

# Advent Devotional Guide



*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:10)*

**Ad-vent** ['ad,vent]*Noun*

- 1) the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.
- 2) Christian Theology: the coming or second coming of Christ.

What comes to mind when you think of Christmas? Shopping? Concerts? Family? Candles? Gifts? Parties? Church? Nativity? Decorations? Wrapping paper? Midnight Madness? Caroling?

The reality is that the weeks leading up to Christmas can be some of the most hectic weeks of the year, and the real meaning of Christmas can easily be lost in all the activity.

To help you celebrate Christ's first coming, and to be prepared for his second coming, I have prepared a devotional guide similar to last summer's Engage Your Devotion initiative.

Starting on Sunday December 1<sup>st</sup>, simply read 1 chapter each day from Luke's gospel. This devotional guide will provide you with some basic insights, questions and prompts for each day. Take time to consider the questions, to read the suggested passages, and to memorize & meditate on a few key verses mentioned. And, I encourage you to listen carefully to that 'still, small voice' as you read through this incredible text.

This guide will be most helpful if you write out your answers and insights in a journal. I know, you may not like the idea of 'journaling'. To be honest, I don't either; but it is helpful, and so I do it anyway... By the way, the messages during the Advent season will be based on these readings as well.

Finally, I will be praying that your devotional life will flourish!

Sincerely,

Pastor Sweis

## **December 1 – Luke 1**

When we begin to read any of the gospels, it is easy to miss that the '400 years of silence' have finally come to an end! God is 'speaking' again to His people! And what was being spoken was of incredible importance!

*Look Back:* Read Malachi 4:5-6 and note how the promise of the birth of John (who would become known as 'John the Baptist') is being fulfilled!

*Consider:* Read Luke 1:37 "For nothing is impossible with God" (NIV 1984). What miracles can you identify in this chapter? (Note them in your journal)

*Pay Attention:* What verse(s) 'grabbed' you? Why?

*Respond:* The events described in this chapter drew a response. Both Mary and Zachariah provide us with a song...As you meditate on this chapter, write a 'song' that expresses your praise. Don't worry about it being 'perfect', rather focus on expressing your praise.

## **December 2 – Luke 2**

*Look Back:* Read Micah 5:2 and note how the very birthplace of Jesus was a fulfilment of ancient prophecy!

*Consider:* From the words of Simeon (vs 29-32, 34b-35) what do these verses tell us about the purpose of Jesus' coming?

*Pay Attention:* What verse(s) 'grabbed you'? Why? What might the Spirit be saying to you personally?

*Respond:* List your (family's) Christmas traditions. Which traditions seem most appropriate to actually celebrate the birth of Jesus? What tradition(s) could you include to more intentionally celebrate His birth and purpose? Discuss this with a family member or friend today.

### **December 3 – Luke 3**

*Look Back:* The second half of this chapter ‘looks back’ by considering Jesus’ genealogy. Note that this genealogy is different from the one found in Matthew 1. Is this a contradiction? No; Most scholars believe that the difference can be contributed to Matthew following the line of Joseph (Jesus’ earthly ‘father’) while Luke’s genealogy follows the line of Mary. Though this practice was highly unlikely, so was the virgin birth!

*Consider:* John recalls the words of Isaiah 40:3-5 in verses 4-6. In what way is he ‘preparing the way’ for Jesus (as the road would be prepared for a visiting king)? Considering the Jewish practice of baptizing Gentiles who wanted to become followers of Judaism, what is the significance of the ‘baptism of repentance’?

*Pay Attention:* What would John tell you about how you should live differently?

*Respond:* Ask the Holy Spirit to tell you how to respond to this chapter.

### **December 4 – Chapter 4**

*Look Back:* Jesus quotes portions from Isaiah 61:1-3 as he explains the purpose for his coming. Read it. Note the differences between the two passages?

*Consider:* How did Jesus respond to the devil’s temptations? How would you respond to similar temptations? Do you know God’s Word well enough to use it as a weapon to withstand temptation?

