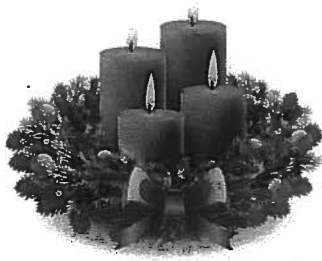


Advent

STUDY



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



The season of Advent helps prepare us for Christmas, when we celebrate God coming into our world clothed in flesh in order to be the ultimate word of forgiveness & love for the human race. Advent helps remind us why humans need that forgiveness and love.

This devotional was in part created by the ELCA World Hunger Team, with additional prayers and hymns from our hymnal, Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW).

The hymns can be downloaded from our website OR there are CDs available in the church foyer. One of the reasons we include hymns is because. Christians have a treasure trove of gorgeous Advent songs, but since the Advent season is only four weeks long, many Christians aren't very familiar with it.

Simplest suggestion for use:

1. Read the appointed scripture for the day (you'll need a Bible each night)
2. Say the prayer
3. Optional: Listen to or sing along with a hymn

Going deeper:

Except for Wednesdays, each day has optional reading, reflection or discussion material. The material is marked by day (Sun, M, Tues, W, Th, F, Sat).

1. Read the appointed scripture for the day (you'll need a Bible each night)
2. Say the prayer (If before a meal, why not eat the meal after the prayer and then follow the additional resources during or after the meal?)
3. Go deeper - into the commentary, questions, and hymn



Week 1: A People of Promise



Psalm 122

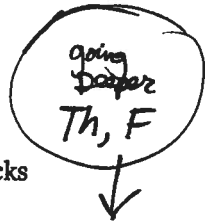
Isaiah 2:1-5

Matthew 24:36-44

W

Sun - Tues

Th - Sat



With the memory still fresh as he preached, the Rev. James A. Forbes Jr. reflected on the devastation wrought by the 9/11 attacks on New York City. He recalled the streaming masses leaving Manhattan, people of every race, ethnicity and class and saw in them the pain and fear so many other people had faced throughout history. He saw, too, a remarkable unity amidst the chaos – “They are all poor now,” he observed.

Poverty takes many forms. To be poor may mean to lack material resources, to struggle to put food on the table. To be poor may mean to lack meaningful relationships, to not feel welcome at any table. To be poor may mean to feel spiritually empty, to not feel welcome even at the Lord’s table. Philosopher Abigail Gosselin found in her research that how we define the problem of poverty and its causes determines how we believe it should be solved. If poverty is economic, the solution is economic. If poverty is spiritual, the solution is spiritual.

For Pastor Forbes, poverty goes deeper than just material, social or spiritual lack. To be poor, at its root, is to be vulnerable – vulnerable to sudden economic swings, to insecure employment, to disease or to disaster.

Week 1: A People of Promise

In a strange twist in the Gospel, Jesus compares waiting for the coming reign of God to the time before the flood in Genesis, when people were “eating and drinking” with no thought to the coming disaster. This is a vulnerability many communities today know well. The reminder of this risk is not a pleasant thought. How strange that Jesus would compare something we long for – the coming of the Son of Man – to something we all try to avoid – the devastation of a natural disaster.




In the analogy, Jesus reminds us of our vulnerability. Just as we’re ready to separate the world into us and them, the saved and the damned, the haves and the have-nots – Jesus reminds us: We’re all poor now. Yet, true to the Gospel message, Jesus turns that vulnerability on its head with a promise. The dread of a people waiting for the next flood to come is transformed into the hope of a people saved by God. The vulnerability of our shared poverty becomes the security of our shared faith in the promise of God, described so well by the prophet Isaiah as a time when we will “walk in the light of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:5). This promise comes to light as we accompany neighbors in the midst of vulnerability, through ELCA World Hunger. Through this signature ministry of the ELCA, Lutherans acknowledge our shared poverty while confident that the promise of God is greater than the risk we face and that an end to vulnerability is not only possible but promised.



