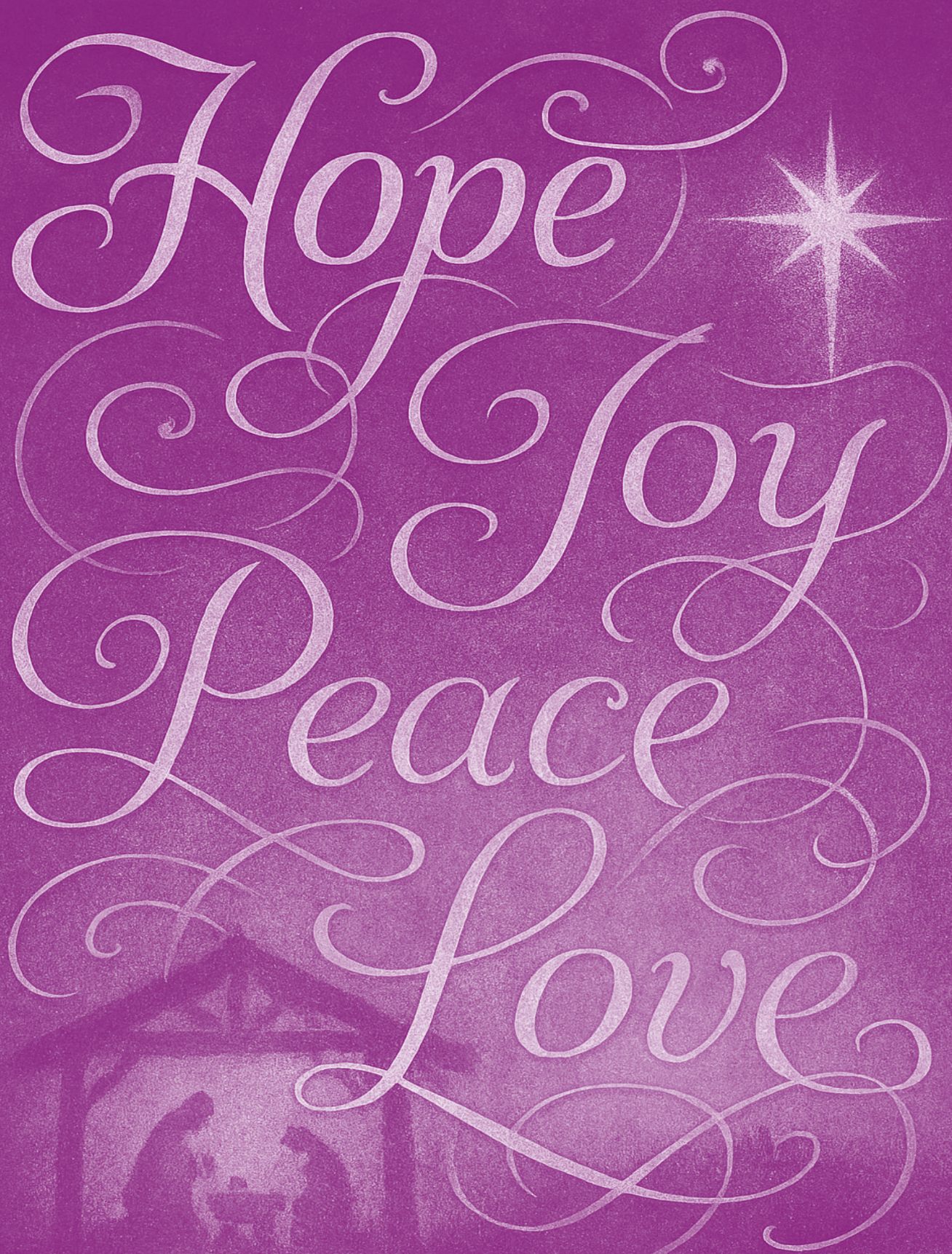
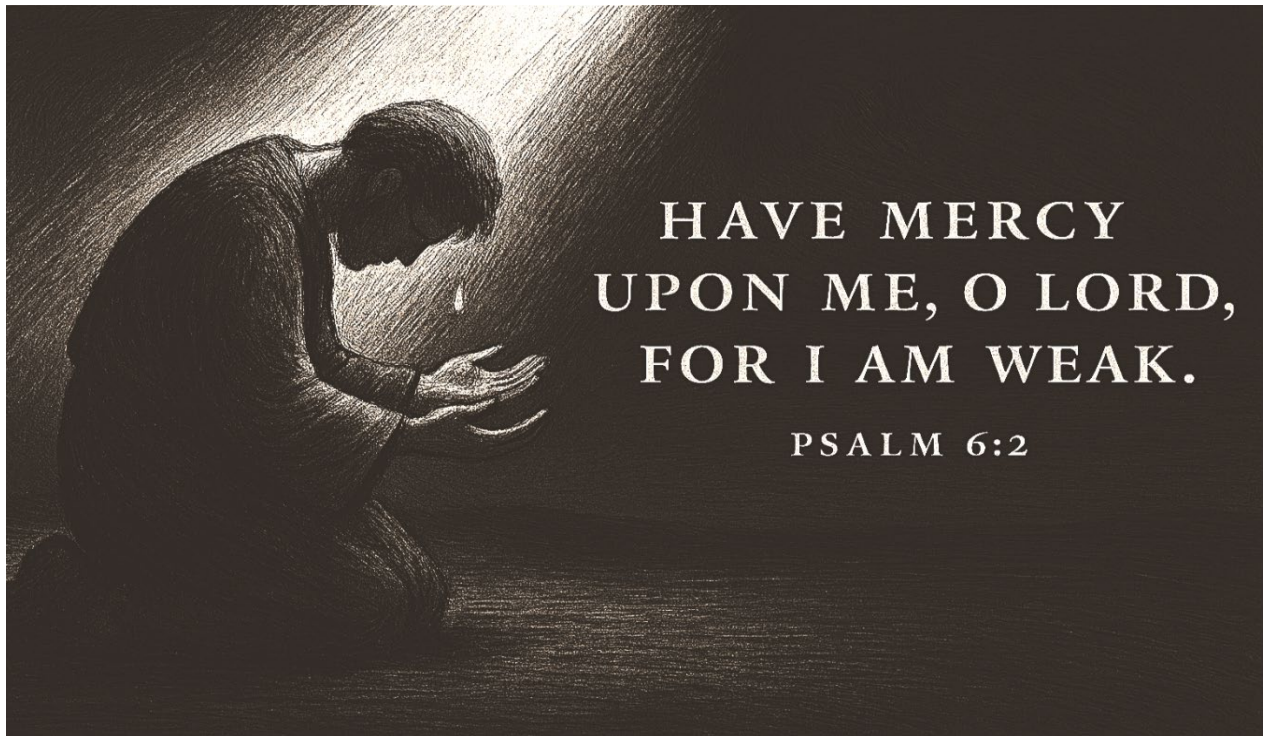