*Pay Attention:* The people at Nazareth obviously were not ready to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. In what areas do you struggle? Ask Him to reveal this in prayer.

*Respond:* In order to become very clear on why Jesus came, and what we, his followers, are to be about, memorize Luke 4:18-19.

## **December 5 – Luke 5**

*Look Back:* Re-read Luke 4:41 and Luke 5:21. Regarding the question ‘Who is Jesus?’, what is the difference between the understanding of demons and the religious leaders?

*Consider:* Luke 5:16 “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Prayer is one of the key themes in the book of Luke. Are you happy with your prayer-life? What do you wish it would look like? What will you do to see the change take place?

*Pay Attention:* What part of today’s reading ‘grabbed you’? Why? What is the Spirit saying to you personally?

*Respond:* Write in your journal your commitment to prayer for the remainder of the Advent season. Share your intentions with someone else and begin to implement it today!

## **December 6 – Luke 6**

*Look Back:* Read Exodus 20:8-11 Why do you think both David and Jesus were justified in breaking the ‘Sabbath law’?

*Consider:* We briefly looked at ‘prayer’ yesterday. Today we read that Jesus spent the night in prayer before designating his disciples. Recall the last big decision you made. How much time did you spend in prayer in preparation for the decision? What decisions do you need to make in the near future? Decide what role prayer will take in the making of those decisions.

*Pay Attention:* Today we also read what is sometimes referred to as ‘The Sermon on the Plain’ (as opposed to Matthew’s longer ‘Sermon on the Mount’). What part of Jesus teaching stands out to you? Why?

*Respond:* Write out your response to either the prayer issue or Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Plain. You may focus on insights, confession, a question or a commitment.

## **December 7 – Luke 7**

*Look Back:* Read Isaiah 35:5-6 and compare it to Jesus' answer (vs 22) to John's disciples! Then compare it to the passage you are memorizing (Luke 4:18-19)!

*Consider:* Luke 7:23 "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." What do you believe this may have indicated to John the Baptist, and what might it indicate to you?

*Pat Attention:* As Jesus interacts with different people in today's reading (the Centurion, the widow, John's disciples, the sinful woman, the religious leaders, etc.) what do you sense him saying to you personally?

*Respond:* Write out a response to your insight into today's reading. Then talk to someone about it before you go to bed.

## **December 8 – Luke 8**

*Looking Back:* In regards to the disciples' question of 'who is this Jesus who calms the storm and waves?', read Psalm 107:25-30. Who is this Jesus? What do these passages tell us about his identity?

*Consider:* Which soil in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:5-15) best describe you? What 'rocks' and 'weeds' may need to be removed? What 'compacted soil' may need to be tilled? How are you going to do this?

*Pay Attention:* What were Jesus instructions to the man who had been healed from demon-possession? How did he respond? (vs. 39)

*Respond:* Identify something that Jesus has done for you and write it down. It could be something he did for you a long time ago, or something more recent. Then go ahead and tell someone today!

## **December 9 – Luke 9**

*Look Back:* There are many 'Messianic prophecies' recorded in the Old Testament. Some of them we have already looked at in this devotional guide. Read Daniel 7:13-14 as an example.

*Consider:* Everyone had an opinion of who Jesus is. What were the opinions listed in verse 19?

Peter obviously 'got it right' (Christ, Messiah, Anointed One); Why do you think they were instructed not to tell anyone? What has changed since that day?

*Pay Attention:* Jesus repeatedly warns his disciples in this chapter that he had to suffer. What indication is there in this chapter that we, his followers, may have to suffer as well?

*Respond:* Write a prayer of commitment to Jesus using phrases of what you read in this chapter. ("Pray the Scriptures")

## **December 10 – Luke 10**

*Look Back:* Jesus sent out the 72 to do the work he had come to do himself (see the passage you are memorizing in Luke 4). How did they do? (See Luke 10:17)

*Consider:* From Luke's writing we now know who Jesus is... God the Son; the Christ, Messiah, the promised Anointed One. In some ways the focus has shifted slightly to our response. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we're told who our neighbor (who we are to love) really is. Which neighbours do you struggle to love?

