming birth must have been heightened by the feel of a newborn in her arms. Her spirit must have been strengthened and her course of action determined by the many hours of sharing with Elizabeth.

She returned home to face the challenges of an embarrassed Joseph and a skeptical small town. But she returned home with a heart full of joy—and great expectations!

In her biblical novel *Mary’s Journal*, Evelyn Bence imagines Mary’s reflection:

Favor with the Lord—the Provider of manna, the Refuge of David, the Mighty who still hears and answers Elizabeth’s prayer, my prayer, Israel’s prayer.

My prayer. Has a day ever passed that I have not prayed—that my womb would be blessed to bear the anointed one? Now my eyes, my spirit, my body—all agree that I have been favored of all women . . .

God of favor grant me favor with Joseph, a good man who will not violate Your law. Prepare his ears and his heart.

### **A Moment with Liliās**

“Faith that comes from the depths has a spring in it.”

Consider—and personalize—several potential meanings of the noun *spring* as used here.

### **Heart-Song**

O magnify the Lord with me,  
With me exalt His name;  
When in distress to Him I called,  
He to my rescue came.

Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then  
Have nothing else to fear;  
Make you His service your delight,  
Your wants shall be His care.

—“Through All the Changing Scenes of Life,” by Nahum Tate and  
Nicholas Brady

## Second Thursday of Advent

### Joseph's Story

*When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.*  
—Matthew 1:24



My room . . . at sunrise produces a camera obscura of inverted cupolas that ring the changes from rose through orange to straw color against the background of the sky. It likewise has the privilege of plastered walls—the plaster made from the crushed crystals with which the walls are built. These crystals have a word for us too, those crystals, for each of them sprang out of some atom of a growing point round which clustered crystallized this endless beauty of form. If we may but be a crystallizing point from which God can work, it matters nothing, how insignificant that starting point.

—Lilias Trotter, November 8, 1927

### Scripture: Matthew 1:18–25

What was the relationship between Mary and Joseph at the point of this narrative?

What was Joseph's initial response when he discovered Mary was with child?

What changed his course of action?

What information did the angel reveal to Joseph?

After the angel visitation, what did Joseph do?

### Meditation on Scripture

Joseph's role surely was the most awkward in the unfolding drama. To begin with, his bafflement must have been overwhelming. His normally sane, sincere betrothed was declaring herself *pregnant*—but not with his child. Many a story has been contrived throughout the

generations to explain an unexpected pregnancy. But Mary's story—conceived by the Holy Spirit—was, paradoxically, inconceivable!

The angel clarified Joseph's unique position for sure, but there was still the skeptical friends and family. Could he really expect them to believe their explanations?

Poet W. H. Auden gives keen insight into Joseph's role:

To choose what is difficult all one's days  
As if it were easy, that is faith. Joseph, praise.

### **A Moment with Liliias**

"If we may but be a crystallizing point from which God can work . . ."

Describe a time when you sensed God was working through you, even as a small crystallizing point.

### **Heart-Song**

Joseph dearest, Joseph mine,  
Help me cradle the child divine;  
God reward thee and all that's thine  
    In Paradise,  
    So prays the mother Mary.

Gladly, dear one, lady mine,  
Help I cradle this child of thine;  
God's own light on us both shall shine  
    In Paradise,  
    As prays the mother Mary.  
        "Song of the Crib," German, 15th century

## Second Friday of Advent

### Word Became Flesh

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*  
—John 1:14



I feel so that the desire that only grows the stronger as it remains unmet—to get down and down alongside the people and live a life on more “apostolic” lines—must be of God. If so it must find its way too. If we could anyhow—anywhere—live more as Jesus lived His last years!

—Lilias Trotter, January 4, 1904

### **Scripture: John 1:1–5, 14, 30**

Who is “the Word”?

What do we learn about Jesus through this passage in John?

Remembering that Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist before Mary delivered Jesus, what did John mean when he said, the one “who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me” (v. 30)?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

“The time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son” (Luke 2:6–7).

The Incarnation—God become flesh—is impossible to comprehend with our finite minds. John clearly states that Christ, “the Word” was present at creation, fully participated with God in creating all things—indeed, *was* God. John the Baptist likewise attested to Christ’s preexistence in his testimony concerning Him (v. 30).

Light and life—“shining in darkness”! Still, as John poignantly relates, “The darkness has not understood it” (v. 5). In truth, the Incarnation is impossible to fully comprehend—even for the believer. “God is in a manger!” (Bonhoeffer) The incomprehensible—as C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Last Battle*—“A stable once had something in it that was bigger than our whole world.”

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!  
Eternity shut in a span;  
Summer in winter; day in night;  
Heaven in earth, and God in man.  
Great little one whose all-embracing birth  
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.

—Richard Crashaw, “On the Nativity of Our Lord”

### **A Moment with Liliás**

[I feel that my desire] “to get down and down alongside the people and live a life on more  
“apostolic” lines—must be of God.”

What relation do you see between Liliás’s personal desire and the Incarnation—the Word  
becoming flesh? How does this speak to your current life situation?

### **Heart-Song**

O love, how deep, how broad, how high,  
Beyond all thought and fantasy,  
That God, the Son of God, should take  
Our mortal form for mortals’ sake.

All glory to our Lord and God  
For love so deep, so high, so broad;  
The Trinity whom we adore  
Forever and forever more.

—“O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High,” Latin, trans. Benjamin  
Webb

## Second Saturday of Advent

### Christ's Humility: Our Example

*Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.*  
2 Corinthians 8:9



You can never tell to what untold glories any little humble path may lead, if you only follow far enough.