Week 1: A People of Promise

(Going Deeper)

Reflection questions:

- 
- 
- 
- 1) What does it mean to be vulnerable?
 - 2) When have you experienced vulnerability? How has your faith strengthened you in times of vulnerability?
 - 3) In what ways does our congregation accompany people in the midst of their material vulnerability? Their social vulnerability? Their spiritual vulnerability?
 - 4) What does it mean for our congregation to be people of promise at a time when "we're all poor now"?



Prayer

Begin all days: Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come,
Sun – W: by your merciful protection save us from the
dangers of our self-centeredness...


Th – Sat: enlighten our journey in the way of your
salvation...

Conclude all days: ...for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy
Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Hymn suggestions

Track 1: Comfort, Comfort Now My People, ELW 256

- 
- 1 "Comfort, comfort now my people;
tell of peace!" So says our God.
Comfort those who sit in darkness
mourning under sorrow's load.
To God's people now proclaim
that God's pardon waits for them!
Tell them that their war is over;
God will reign in peace forever.

cont'd →

2 For the herald's voice is crying
in the desert far and near,
calling us to true repentance,
since the reign of God is here.
Oh, that warning cry obey!
Now prepare for God a way.
Valleys, rise to greet the Savior;
hills, bow down in humble favor.

Tues cont'd

3 Straight shall be what long was crooked,
and the rougher places plain.
Let your hearts be true and humble,
as befits God's holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord
now on earth is shed abroad,
and all flesh shall see the token
that God's word is never broken.

Text: Johann G. Otarius, 1635-1711; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827-1878, alt.

Track 2: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, ELW 254

1 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 ev'ry nation,
joy of ev'ry longing heart.

Sat.

2 Born thy people to deliver,
born a child, and yet a king;
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Text: Charles Wesley, 1707-1788



Week 2: Bearing Fruit



Psalm 72:1-7 Tues

Isaiah 11:1- 5 Sun

Matthew 3:1-12 Th - Sat

72:18-19 Wed

11:6-10 M

“Bear fruit worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8). This emphasis on merit or worthiness raises a bit of a question for Lutherans, who believe that grace and salvation come from God unmerited, that we can never be “worthy” on our own of all God has to offer in Christ. But the Greek word translated as “worthy” here can have other meanings. For example, it can mean “befit,” so that good fruit is seen as borne by one who has repented and been moved by grace. When we have experienced God’s grace, we see life as gift and in turn, want to share our gifts with others. Fruit is not the cause of reconciliation; it is the result.



John the Baptist clearly communicates that whatever fruit the Pharisees and Sadducees are bearing, it isn’t worth harvesting. Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes this “bad fruit” of the Pharisees: “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others ... they love to have the place of honor at banquets ... [they] lock people out of the kingdom of heaven ... [they make] gold sacred ... [they] have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” and so on (23:4-23). In nearly all the “woes” Jesus ascribes to them, the central problem is that they have tended their fruit for show and not for the good of their neighbors.

Week 2: Bearing Fruit

If that is what bad fruit is, what is good fruit that “befits” repentance? We get a hint from Isaiah, whom John the Baptist quotes. The Old Testament prophet describes “a shoot from the stump of Jesse” on whom “the Spirit of the Lord shall rest” (Isaiah 11:1-2): “with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth” (11:4). Through him, will come a peace so complete that “the wolf shall live with the lamb” (11:6). What kind of fruit is produced by those reconciled to such a One?

By grace we are set free from the “heavy burdens” of the law. Martin Luther, though, makes clear that this freedom has a purpose and that purpose is found in the well-being of the neighbor. Our “fruit” is succulent and sweet, nourishing those God brings to our orchard. “This demonstrates that we are children of God,” he writes, “caring and working for the well-being of others and fulfilling the law of Christ by bearing one another’s burdens.” The fruit that “befits repentance” is fruit that grows as gift – tended by God’s grace – and that is harvested as gift – offered for the good of the neighbor. When we support ELCA World Hunger through gifts of time, talent and finances, we join neighbors around the world and across the U.S. bearing good fruit.