Hope
Joy
Peace
Love



ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2025



Advent Week 1 - Psalm 6: Awakening

The Archdeacon Dan Hardin

Advent begins with a jolt — the Lord calls His people to rise from spiritual drowsiness and face Him with clear eyes and an honest heart. Psalm 6 places us right at that threshold. It is the prayer not of the proud or the self-assured, but of one who finally sees the truth about his own condition: “Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am weak.” The psalmist’s words strip away the polite illusions we prefer. He is describing the soul awakened — startled, humbled, and suddenly aware of its need.

This is where true spiritual awakening always begins. Sin is not merely a tally of wrong actions; it is estrangement from God, a rupture in fellowship, a relationship wounded at its very core. When the psalmist cries out, he is acknowledging that the true weight of sin is not guilt alone but distance — distance from the One who is our life. Advent insists that we face this reality. It refuses to let us drift casually into the season. It confronts us with the truth that something in us must be roused, awakened, shaken loose from complacency.

Such awakening requires honesty — not the half-honesty that admits only what is comfortable, but the painful transparency that the psalmist models. “I am weary with my groaning,” he says, and the words carry no excuses, no self-defense. Advent asks us to do the same: to come before God without pretense, without rehearsed speeches, without blame shifted elsewhere. In a

season when the world races toward sentimentality, Scripture calls us to sober truthfulness before divine mercy. Only those who know their need can truly receive the One who comes.