—Lilias Trotter, August 13, 1899

### Scripture: Philippians 2:5–11

Whose attitude are we to emulate?

In what ways was Christ's humility manifest? What did the Incarnation require of Him?

What was the ultimate end of Christ's humiliation?

### Meditation on Scripture

Ironically, it is often easier to accept the "humiliation" of Christ than the scriptural injunction: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (v. 5). What did Christ's Incarnation require of Him? Giving up His prerogative as God, taking on the nature of a servant, obedience unto death!

How do *I* respond when *my* rights are at stake? How do I react when the menial or lesser tasks are assigned to me? And what about the issue of obedience? Am I willing to comply with God's law and His will in life much less death? "For the Christmas spirit is the spirit of those who, like their Master, live their whole lives on the principle of making themselves poor – spending and

being spent – to enrich their fellow humans, giving time, trouble, care and concern, to do good to others – and not just their own friends – in whatever way there seems need.” (J.I. Packer)

“What does God require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”  
—Micah 6:8

### **A Moment with Liliās**

“You can never tell to what untold glories any little humble path may lead.”

In past tense, present tense, or future, write a sentence or paragraph that personalizes Liliās’s sentiment.

### **Heart-Song**

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown  
When Thou camest to earth for me.  
But in Bethlehem’s home was there found no room  
For Thy holy nativity  
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.  
There is room in my heart for Thee.

Heaven’s arches rang when the angels sang  
Proclaiming Thy royal decree  
But of lowly birth didst Thou come to earth  
And in great humility  
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.  
There is room in my heart for Thee.  
—“Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne,” Emily Elliott



## THE SHEPHERDS' CANDLE

### Third Sunday of Advent

*The Light of joy that unexpectedly brightened the hearts of a humble band of shepherds.*



Once for all, here and now, this light will break on you if you lift up your eyes and behold Jesus Christ with the spiritual vision of the soul.

—Lilias Trotter, *The Way of the Sevenfold Secret*

#### **Scripture: Luke 2:8–20**

What were the shepherds doing when the angels came with their announcement?

What significance might this have for us?

Why do you think God chose to announce the birth to the shepherds?

What was the shepherds' immediate response to the angels' announcement (v. 15)?

What was their response to seeing Jesus (vv. 17–20)?

How would you compare your “spiritual awakening” to that of the shepherds?

#### **Meditation on Scripture**

Up until now, everything has been in the future tense: anticipation; promises by the prophets; preparation by angels of the principal characters—Mary, Joseph, Zechariah. Now the future becomes present tense in the form of an announcement: “*Today . . . a Savior has been born.*”

This week we explore the richness of God's choice to announce His coming to a humble band of shepherds. He who called Himself both shepherd and lamb came to the unsuspecting shepherds who were, quite simply, doing their task. All of history is concentrated in this moment: even to the very dating of time: BC and AD.

Our focus is likewise on the shepherds' response to the good news the angels proclaimed. Go. See. Their response to the Christ-child was to return home, glorifying and praising God. What should be *our* heart's response to the good news?

### **A Moment with Liliias**

"Lift up your eyes and behold Jesus Christ with the spiritual vision of the soul."

Spend two minutes just contemplating the reality of Jesus the Christ.

### **Heart-Song**

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!  
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels.  
O come, let us adore Him. O come, let us adore Him.  
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation.  
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!  
Glory to God, all glory in the highest.  
O come, let us adore Him. O come, let us adore Him.  
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning.  
Jesus, to Thee be glory given.  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.  
O come, let us adore Him. O come, let us adore Him.  
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!  
"O Come, All Ye Faithful," by John Francis Wade et al.

## Third Monday of Advent

### Birth Announcement

*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*  
—Luke 2:11



The same lesson is re-iterated all round by God: the simple A.B.C. lesson that where inadequacy and inefficiency on the human side are His conditions for working. “He sealeth up the hand of every man, that all men may know His work” [Job 37:7].  
—Lilias Trotter, February 27, 1904

### **Scripture: Luke 2:8–10**

What were the shepherds doing when the angel appeared to them?

What was the shepherds’ reaction to the angels? Why?

How did the angel respond to their terror?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

A baby—the Baby—was born in a simple manger stable in an obscure part of town. We imagine that He was alone but for His mother and Joseph and lowly barn animals. Who should receive the birth announcement? Kings? Governors? Religious leaders? People of high rank with “contacts” who could spread the word around?

It shouldn't be a surprise that the same God who placed His promised Redeemer in the womb of a peasant girl, prepared a straw-filled manger for His bed, would choose humble shepherds to first hear the good news.

And what an announcement! As if heaven could not contain its ecstasy, an angel of the Lord broke into the stillness of the night, shining with God's glory. Reassuring the terrified shepherds, the angel declared the long-awaited message: "A Savior has been born to you." And as if the heavens could not contain their joy, a great company of angels joined the angelic messenger and filled the fields with their song of praise!

Little is known about the shepherds, but one thing stands out about God's choice: He chose men simply doing their jobs. The application is profound. To those of us who seek a "vocation"—a calling—it is likely to manifest itself to us when we least expect it: when we are fully engaged in doing what we are supposed to be doing in the here and now. And it does make sense. God is most likely to assign His special ministrations to those people already proving faithful in their given task, in the small, uneventful circumstances of each day.

The trivial round, the common task,  
will furnish all we need to ask,  
room to deny ourselves a road  
to bring us daily nearer God.  
—John Keeble, "New Every Morning"

### **A Moment with Liliás**

"Inadequacy and inefficiency on the human side are His conditions for working."