Week 2: Bearing Fruit

Going
(Deeper)



Reflection questions:



- 1) What does it mean to be reconciled to God?
To our neighbor?
- 2) Where do we see good fruit being borne in our congregation?
- 3) Advent is a season of hopeful longing for the coming of Christ. How does this church respond to the other “hopeful longings” within our community – for peace, justice and wellness?



Prayer

Begin all days: Stir up your power, Lord God;

Sun – W: to prepare the way of your only Son....

Th – Sat: by his coming, nurture our growth as people
of repentance and peace ...

Conclude all days: through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Hymn suggestions

Track 3: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, ELW 257

- 1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

- 2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
embracing all things far and nigh:
in strength and beauty come and stay;
teach us your will and guide our way. *Refrain*

(cont'd) →

Sun
1-4

- 3 O come, O come, O Lord of might,
as to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times you gave the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe. *Refrain*
- 4 O come, O Branch of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave. *Refrain*
- 5 O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery. *Refrain*
- 6 O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer,
O Sun of justice, now draw near.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadow put to flight. *Refrain*
- 7 O come, O King of nations, come,
O Cornerstone that binds in one:
refresh the hearts that long for you;
restore the broken, make us new. *Refrain*
- 8 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear. *Refrain*

Mon
5-8

Origins, 13th century; Text: Psalterium Canticum Catholicarum, Köln, 1710; tr. Composite

Track 4: On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry, ELW 249

- 1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
awake and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings!
- 2 Then cleansed be every life from sin;
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.
- 3 We hail you as our Savior, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward;
without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.
- 4 Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,
and make us rise to fall no more;
oh, let your face upon us shine
and fill the world with love divine.
- 5 All praise to you, eternal Son,
whose advent has our freedom won,
whom with the Father we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

Sat



Week 3: Healing of the Whole World



Psalm

Isaiah 35:1-10

Matthew 11:2-11

W

Sun - Tues

Th - Sat

Eunice is a subsistence farmer in a small town in South Africa. Without other means of employment, Eunice is dependent on the natural environment around her. She may not know soil science, but she does know that the once fertile soil that produced bountiful crops is now bone dry. “The ground,” she says, “used to be soft and easy to dig by hand; water was freely available just under the surface and food was plentiful. But now the land is dry and hard and there is no water under the surface; even our small lake has dried up.” She has also noticed that the rains have become more erratic. They are less frequent, but when they do come, the rain is so hard that their fields flood, washing away valuable crops and seeds. And Eunice is not alone. In western Uganda, for example, farmers find themselves in the same climate situation, unable to grow cassava, bananas or soy beans. In recent years, Nicaragua has faced the worst drought it has seen in more than four decades, causing extremely high rates of hunger.

(going deeper)
(M)



In Scripture, we hear God’s invitation to enjoy the fruits of creation. We hear God’s call to be tenders of the garden. And, with Paul, we hear creation “groaning,” “longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Romans 8:19-23). But we also hear the promise of our Creator whose creation is a gift, and this is our starting point. We do not see the world

Week 3 : Bearing Fruit

as a treacherous terrain of challenges to be navigated but rather as a bountiful garden, which we are called to tend. The things we hear and see don't highlight a problem we must solve; rather, they remind us of a vocation to which we are called and the place we have been set to do so.

At its root, this vocation is a collaborative partnership in which we come to see the presence of God in, through, around and with us – enriching our labors and shaping our world. Martin Luther writes, “God is entirely present, personally and essentially, in Christ on earth in his mother’s womb, in the crib, in the temple, in the wilderness, in cities, in houses, in the garden, and in the field.” The call to care for creation is the call to draw near to the presence of God in the world around us, in the restored relationships between us and our neighbors, and in the life-giving relationship between humans and the land.