*Pay Attention:* Who specifically is the Holy Spirit prompting you to reach out to? Ask the Spirit to reveal a name and then listen...

*Respond:* Write a prayer in which you commit to love someone you find difficult to love. Don't forget to thank God for revealing this person to you and to confess your failure to love this person sooner. Include in your prayer a prayer of specific blessings for this 'neighbor'.

### **December 11 – Luke 11**

*Look Back:* What was the “sign of Jonah” Jesus was referring to? (See Jonah 1:29)

*Consider:* At one point in today’s reading, a Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him (vs. 37). Jesus ended up speaking ‘the six woes’. In your own words, what was behind Jesus’ harsh judgement of the religious leaders?

*Pay Attention:* What is the Spirit telling you through the teaching of the six woes?

*Respond:* Write a prayer along the outline given in ‘The Lord’s Prayer’

### **December 12 – Luke 12**

*Look Back:* The first 12 verses of today’s reading may be greatly challenging. What part is most challenging to you?

Read and meditate on Proverbs 3:5-6. Ask God for greater trust!

*Consider:* What is most challenging about Jesus’ teaching in verses 49-53 to you? And, what does an appropriate response look like to those who oppose your following of Jesus? (Hint: re-read Luke 6:27-29)

*Pay Attention:* Verses 13-34 deal with man’s tendency to greed and worry. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind a true picture of these tendencies in your life. Be sure to confess any sin in this area.

*Respond:* As mentioned in the ‘Devoted to Generosity’ sermon earlier this fall, “everything belongs to the Lord: both time and resources” – we just manage what has been entrusted to us. What generous act will you do this week to fight the tendency of greed and worry? Share this intention with someone and ask to be held accountable.



### **December 13 – Luke 13**

*Look Back:* Jesus' Parable of the Vineyard (vs 6-8) and its meaning would have been familiar to Jewish people... Read Isaiah 5:1-7. What do you believe the main message of these two passages to be?

*Consider:* When Jesus healed the woman on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler objected (vs. 14). Jesus' response caused his opponents to be humiliated (vs. 17). What, do you think, caused this emotion?

*Pay Attention:* What, in today's reading makes you most uncomfortable? Why? Bring it before God in prayer and allow Him to speak to you about this. Write down what comes to mind.

*Respond:* Jesus' teaching in this chapter was certainly not in line with the religious understanding of the day. Ask the Spirit to reveal to you what He wants you to do today that is in line with Kingdom values, but may go against our cultural expectations.

### **December 14 – Luke 14**

*Look Back:* As Jesus continues to teach, he mentions 'the resurrection of the righteous'. Read Daniel 12:1-2. Who will all be raised from the dead? Only the righteous?

*Consider:* The Parable of the Great Banquet draws a picture where many people are just too busy to attend the feast. What 'reasons' are given in this parable, and, what personal reasons can you add?

*Pay Attention:* As you prayerfully read verses 25-35 (about the cost of following Jesus), what is the Spirit asking you to give up? What has following Jesus cost you already?

*Respond:* Today's reading may be very difficult to accept for anyone living in a consumeristic and materialistic culture. Find a way to encourage at least 2 people today to 'pay the price'.

### ***December 15 – Luke 15***

*Look Back:* Today's reading is all about the lost being found. The image of God as shepherd would have been very familiar to religious Jews. Read Ezekiel 34:11-16. What characteristics of the Shepherd do you identify in these two readings?

*Consider:* Jesus' teaching on this topic seems to have flowed out of the muttering of religious people. They obviously did not see 'sinners' as people worthy to love or spend time with (vs. 2). What kind of 'lost people' do you struggle to love?

*Pay Attention:* Ask Jesus to bring to mind a 'lost person', and ask him to reveal to you how He views this person. Write any insights down in your journal

*Respond:* Write a prayer for this 'lost person'. Include in your prayer a blessing for him/her and a commitment to reaching out to this person in the days ahead.