Consider a time when you've been aware of God working through your inadequacy.

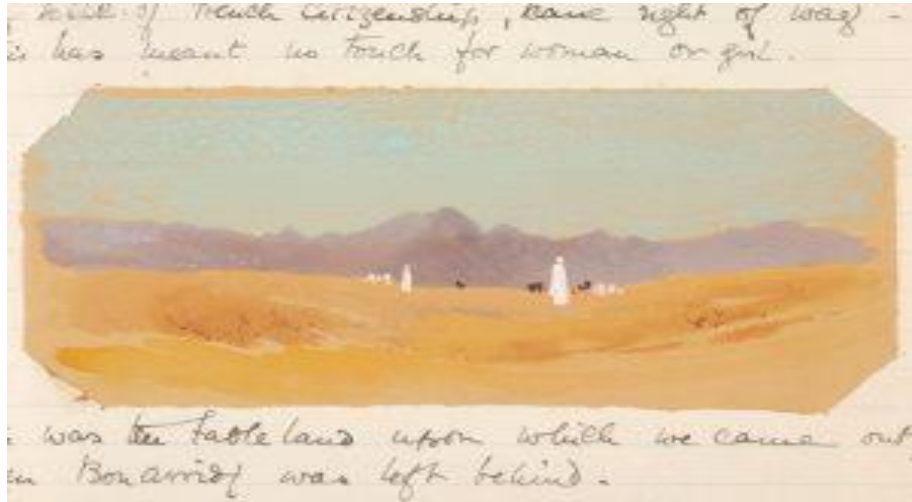
### **Heart-Song**

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping  
Vigil till the morning new  
Saw the glory, heard the story  
Tidings of a gospel true.  
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,  
Praises voicing, greet the morrow:  
Christ the child was born for you!  
Christ the child was born for you!  
—"Infant Holy, Infant Lowly," by Piotrowi Skardze and Edith Reed

## Third Tuesday of Advent

### Christ the Shepherd

*I am the good shepherd.*  
—John 10:14



There was a pretty sight in the marketplace this morning—a procession of shepherds in from the desert led off by ten or twelve little lads carrying the lambs in their arms. And the Lord with His Shepherd Heart will not set the souls down in a road too hard for them to follow—even if we under shepherds make mistakes. How the Good Shepherd follows the trail in all His endless patience. Even the torn wool on the briars helps Him on His way!

—Lilias Trotter, March 4, 1917

### Scripture: John 10:14–18

What are the characteristics of a ‘good shepherd’?

In what ways does Christ compare Himself to a good shepherd?

What did Christ mean when He said, “I lay down my life—only to take it up again” (v. 17)?

### Meditation on Scripture

We jump ahead in the Advent narrative to Jesus’s own words concerning His identity, “I am the good shepherd,” and to His mission, “I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Once again a cryptic message was delivered in startlingly clear metaphor. The shepherd’s relationship to his flock was common knowledge: he fed them, tended them, knew them by name. If one of the many strayed, he sought it even to the risk of his own life.

Yet as so often was the case in God's progressive revelation, there was an additional unexpected message. A message easily missed, but for those with ears to hear, a message so distinct and disturbing in its uniqueness, one could not dispel it from the mind: "I lay down my life—*only to take it up again!*"

What wonderful assurance and comfort Christ's words must have brought to those people acquainted with the testimony of Christ's ancestor, David, the shepherd and psalmist. The hymn below, "The King of Love," paraphrases Psalm 23.

### **A Moment with Lilies**

"How the Good Shepherd follows the trail in all His endless patience."

Describe times in your life path when you were aware of the Good Shepherd's patience.

### **Heart-Song**

The King of love my Shepherd is  
Whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am His  
And He is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow  
My ransomed soul He leadeth,  
And where the verdant pasture grow  
With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,  
But yet in love He sought me,  
And on His shoulder gently laid  
And home rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill  
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me;  
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,  
Thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;  
Thy unction, grace bestoweth;  
And O what transport of delight  
From Thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days  
Thy goodness faileth never;  
God Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise  
Within Thy house for ever.

—"The King of Love My Shepherd Is," by Henry Williams Baker

### Third Wednesday of Advent

#### Paradox: Shepherd and Sheep

*For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

—Revelation 7:17



I must put down a dear little story told me by a friend this morning. Her small niece, aged somewhere between three and four, was heard telling the parable of the lost sheep to a cousin a year or two older. The finale was, “So the Shepherd put back the lamb into the fold, and then He mended up the hole where it had got out.” All of sanctification as well as well as salvation lay in the wisdom of those child-lips!

—Lilias Trotter, May 28, 1926

#### **Scripture: Isaiah 53:7–11**

In what ways is Christ like a lamb (v. 7)?

What event is anticipated in verses 8 and 9?

Why was it “the Lord’s will” for Christ to suffer in such a way (v. 10)?

Look at verse 11. Explain the following phrases with your additional understanding from the New Testament fulfillment of prophecy:

- “suffering of his soul”
- “he will see the light of life and be satisfied”
- “my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities

### **Meditation on Scripture**

“The Lamb . . . will be their shepherd” (Revelation 7:17). Paradoxically, the prophet Isaiah compared the Redeemer—the Good Shepherd—to a lamb brought to slaughter. A lamb sacrificed for the transgression of the people was a common practice of the Jewish community. But here again, amidst the familiar images, Isaiah slips in the foreign puzzling cryptic comment: he refers to life after death—resurrection: “Though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days . . . he will see the light of life.”