And here the connection to the Advent proclamation becomes clear: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The preparation is not external; it is inward. The Lord does not ask us to decorate the heart, but to open it. His light always exposes before it comforts. The light of Christ pushes back darkness in a way that is both unsettling and healing. It reveals what we would rather conceal, yet it does so for the sake of restoration, not shame. The exposing light of God is the beginning of health.

Therefore, let Advent begin with quiet confession — not rushed, not mechanical, but sincere. Let it begin with a renewed hunger for mercy, a recognition that our weakness is not an obstacle to God’s grace but the very condition in which His mercy meets us. Psalm 6 reminds us that God draws near to the trembling, the weary, and the contrite. And until that awakening takes hold, there can be no true Christmas joy. For joy without repentance is counterfeit; but joy that rises from an awakened, honest heart is the joy that Christ Himself brings.

So we stand at the doorway of the season with the psalmist’s cry on our lips: “Have mercy upon me, O LORD.” This is the right beginning — the only beginning. Only those awakened by mercy can truly welcome the coming King.



Advent Week 1 - The Substance of Hope

The Reverend Canon Stephen Linkous

We light that first Advent candle and say the word—Hope. But let me ask you something: What are we really talking about here? Because if we're honest with each other, most of what we call hope is really just wishful thinking dressed up in religious language.

You know what I mean. We hope the diagnosis comes back better than expected. We hope the difficult conversation goes well. We hope next year brings some relief. And underneath all of it, there's this quiet fear that maybe we're fooling ourselves.

But biblical hope? That's something different entirely.

Let me tell you about the prophets. These weren't men removed from reality. Isaiah spoke to a nation facing annihilation. Jeremiah wept as Jerusalem burned. Ezekiel sat in the ruins of everything his people had known.

These men knew darkness intimately.

But listen to how Isaiah speaks: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." Not "might see" or "let's hope they see." No—"have seen." Present tense. Done. And he's saying this while enemy armies surround the city.

That's not optimism. That's something else entirely.

Or consider Jeremiah. The city's under siege. Babylon has them surrounded. And this man buys a field—real estate in a war zone. Can you imagine? His neighbors must have thought he'd lost

his mind. But Jeremiah understood something crucial: There's a difference between wishing and hoping. Wishing says, "Wouldn't it be nice if things worked out?" Hope says, "God has spoken, so it's certain."

This is the hope Advent invites us into—not some fragile optimism that collapses under pressure, but an anchor that holds when everything else is falling apart.

The writer of Hebrews gives us a powerful image—hope as an anchor for the soul. Anyone who's been on a boat understands how an anchor works. The storm can rage. The waves can crash. But the boat stays because down below, where you can't see it, that anchor has caught hold of something solid. Something the storm cannot touch.

That's how biblical hope works. It's not tied to your circumstances. It's not dependent on how you're feeling or whether you can see how this will resolve. It's anchored in God himself—in his character, his promises, his proven faithfulness.

God isn't asking you to hope in hope. He's asking you to hope in him. When Scripture says, "God is not a man, that he should lie"—that's not poetry. That's bedrock truth. Every promise God has made, he has kept or will keep.

Think about Mary. A young woman receives an impossible announcement from an angel. Nothing about it makes sense. But her response? "Let it be to me according to your word." She doesn't understand the how. She can't see the path. But she knows the one making the promise. And that's enough.

John says it simply: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Isn't that exactly what we need to hear when darkness feels overwhelming?

Here's what the prophets were announcing—God himself would come as light into our darkness. Not sending help from a distance. Not offering wisdom from heaven. Coming in person. The Light would take on flesh and blood, be born in darkness, laid in a feeding trough because no one made room.

That's what Advent celebrates. The Light arrived exactly as God promised. Shepherds in darkness suddenly surrounded by glory. A star piercing the night. God keeps his word. The Light came.

Every Advent candle we light proclaims it: What God promised, he did.

But we live in the tension—between Christ’s first coming and his second. Between promise given and promise fully realized. Jesus came, yes. But we’re still waiting for him to return and make all things new.

We’re not hoping that Christ might return. We’re trusting that he will because he said so. “I am coming soon,” he declared. Every promise already fulfilled guarantees every promise yet to come.