### ***December 16 – Luke 16***

*Look Back:* There is actually much discussion as to the precise meaning of the Parable of the Shrew Manager. Read the wise advice of Proverbs 23:4-5 as a basis to understanding wealth. Write down what 'stands out' to you.

*Consider:* Why would the master commend the manager? (vs 8) What righteous lesson might there be in this seemingly strange verse for us as 'people of the light'?

*Pay Attention:* What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about today's reading? Write it down and respond appropriately.

*Respond:* Verses 19-31 paint a horrifying scene in which it's 'too late'. We are just over a week away from Christmas. Who will you reach out to, with the intent to introduce them to Jesus. What will you do specifically before it is 'too late'?

### ***December 17 – Luke 17***

*Look Back:* Read Matthew 6:14-15 for more of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness. Also, the number seven in Scripture often indicates 'completeness'. See Ps 119:164 for an example of 'complete praise'. What do you suppose Jesus meant in Luke 17:4?

*Consider:* The disciples recognized the difficulty in forgiving, and so cried out 'Increase our faith!' (vs 5) Why do you think Jesus responded the way he did? (vs 6-10)

*Pay Attention:* Ask Jesus to bring to mind someone you have not forgiven. Write this person's name in your journal.

*Respond:* The Set Free Retreat teaching includes 2 practical steps on forgiveness: 1) Pray for the offender(s) the same thing you pray for yourself, and 2) Do something for the offender(s) that shows care (if possible and safe). Since unforgiveness is a strategy of the Enemy, do your best to forgive the person that came to mind earlier.

### ***December 18 – Luke 18***

*Look Back:* Verse 1 gives us the reason for the Parable of the Persistent Widow. Again, this teaching should have been familiar to Jewish people. Read Psalm 88:1 – 2 for an Old Testament example. On a scale of 1-10, how persistent are you in prayer?

*Consider:* Today's reading clearly shows how different the values of the Kingdom of Heaven are from the kingdom of earth. Which differences stand out to you?

*Pay Attention:* Ask Holy Spirit to reveal to you any values you hold that are not in line with the values of the Kingdom. Write them down, repent, and ask Him to transform you values.

*Respond:* After the rich ruler turned his back on Jesus the disciples asked "Who then can be saved?" (vs. 26) Jesus reminds them that salvation is only possible with God. Write a prayer thanking God for your salvation.

## **December 19 – Luke 19**

*Look Back:* Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem was foretold in the Old Testament. Read Zechariah 9:9 and write what aspects of that verse were fulfilled when Jesus entered.

*Consider:* The story of Zacchaeus is well known by Christians. But did you know that verse 10 can be seen as the key verse of the Gospel of Luke? In short, for this purpose Jesus traded in his heavenly glory to live among his enemy and endure suffering!

Commit this verse to memory so you will always be able to share the reason for Jesus' coming!

*Pay Attention:* As Jesus entered Jerusalem, he wept (vs 41). What did Jesus know that brought about this emotion? Ask him what 'makes him weep' in your life.

*Respond:* Much of this chapter is about our response to Jesus and His Kingdom. In light of what you have read and to what He may have revealed to you (in *Pay Attention*), write a 'prayer of response', indicating your commitment to Him.

## **December 20 – Luke 20**

*Looking Back:* Read Isaiah 5:1-7 to appreciate what Jesus was telling the religious leaders through the Parable of the Tenants. What, do you think, was his main point?

*Consider:* Yesterday you began to memorize this book's key verse (Luke 19:10). What evidence do you see in today's reading that the religious leaders, for the most part, would not 'be found'.

*Pay Attention:* What is the Spirit saying to you about your response to Jesus? What is He pleased with? What needs to change?

*Respond:* The Set Free Retreat teaches a very specific way of confessing sin. "Father, I confess that ..... is my sin. I repent of it and ask you to forgive me." As you prepare for Christmas, pray this prayer for each thing that you know needs to change.

## ***December 21 – Luke 21***

*Look Back:* Much of this chapter is devoted to Jesus' teaching on 'End Times'. Old Testament themes can be found throughout. For example, read Daniel 9:24-27. Does this kind of teaching cause you to hope or to fear?