Could the Old Testament believers begin to decipher Isaiah’s message? And what about the New Testament followers of Christ? Could they associate the “Good Shepherd” with the “slaughtered lamb”?

For the earnest seeker, the conundrum was clarified by John the Baptizer’s paradoxical testimony upon seeing Christ: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Indeed, the sweet cradle of Christ was rocked in the shadow of a Cross.

### **A Moment with Liliias**

“So the Shepherd put back the lamb into the fold, and then He mended up the hole where it had got out.”

What does Liliias here say to you about the Shepherd’s care for you?

### **Heart-Song**

Little Lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?  
Gave thee life and bid thee feed,  
By the stream and o’er the mead;  
Gave thee clothing of delight,  
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;  
Gave thee such a tender voice,  
Making all the vales rejoice?  
    Little Lamb, who made thee?  
    Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I’ll tell thee,  
Little Lamb, I’ll tell thee,  
He is called by thy name,  
For He calls Himself a Lamb.  
He is meek, and He is mild,  
He became a little child;  
I, a child, and thou a lamb,  
We are called by His name.  
    Little Lamb, God bless thee!  
    Little Lamb, God bless thee!  
    —“The Lamb,” William Blake



### Third Thursday of Advent

#### Shepherds' Faith Response

*Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.*  
—Luke 2:15



Christ never promised His disciples an easy life. The road He trod for us was a rough road: how then can it be a smooth one to those who follow Him? He makes appeal, not to our love of ease, and of the good things of the world, but on the contrary, He makes appeal to our courage, and to our faithfulness unto death.

—Lilias Trotter, *The Way of the Sevenfold Secret*

#### **Scripture: Luke 2:15–16**

What was the shepherds' immediate response to the news of the angels?

What do you think your response would have been?

#### **Meditation on Scripture**

The shepherds' spontaneous response to the angels' astonishing message was "Let's go to Bethlehem and *see* this thing that has happened." What if they had postponed the journey? After all, there were the sheep, you know—arrangements to be made, details to work out. But no, their faith response was immediate and trusting.

Their confidence, of course, was in their *certainty* of the message—"the Lord has told us"—and in the *content* of the message—"today a Savior has been born to you." So there was no time to waste. Everything else was of secondary importance.

Bottom line, theirs was a *faith* response. They had not yet *seen* with their own eyes. Faith, however, was rewarded by sight. And so it is even now. We must first respond to Christ by faith. *Then* we shall know Him.

### **A Moment with Liliias**

“He makes appeal to our courage, and to our faithfulness.”

What does faith and faithfulness require of you today?

### **Heart-Song**

Come to Bethlehem and see  
Him whose birth the angels sing;  
Come, adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.  
*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*  
*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

—“Angels We Have Heard on High,” French, trans. James Chadwick

### Third Friday of Advent

#### Shepherds' Life Response

*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.*  
—Luke 2:20



Now we turn from all these enemies, the stranger, the thief, the hireling and the wolf, who endanger those who follow afar off, and look at the Good Shepherd and the sheep who stay in His care. They are “His own,” not by force, but because He has paid the price of His life for them, and none shall pluck them out of His Hand.

—Lilias Trotter, *The Way of the Sevenfold Secret*

#### **Scripture: Luke 2:17–20**

What was the shepherds' response upon seeing the child?

What was their response to this experience upon returning home?

What was the essence of their testimony concerning the Child?

#### **Meditation on Scripture**

Once again we observe the shepherds' spontaneous response. Having seen Him, they (1) “spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child” (v. 17), (2) they “returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.” In two words, their life response was to *witness* and to *worship*.

It is the most natural thing in the world to rave about any product, person, or experience that has especially satisfied or thrilled us. Indeed it is, likewise, the most natural thing to fall down and worship that which transcends the common, ordinary, and earthbound. Why then do we balk at both? Witness. Worship.

One bit of stark reality filters through the glory of the biblical narrative: “The shepherds returned . . .” Imagine, going back again to the hillside, dark lonely nights, the baaing and straying of simple lowly sheep. Yes, they returned from the magnificent to the mundane—but with a difference. *They* were changed. Long after the shimmer of angel wings had vanished and the touch of soft, warm baby skin was but a memory, the shimmer and warmth remained—but in their hearts, demanding a response: get up and spread the word; bow down and worship.

The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be?  
My God, no hymn for Thee?  
My soul’s a shepherd too; a flock it feeds  
Of thoughts, and words, and deeds.  
—George Herbert, “The Temple: Christmas”

### **A Moment with Lilies**

“Look at the Good Shepherd and the sheep who stay in His care. They are “His own.”

Turn this Lilies line into a personal prayer.

### **Heart-Song**

While shepherds kept their watching  
O’er silent flocks by night,  
Behold, throughout the heavens  
There shone a holy light.

The shepherds feared and trembled  
When lo! above the earth  
Rang out the angel chorus  
That hailed our Savior’s birth.

Down in a lowly manger  
Our humble Christ was born  
And brought us all salvation  
That blessed Christmas morn.

Go, tell it on the mountain  
Over the hills and everywhere.  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born.

—“Go Tell It on the Mountain,” Spiritual, adap. by John Wesley Work, Jr.

### Third Saturday of Advent

#### Our Response: Go and Do Likewise

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart  
and with all your soul and with all your mind.*  
—Matthew 22:37



Therefore, my brother, for this first step of the way in which He calls you to walk with Him, put your hands by faith into His hands, and, though you cannot see Him, let Him look into your eyes and read your heart, and transfer to Him the true surrender that you have learned in the path of the Brotherhood, and that without a fear or a misgiving, for He can make no mistake. A new and wonderful longing will arise in your heart to know and do His will. And not only will your own faith and love be established by going forth with Him, but it is by witnessing to Him that you will be able to draw others to seek His salvation.