Through ELCA World Hunger, our church is accompanying our neighbors as we learn together what it means to be stewards of God’s good creation. In Bangladesh and Malawi, where water levels are dropping at alarming rates, ELCA World Hunger and local partners are helping small farmers cultivate drought-tolerant rice that requires 30 percent less water to grow. In Nicaragua, one of the countries hardest hit by climate change, ELCA World Hunger and the Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope in Nicaragua are helping families learn new ways to grow and irrigate crops, as well as practices to protect themselves from natural disasters.

Good news for creation is good news for people in poverty, who are particularly vulnerable to the worst effects of climate change. God’s promise, as Isaiah makes clear, is for reconciliation of all of creation, of a time when “the desert shall rejoice and blossom” (Isaiah 35:1-2) and when “waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert” (Isaiah. 35:6). Through ELCA World Hunger, this church is helping make this transformation visible in communities like Eunice’s, where “the burning sand” can often mean hunger and hardship.

Week 3 : Bearing Fruit

(going deeper)



Reflection questions

Tues

- 1) How do we experience God's graciousness through the natural world? How might a view of creation as "gift" shape our actions today?
- 2) What can farming and agriculture reveal about God's grace, God's work in the world, and humanity's relationship to the environment?
- 3) How might our congregation remain attentive to the environment and nature, even during cold, winter months?



Prayer

All days: Stir up the wills of all who look to you, Lord God, and strengthen our faith in your coming, that, transformed by grace, we may walk in your ways; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Hymn suggestions

Track 5: Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming, ELW 272

- 1 Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming
as seers of old have sung,
it came, a flow'r so bright,
amid the cold of winter,
when half-spent was the night.

Sun

(cont'd) →

- 2 Isaiah had foretold it,
the rose I have in mind;
with Mary we behold it,
the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
she bore to us a Savior,
when half-spent was the night.

Text: German carol, 15th cent.; tr. Theodore Baker, 1851-1934, sts. 1-2

Track 6: Prepare the Royal Highway, ELW 264

- 1 Prepare the royal highway;
the King of kings is near!
Let ev'ry hill and valley
a level road appear!
Then greet the King of glory,
foretold in sacred story:

Th

Refrain

Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

Text: Frans Mikael Franzén, 1772-1847; tr. *Lutheran Book of Worship*
Text © 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

Track 7: Hark, the Glad Sound! ELW 239

- 3 He comes the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich the humble poor.

Sat

Text: Philip Doddridge, 1702-1751



Week 4: God in Unexpected Places



Psalm 80:1-7

Isaiah 7:10-16

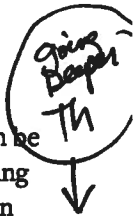
Matthew 1:18-25

W

Sun - Tues

Th - Sat

To say that Joseph must have been surprised when his fiancée “was found to be with child” is an understatement. An anticipated baby can be a special thing, but for Joseph, Mary’s pregnancy was more confounding than cheerful. In the midst of his confusion, he is visited by an angel in a dream. The mystery of the soon-to-arrive baby wouldn’t end there for Joseph, but the message from God was clear: There is something special about this one. He will not be like other children.



Congregations in southeast Michigan used to host a rotating homeless shelter for weeks at a time in November, just as the weather was turning cold. During their week of hosting, cots filled the Sunday school rooms. The narthex was transformed into a dining room and gathering space, and the office became a small medical clinic. As guests arrived at one congregation, Thomas drove with his parents to a parking lot to pick up a family that was living in their car. They had a son who, like Thomas, was only 10 years old, and they quickly discovered a mutual interest in comic books and football. Throughout the week, Mark and Thomas played games together, wandered the church, and developed as much of a friendship as one can within such a short time.