So we light candles in the darkness—not denying the darkness is real, but refusing to grant it finality. We grieve, but not as those without hope. We struggle, but not without certainty that the struggle has meaning and end. We wait with the expectation of those who have met the Promise-Keeper.

Maybe you’re entering this Advent season weary of hoping. Life has taught you that expectation is dangerous. That it’s safer to keep your guard up and protect your heart from disappointment.

I understand. But biblical hope isn’t wishful thinking. It’s not positive thinking or pretending everything’s fine. It’s confident expectation rooted in God’s character and his proven track record of keeping every promise.

The same God who spoke light into darkness at creation spoke his final Word in Christ. The same God who kept his promise to send a Savior will keep his promise to return and restore everything that’s broken.

As you light your Advent candles this season, let them remind you: Hope is not wishful thinking. It’s an anchor fixed in bedrock. The prophets spoke into absolute darkness with complete certainty, and the Light came exactly as promised.

He’s coming again. That’s our hope. That’s our anchor. That’s our confident expectation.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Pax,

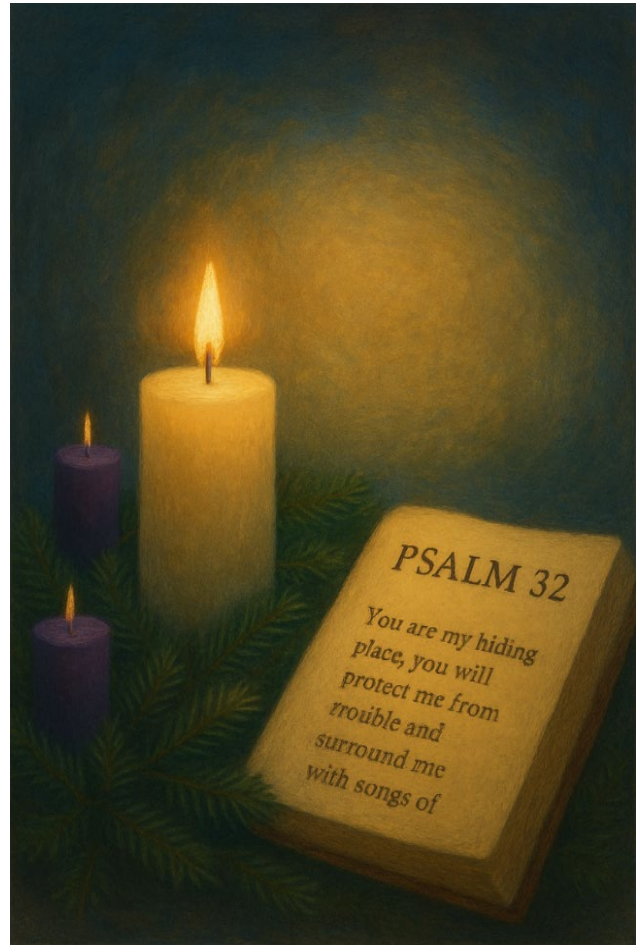
The Rev’d Cn Stephen Linkous

Advent Week 2 - Psalm 32: Forgiveness

The Archdeacon Dan Hardin

Our theme this evening is *The Blessedness of the Forgiven*. Forgiveness is not a theory; it is an experience. Psalm 32 gives us the journey — from silence and misery, to confession, and finally to the deep joy of restoration.

“When I kept silent,” says the psalmist, “my bones wasted away through my groaning all the day long.” Sin has a *weight*. When we withhold confession, when pride or fear closes our lips, the soul begins to feel the burden of the weight of sin. Guilt has a way of pressing not only upon the spirit but even upon the body. It steals our peace, it disturbs our rest, and it turns prayer into a labor rather than a joy. David knew that feeling well — that inward corrosion of conscience when sin is known but unspoken. To carry unconfessed sin is to live beneath a heaviness that no human strength can lift.



Then comes *the release*. “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee,” he says, “and Thou forgave the iniquity of my sin.” Notice how simple it is — no bargaining, no self-justification, no ritual performance — only the honesty of confession. The act of confession is not groveling before a tyrant; it is the return of a child to his Father’s embrace. True confession is homecoming. There is no liberation like it in all the world.