—Lilias Trotter, *The Way of the Sevenfold Secret*

#### **Scripture: Matthew 22:37–40; 1 John 4:7–11**

What is the first and greatest commandment? What is the second commandment?

What did Christ mean by saying: “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:40)?

How did God show His love to us?

What should our response be to God’s love?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

Christ Himself enlarged upon the shepherds' example with His teaching: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Christ called for nothing less than a total life response: heart, soul, and mind. Second only to our love for God comes the adjunction "to love your neighbor as yourself."

The apostle John, in a pastoral letter, speaks to the basis for our life response: "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). Our *life* response should be first to love God, *because* He first loved us, and then to love others *as we have been loved*.

Let our response be like that of the shepherds—a life response: spontaneous, wholehearted, and immediate. Let us, likewise, witness and worship as we *return* from our quiet moments with Jesus to continue our assignment in the world.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.  
—Christina Rossetti, "In the Bleak Midwinter"

### **A Moment with Lilies**

"A new and wonderful longing will arise in your heart to know and do His will."

What does this mean for you today?

### **Heart-Song**

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,  
Love incarnate, love divine;  
Worship we our Jesus:  
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token.  
Love be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and to all men,  
Love for plea and gift and sign.  
—"Love Came Down at Christmas," by Christina Rossetti

## THE ANGELS' CANDLE

### Fourth Sunday of Advent

*The light of the angels who heralded the Good News of Light to a darkened world.*



God is the God of joy, and we must drink in the spirit of His joy . . . He didn't promise us ease and comfort—but He did promise joy which we may have in the midst of any weight or heaviness that may be ours to bear.

—Lilias Trotter, July 17, 1928

### **Scripture: Luke 2:13–14**

Try to imagine the scene that the shepherds' witnessed on the isolated hillside. What do you think the shepherds must have thought at the first sight and sound of the angelic host?

Identify the role of angels in each of the following accounts:

- Zechariah (Luke 1:11–19)
- Mary (Luke 1:26–38)
- Joseph (Matthew 1:18–25)
- Shepherds (Luke 2:13–14)

What qualities characterize angels?

Do they serve any other function than as messengers?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

As early as Abraham, angels anticipated a descendant “through whom all nations would be blessed” (see Genesis 22:18). The Scriptures this week focus on the role of angels in anticipating both Advents, the First and Second Comings of Christ to earth, as well as the culmination of earthly history in a new order, a new Creation.

Recorded angelic activity reached an unprecedented flurry immediately preceding the birth of Christ as they prepared the key characters—Zechariah, Mary, Joseph—for their roles in the life of the coming Messiah. What “birth announcement” could compare with the angel’s appearance to the shepherds followed by the glorious company of angels praising God and saying, “Glory to God!” It is no wonder that music plays such a prominent place in the history of celebrating the birth of Jesus!

As tension builds as action accelerates in the crowded days before Christmas, let us remain attuned to the many touches and glimpses of grace this season. May we not miss the protecting, proclaiming, praising angels who shimmer about us mortals so often preoccupied and unaware of God’s matchless grace.

What sweeter music can we bring  
Than a carol for to sing  
The birth of this our heavenly King?  
Awake the voice! Awake the string!  
Heart, ear, and eye, and everything,  
Awake! the while the active finger  
Runs divisions with the singer.  
—Robert Herrick, “A Christmas Carol”

### **A Moment with Lilies**

“God is the God of joy, and we must drink in the spirit of His joy.”

Look for and note a particular joy each day this week.

### **Heart-Song**

Joy to the world! The Lord is come:  
Let earth receive her King!  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.  
—“Joy to the World,” Isaac Watts



## Fourth Monday of Advent

### Angels Prepare

*The angel said, “Do not be afraid.”*  
—Luke 1:30



How the angels must watch the first day when that light reaches a new spot on this earth that God so loves—and the great wall of darkness is pushed back one tiny bit—and oh, the joy of being allowed to go with His message that first day. How can His people hold back from that joy while one corner remains unvisited by the Dayspring!

—Lilias Trotter, March 1895

**Scripture: Exodus 14:19; Judges 2:1; Luke 1:11, 28; Matthew 1:20**

What is the message of the angel in each of the above passages?

How does each contribute to the preparation of the coming Messiah?

### Meditation on Scripture

Of all the symbols of Christmas, angels are among the most appealing! Bejeweled, beribboned, bannered—the very word *angel* conjures images of heavenly beings with shimmering glittering wings, gauzy flowing robes of jewel-toned colors edged in gold; messages heralded with instrument and song. So compelling is our vision of angels that it is easy to overlook their very real, very significant role in history.

Specific accounts of angelic involvement in preparing men and women for God's redemptive plan—as well as expediting that plan—are recorded hundreds of years before Christ's birth! An "angel of God" traveled before the Israelite army as they made their exodus out of Egypt; he served as a barricade between the armies of Egypt and Israel by night. Later in Canaan, under Joshua's leadership, the angel rebuked the wayward children of Israel, bringing them to the point of repentance as he reminded them of God's covenant promise and protection.