But for all their similarities, Mark and Thomas were very different boys. They both loved comics, but Mark had never owned one. They both loved football, but only Thomas had ever seen it on a big screen television. A motel to one boy was a strange, new place to return each night after a fun-filled vacation day. A motel to the other was a strange, new place to go on those rare occasions when his parents could afford a room.

Week 4 : God in Unexpected Places

Thinking of family road trips, Thomas lamented to his new friend how he could never sleep in a car. The other boy quietly responded, "You can when you don't have a choice."

Many of us eagerly serve in shelters, soup kitchens and food pantries, looking forward to bringing God to the lives of the people we might meet. What many of us are not prepared for is the God that others often bring to us. In the Gospel lesson, Joseph, raised on stories of the Hebrew Scriptures, did not expect to find God in the scandalous pregnancy of his soon-to-be-wife, Mary. Even Mary did not expect this (Luke 1:46-55). Yet, God who spoke on mountaintops and through burning bushes also came to an unmarried pregnant teenager. In a dream, Joseph encounters a confounding truth, that sometimes God is revealed in unexpected ways and through unexpected people.

During that week with Mark, Thomas had expected God to show up through himself and to reveal how good it felt to serve others. Instead, God showed up through Mark and his family and revealed to Thomas and the rest of the congregation the more sobering truth of their own privilege and the harsh reality of a world in which some have so much and many have so little.

God is revealed to us in other ways, too – in the hope we gain through stories of families finding stable homes and in the impelling dissatisfaction with injustice and inequity that drives people of faith to work tirelessly to end hunger, poverty and homelessness. This work comes to life each day through ELCA World Hunger, the ELCA's signature response to hunger and poverty around the world.

Sometimes God is revealed on a mountaintop, with flashing lightning and descending doves. But sometimes, God is revealed in an unwed, pregnant, teenage girl, and sometimes through a sandy-haired 10-year-old boy living in a beat-up Chevy. As we wait for the birth of Christ on the expected Christmas morning, we keep our eyes open for the presence of God in our midst in the unexpected, too.



Week 4 : God in Unexpected Places

going deeper



Reflection questions

- 1) When have you encountered God in unexpected places?
- 2) In Scripture, God often chooses unexpected people to be instruments of God's revelation: a shepherd boy, a stuttering prophet, a pregnant teenager. What does this say about God? What does this say to us about what it means to be people of God?
- 3) How can our church remain open to God's presence among people in poverty without making poverty itself seem blessed by God?

F



Prayer

Begin all days: Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come;

Sun – W: With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith...

Th – Sat: that eagerly we may receive your promises ...

Conclude all days: for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Hymn suggestions

Track 3: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, ELW 257

Pages 7-8 (Sun – stanzas 1-4; M – stanzas 5 – 8)

Track 8: Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn, ELW 242

- 1 Awake! Awake, and greet the new morn,
for angels herald its dawning.
Sing out your joy, for soon he is born,
behold! the Child of our longing.
Come as a baby weak and poor,
to bring all hearts together,
he opens wide the heav'nly door
and lives now inside us forever.

Jues

Text: Marty Haugen, b. 1950

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Track 9: Savior of the Nations, Come, ELW 263

- 1 Savior of the nations, come;
virgin's son, make here your home.
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth:
God has chosen such a birth.
- 3 Wondrous birth—oh, wondrous child—
from his throne, a virgin mild!
Very God, and Mary's son,
eager now his race to run!
- 4 From God's heart the Savior speeds,
back to God his pathway leads;
out to vanquish death's command,
back to reign at God's right hand.

Sat

Text: attr. Ambrose of Milan, 340-397; Martin Luther, 1483-1546



As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, through ELCA World Hunger, we commit to pursuing a world of justice where all are fed. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger support effective programs in nearly 60 countries, including the United States.

Through your gifts, this church is empowered to accompany our companions and neighbors responding to hunger and poverty around the world.



ELCA World Hunger
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