*Consider:* Many Christians prefer to ignore 'End Times teaching' because it scares them. The truth is that tough times are ahead! But did you know that even the book of Revelation was written as an encouragement to suffering Christians? Yes, there would be trouble, but all is well for those who are victorious (faithful to Jesus)! Read Revelation 21:1-8.

*Pay Attention:* Remember you are loved by the Father! In prayer, ask Jesus to reveal something that he loves about you.

*Respond:* Intentionally, step out of your comfort zone today! Commit to doing one thing 'in faith' before going to bed tonight.

## ***December 22 – Luke 22***

*Look Back:* The money agreed upon in verse 4 is yet another fulfillment of prophecy (Zechariah 11:12). Did you know that '30 pieces of silver' was the price of a slave in ancient Israel and indicates relative worthlessness?

*Consider:* When we think on Jesus' teaching on prayer, we usually default to what we have come to know as 'The Lord's Prayer' (Luke 11:2-4). However, there is a very important lesson regarding prayer in today's chapter. What did Jesus instruct his followers to pray for (vs. 40)?

*Pay Attention:* The saying "Familiarity breeds contempt" is a real possibility when it comes to the Lord's Supper. Write in your journal what 'grabbed' you when you read vs. 7-23.

*Respond:* With Christmas only days away, who will you encourage with what you learned from today's reading? Be sure to do it before the day is over!

### **December 23 – Luke 23**

*Look Back:* Read Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 Which prophecies from your reading in Isaiah do you recognize as being fulfilled in today's reading from Luke? Jot them down to help you grasp the significance of the events.

*Consider:* Today's reading might seem 'out of place' with Christmas only 2 days away. That said, Jesus' trial, crucifixion and death are necessary in order to accomplish his mission. In your own words, what is Jesus' mission and how does today's reading relate?

*Pay Attention:* "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son..." Quietly consider what Jesus suffered for you. Journal any thoughts or 'pictures' that come to mind.

*Respond:* Write a thank-you letter to Jesus. You don't need to share it with anyone else – just share it with Him as you write.

### **December 24 – Luke 24**

*Look Back:* As we have seen the past 24 days, the Old Testament has a lot to say about the Messiah. It even eluded to Jesus' resurrection! Read Isaiah 53:10-11 and give praise!

*Consider:* The ascension of Jesus marks the end of his 'first advent', but He will return! There will be a Second Coming! In the meantime, He has not left us alone... What did Jesus refer to in verse 49? And, what would the result be?

*Pay Attention:* The disciples could hardly believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead (verse 36-39) What about Jesus do you struggle to believe? Confess it by writing it out and in prayer, and pray for faith and understanding.

*Respond:* Jesus' followers are called 'witnesses of these things' (vs. 48). Witnesses are called to testify. Ask Jesus who you should testify to this Christmas. Then follow through!

### ***A final thought....***

You have come to the end of the Book of Luke and this devotional guide. I sincerely hope it has been of help, challenge and encouragement to you.

Now it is Christmas Eve. We pause remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Son of God; the Promised Messiah. He would grow up to, well, you read the story... But one day he will return!

The question is, how will he find us?

Faithful or compromising?

Thriving or stuck?

Transformed or worldly?

Alive or dead?

'In Christ' or 'in the world'?

This past November I read through, and contemplated the Book of Revelation. Unlike ever before I realized the book is a lot less about 'when', 'how' and 'what sequence', and much more about encouraging the followers of Christ to remain faithful.

Maybe give it a try in the weeks ahead! If you have access to the internet, I highly recommend the 2 videos from the Bible Project dealing with Revelation.

But first things first; it's Christmas Eve...

Besides preparing gifts, decorations and food, you have prepared to celebrate by following this devotional guide.

So do it.... Celebrate!

Remember his humble birth, his life, his sacrifice, his death and resurrection. He did it, that you might have life.

Attend a Christmas (Eve) service. Read the Christmas story again. Sing a carol. Thank Him in prayer.

Merry Christmas!

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