As the long-awaited plan drew nigh, angels prepared the hearts of the leading characters for their role in the unfolding drama. An angel prepared Zechariah that his aged wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son to "make ready a people" for the Lord' (Luke 1:17). The angel Gabriel prepared a young Mary that she would give birth to Jesus, "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). An angel reassured a frightened Joseph that his betrothed was indeed a virgin, impregnated by Divine intention and supernatural means.

However miraculous, however spectacular the angels' preparatory role in this great ongoing drama spanning centuries, never did they act as independents, taking it upon themselves to meddle in the affairs of fickle, faithless, and fearful humankind. Always they acted as agents of the divine and holy God, carrying out His orders to implement the details of God's grand purposes.

### **A Moment with Liliás**

"The great wall of darkness is pushed back one tiny bit."

Consider the physical/natural and spiritual reality of Liliás's statement.

### **Heart-Song**

Angels we have heard on high,  
Sweetly swinging o'er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply  
Echoing their joyous strains.  
*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*  
*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

Shepherds why this jubilee?  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
Say what may the tidings be  
Which inspire your heavenly song?  
*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*  
*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

—"Angels We Have Heard on High," French, trans. James Chadwick

## Fourth Tuesday of Advent

### Angels Praise

*Glory to God in the highest.*  
Luke 2:14



I have been finding a great blessedness in these last few months in definitely obeying the command “Let them sing aloud upon their bed!” [Psalm 149:5]—I remembered Pearsall Smith half a lifetime ago, saying in a meeting—at the first Oxford Conference or thereabout—that he wondered how many present had ever obeyed it. But the seed thought has never got vitalized til now.

—Lilias Trotter, February 5, 1919

### **Scripture: Luke 2:13–14**

What was the context of the appearance of the heavenly host?

What was the purpose of their appearance?

What was their message?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

Who can imagine the impact on the shepherds, already stunned by the angel announcement of a baby Savior’s birth, when a great company of angels suddenly appear on the scene? In what must have been one of the purest expressions of praise, they of one accord declared:

Glory to God in the highest,  
And peace to His people on earth.  
—*The Book of Common Prayer*

Through the ages humans have tried to capture some sense of that glory through individual expressions of praise. Artists have applied pen and paint to represent angels bearing all manner of instruments to accompany the heavenly hymns of praise. Fra Angelico was immortalized for his angel musicians clothed in gold-embroidered robes, playing celestial instruments: brilliant brass, booming drums, slender flutes, golden harps. Composers have created in music their concept of what that moment must have sounded like: Handel follows a recitative in the *Messiah* with a burst of joyous chorus accompanied by brass instruments “Glory to God,” while Vivaldi, inspired by angel-praise, built an entire cantata—*Gloria*—on this theme. Children draped in angel robes lend their sweet voices to lining songs of praise. Poets and saints labor to catch in words the essence of praise. Glory to God!

And yet, for all the inspiration evoked from this grand and glorious moment in history—when heaven broke through to earth—Scripture could not be clearer in the *purpose* of praise: to bring honor to our living Savior. Scripture, likewise, takes praise a step further, beyond our verbal or artistic offerings or, for that matter, even our most costly sacrifices—to a matter of a *life* response: praising God with our entire beings, praising God in our daily walk of obedience to Him. “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22).

Let us continue to try to capture the moment in song, art, and words. But let us go further and proclaim our praise in the manner which truly pleases God: bringing glory to Him through our lives.

### **A Moment with Lilies**

“The seed thought has never got vitalized til now.”

What new insight have received during this Advent season? Note especially if it has to do with praise.

### **Heart-Song**

We rejoice in the light,  
And we echo the song  
That comes down through the night  
From the heavenly throng.  
Ay! we shout to the lovely evangel they bring,  
And we greet in His cradle our Savior and King!  
—“There a Song in the Air,” by Josiah G. Holland

## Fourth Wednesday of Advent

### Angels Minister

*Are not all angels ministering spirits?*  
Hebrews 1:14



There lies before us a beautiful possible life—one that shall have a passion for giving that shall be poured forth to God—spent out for man.

—Lilias Trotter, *Parables of the Cross*

### Scripture: Psalm 91:11; Hebrews 1:14

What do these verses tell us about the work of angels?

Who determines the actions of angels?

How are angels involved in our lives today?

What difference does it or should it make in my life?

Have you ever been touched by an angel? Explain.

### Meditation on Scripture

What a wonderfully comforting thought: that ministering spirits surround me at the ready to respond to God's command concerning me! It makes me wonder: was that "close call" a crucial co-incidence or the result of direct angelic intervention? The time a sizzle of saliva alerted us to our toddler son who was pulling a live wire to his mouth, the time an out-of-control car skidded

over slick ice, inexplicably stopping just before the oncoming train sped in front of my helpless husband, the nighttime walk through piles of freshly raked autumn leaves along the street curb, when I stopped abruptly—*after* which I saw the open manhole into which I would have taken my next step.

Many tell such stories, which thrill the believer, repel the skeptic, but make us wonder: could it have been an angel? Books are written to testify to such ministering spirits. More important, *the* Book teaches us of this reassuring reality: “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:11).

### **A Moment with Lili**

“There lies before us a beautiful possible life.”

In the context of what you’ve learned in this season, what does this mean for you?

### **Heart-Song**

Now I lay me down to sleep.  
Angels watching over me, my Lord.  
Pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
Angels watching over me.

Lord, stay with me through the night.  
Angels watching over me, my Lord.  
Wake me with the morning light.  
Angels watching over me.

All night, all day,  
Angels watching over me, my Lord.  
All night, all day,  
Angels watching over me.

—Spiritual, Otis McCoy

## Fourth Thursday of Advent

### Angels Proclaim

*They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call.*

—Matthew 24:31



There is a wonderful sense of expansion—endless expansion—about our love for those who are gone, as if it had escaped earthly fettering. The pain of the parting is just the rending of the sheath, as it were, to let the flower have its way. And their love for us will have grown in the same way, only in fuller measure, into something pure and fathomless and boundless and inexhaustible because it is “in God.”

—Lilias Trotter, May 26, 1918

### **Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Matthew 24:29–31**

According to 1 Thessalonians 4, what is the role of angels in the return—or second advent—of Jesus?

What additional information is provided by Matthew concerning the role of angels in the return of Jesus?



## **Meditation on Scripture**

Even as the angels proclaimed the Advent of Christ to earth, an angel will likewise announce the *second* advent—Christ’s return to earth to claim His own: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, and with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

What must the angels think about uncomprehending human beings—they who were present for the Big Events, when the Divine chose to stoop to earth and involve Himself directly with stubborn and hard-hearted humankind? What must it take to get through to the human heart? Was not trumpet fanfare and angel choirs announcing His coming to earth enough? Next time, however, in the undated future, Christ will come—accompanied by angels—and gather His own for the grandest homecoming of all: “And so we will be with the Lord forever” (v. 17).

What a homecoming that will be! Reunited with our loved ones who have gone before us; introduced to the legends of our faith—all this will pale in the Presence of Christ: “And we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever!” (see Psalm 23:6) Amen.

## **A Moment with Liliás**

“... something pure and fathomless and boundless and inexhaustible because it is ‘in God.’”

How does Liliás’s view of the afterlife speak to you?

## **Heart-Song**

And our eyes at last shall see Him,  
Through His own redeeming love;  
For that child who seemed so helpless  
Is our Lord in heaven above;  
And He leads His children on  
To the place where He is gone.

Not in that poor lowly stable,  
With the oxen standing round,  
We shall see Him; but in heaven,  
Where His saints His throne surround:  
Christ, revealed to faithful eyes,  
Set at God’s right hand on high.

—“Once in Royal David’s City,” by Cecil Frances Alexander



## Fourth Friday of Advent

### Angels Unaware

*Some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*  
—Hebrews 13:2



It is such a happy summer with the dear bunches of the natives about the place. And there is a spirit of love all about—either I get asked out to supper at one end of the house or the other, or a plate of stew is brought to us, or a hunk of watermelon in its wonderful crimson & green—or a sugar cake or two—or my bathtowels get carried off for a private washing & come back fragrant with a scented jessamine wreath folded in—all little precious tokens—& with them the glad light of the happy spirit of help & fellowship among each other.

—Lilias Trotter, August 25, 1921

### Scripture: Genesis 18:1–19; Hebrews 13:1–2

What was the role of angels in each of these accounts?

Can you think of any times in your life when an angel may have spread his glittering wings over you?

How does the thought of an angel unaware affect your life?

### Meditation on Scripture

The Genesis account of Abraham entertaining three strangers—angels unaware—is etched in the Jewish collective memory for both the *promise*—“Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations will be blessed through him” (18:18)—and for the *means*—the offspring of his barren wife Sarah.

As the Hebrew people passed on this miraculous account from generation to generation, they likewise related the appearance of angel-visitors, thus raising the bar for the practice of hospitality, compellingly articulated by the author of the book of Hebrews: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (13:2).

In his book *Wishful Thinking* Frederick Buechner wrote:

Sleight-of-hand magic is based on the demonstrable fact that as a rule people see only what they expect to see. Angels are powerful spirits whom God sends into the world to wish us well. Since we don’t expect to see them, we don’t. An angel spread his glittering wings over us, and we say things like “It was one of those days that made you feel good just to be alive” or “I had a hunch everything was going to turn out all right” or “I don’t know where I ever found the courage.”

We never know as we go about our daily rounds when an angel—actual or symbolic—will spread his “glimmering wings” over us, gracing our lives with its unexpected presence. Let us keep our hearts and homes open to the unexpected “angel”—be it a family member, a neighbor, a child—a stranger. Who knows? it may be an angel unaware!

### **A Moment with Lili**

“All little precious tokens—& with them the glad light of the happy spirit of help & fellowship among each other.”

Try to identify one or two potential “angel unaware” moments experienced by you or someone you know.

### **Heart-Song**

Angels, descending, bring from above,  
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long;  
This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Saviour all the day long.

—“Blessed Assurance,” Fanny Crosby

## CHRISTMAS EVE

*For your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

—2 Corinthians 8:9



Such a day of small things still, but on God's terms and that is enough. Size as well as time and space count nothing with Him.

—Lilias Trotter, January 1, 1902

### **Scripture: John 1:1–14**

Who was the Word John refers to in verse 1? What do we learn about the Word before His incarnation (vv. 1–4)?

What was the role of John the Baptist (vv. 6–9)?

What was his message? What was the bad news? Good news?

What is the meaning of verse 14? What does it mean to you?

### **Meditation**

“The Word became flesh.” The Word that was present from the beginning of time as we know it. Who participated in the very creation of this world. The Word entered His creation. Became flesh. A baby. *“Such a day of small things!”* He grew into childhood, adolescence, manhood. And dwelt among us for all His short life on earth.

Prophets proclaimed Him. Bethlehem birthed Him. Angels sang the good news. Shepherds witnessed Him then fell down in worship. And ever since, humanity has grappled with who He is – and what He means to us, individually.

Believer or skeptic, Christmas Eve unites us. Through Scripture. Through song. Through legend. Through story, often personal in nature. Or just a general sense of peace on earth, good will to man. If only for one night, one time each year.

Of the many songs and carols celebrating the birth of Christ, “Silent Night” has been among the most beloved, sung through the years, home and abroad. We are touched, perhaps, by its history: the matching of Joseph Mohr's text to Fritz Gruber's music. Gruber adapting this carol to two voices and a guitar that Christmas Eve the organ gave out. We latch onto the stories of temporary peace in wartime when a few men from enemy sides declared truce, if only for an evening, uniting in singing this familiar carol, tears rolling down their faces. There are other stories of wonder surrounding this song. Perhaps you have one?

“Silent night. Holy night.” These words set the tone, stanza by stanza, of quiet mystery throughout the unfolding story. Glory streams down from Heaven. Shepherds quake at the glorious sight! All center on the Holy infant, calmly sleeping.

A holy hush. If only for a moment. But we long to hold on to the love, the peace, the joy. And we can! We can continue to live in the *reality*, if not the mood. Christ the Saviour is born! Son of God; love's pure light. He is the Light of the World! Radiance beams from His holy face and into our lives if we but receive Him – His redeeming grace. *His* light we can pass on to others.

Churches all over the globe play out this dynamic in their Christmas Eve candlelight services. The flame from the Christ candle becomes the primary source from which all the other candles receive their light – one candle, one person at a time – eventually flooding the entire sanctuary with their collective light. Which we take, figuratively speaking, into the world. Our world.

“For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

### **A Moment with Lili**

“Size as well as time and space count nothing with Him.”

If you find this idea hard to grasp, write out your thoughts, consider especially the celebration of our Lord's birth.

### **Heart-Song**

Silent night, holy night!  
All is calm, all is bright.  
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.  
Holy infant so tender and mild,  
    Sleep in heavenly peace,  
    Sleep in heavenly peace.

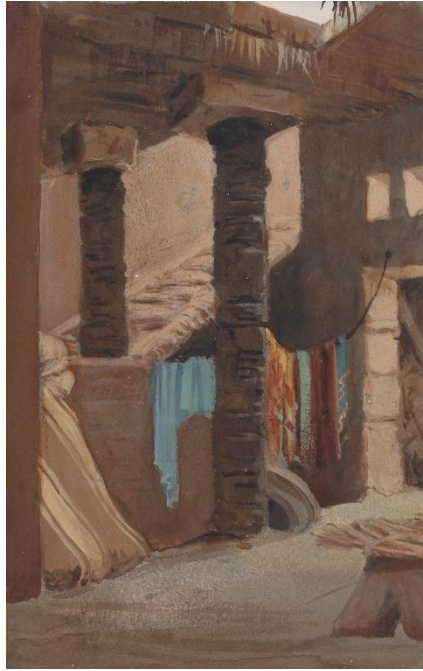
Silent night, holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight,  
Glories stream from heaven afar  
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!  
    Christ the Savior is born,  
    Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light.  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
    Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,  
    Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!  
    —“Silent Night,” by Joseph  
    Mohr

## CHRISTMAS DAY

*Today . . . a Savior has been born.*

—Luke 2:11



Once more, after twenty-two years, Christmas Day in Tolga—and again Christmas-like in its deepest sense with just a touch of the fondouk [inn] to make it beautiful. Common brick walls, earth floor, unglazed windows—such a tiny touch—but fitting in with the wonderful sense of being “weak with Him” which is the key note to the beginnings here. “Wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” [Luke 2:7]—that is how the world’s redemption dawned!

—Lilias Trotter, December 25, 1923

### **Scripture: Luke 2:4–7**

Why did Joseph leave Nazareth to go to Bethlehem?

What is the significance of his lineage?

What were the physical circumstances of the birth of Jesus? Why do you think God purposed these circumstances?

### **Meditation on Scripture**

Let us pause, even if briefly, on this busiest day of celebration. Let us ponder what it is—Who it is—we celebrate. The grand miracle. The great mystery of the Incarnation: God made human. Truly beyond our comprehension yet worthy of our consideration.

During this Advent season, we've explored events leading up to this point from the prophets to the cast of players present at the long-awaited moment of Christ's birth. We've attempted to express our gratitude—individually and corporately—through worship in prayer and song, through feasts and fellowship.

And now it all comes down to this day, the celebration of *the* cosmic reality—"eternity shut in a span"—shaking our planet Earth, dividing time, and, potentially, changing our lives forever.

Let us rest our minds, for a moment, from the labors of celebration—final wrapping of presents, preparation and serving of food, services, and rituals—and consider the enormity of this day.

Jesus come to earth. Emmanuel: God With Us.

Consider the implications of this greatest of gifts: What does Jesus mean to me? How does He affect my life today? Tomorrow? Everyday? Is there room in my heart for Him?

"Jesus stands at the door knocking. . . he lives in the form of a human being among us. Do you want to close the door or open?" - Bonhoeffer

### **A Moment with Liliias**

"Common brick walls, earth floor, unglazed windows—such a tiny touch—but fitting in with the wonderful sense of being 'weak with Him.'"

Choose a role (or several) and spend a few minutes imaging yourself in the Nativity story. What does the Spirit reveal to you?

### **Heart-Song**

How silently, how silently,  
    The wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
    The blessings of His heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming  
    But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him, still  
    The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
    Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in,  
    Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
    The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
    Our Lord Emmanuel.

—"O Little Town of Bethlehem," by Phillips Brooks



You were once darkness,  
but now you are light in the Lord.  
Live as children of light.  
—Ephesians 5:8