And so we come to *the joy*. The forgiven heart sings again. The psalm ends not in shame but in gladness: “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous.” Forgiveness in God is not merely a legal pardon — it is the restoration of fellowship, the mending of communion, the rekindling of joy. God does not merely erase our record; He restores our relationship. The burdened bones that once groaned now dance. The silence of guilt gives way to the music of grace.

As we draw nearer to Advent, this forgiveness is our preparation. The Christ Child comes to dwell in forgiven hearts. The season bids us to make straight the way of the Lord — not by

outward gestures, but by humble repentance. When we confess, we clear the inn of our souls that He may find room within. Forgiveness prepares us to receive Christ in freedom and in joy.

So tonight, if your heart is heavy, if something long unspoken weighs upon your spirit, take David's path. Speak it to God. Receive His mercy. And then, like the psalmist, you will find your voice again — the song of the forgiven, the blessedness of those whose sin is covered.

Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."
Amen.

Advent Week 2 – BLESSED Lord

The Reverend Joey ODell

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The collect for the second week of Advent seems a strange fit - not just for contemporary evangelicals and other Christians who think that Advent is just pre-Christmas, but also for us who know that Advent calls us to the hope of the return of Jesus. Why is this collect an Advent collect?



It's important to realize that this collect is perhaps the most Protestant statement in our prayer book outside the 39 Articles. In the year 1536, William Tyndale was executed for the crime of publishing the Bible in English. Only a year later King Henry VIII authorized the publication of the Great Bible, which was placed in, and chained to, the pulpit in every church. Contrary to the assumptions of historically confused Baptists and Adventists, the Great Bible was ordered chained to the pulpit for two reasons – to prevent theft and to allow the laity always to have access to it, for the price of such a large book was beyond the means of most people. If you ever take the time to research the Great Bible, you'll find that the images and Scriptures on the title page convey a definite royal message: the King had authority from God to give the Bible to the people.

Notice these features:

- Central to all is the figure of King Henry VIII, whose crown has been removed in deference to God. The King hands the *Verbum Dei* (the Word of God) to the leaders of the Church, (Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury), and the Civil Government (Thomas Cromwell, the Lord Privy Seal).
- To Cranmer Henry says "Such things command and teach" (I Timothy 4:11)
- To Cromwell he says, "Judge righteously; hear the small as well as the great." (Deuteronomy 1:16-17)
- To everyone Henry says, "My commandment is, in my dominion & kingdom, that men fear and stand in awe of the living God."
- In the left middle picture, Cranmer passes the Bible to the clergy with the words, "Feed ye Christ's flock" (I Peter 5:2)

- On the right middle picture, Cromwell hands the Bible to the laymen saying, “Shun evil, and do good; seek peace and ensue it.”
- At the left top of the bottom frame, a preacher urges his people to pray and give thanks for their king (I Timothy 2:1-2). The congregation responds, “Long live the King.”

So, whatever we may think of Henry VIII’s proclivities and motivations, he clearly believed it was beneficial to himself and to his kingdom to make the Word of God accessible to the people in their own language.

In England in 1549, when the first Book of Common Prayer was published, the Great Bible had been available to the people for ten years, while the Roman Catholic church would not publish a complete Bible in English for 60 more years. Thus, when this collect was first published, it proclaimed what the Reformation was truly about – where authority is found. Faithful Christians of every stripe would affirm that all authority is given to the Lord Jesus Christ, who commissioned his church to take the gospel into all the world. But, what is the ultimate and highest authority in this world that is accessible and understandable to us? The reason Rome did not authorize the Scriptures to be printed in English – or Spanish, or French – was because it proclaimed *itself* as the ultimate authority to not only have the Scriptures, but to tell the people what it said and what it meant.

When people can read, know, and wrestle with understanding the Holy Scriptures together, without a magisterium to tell the people what to believe, a transformation of understanding occurs in people, in families, in communities. This is why this nearly 400-year-old collect still matters. It calls us to faithfulness as a people in an age of universal literacy: to not only hear the Word of God read and explained at the divine service, but also to, ourselves, read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest it. When the words of the Scriptures are not just something someone else tells you about, but they are securely rooted in your soul, it transforms your life. It orients you toward what is good, true, and beautiful. It places your hope, not in temporary circumstances, but in eternal truths and the relationship between us and our Triune God and Savior.

Knowing the Scriptures, knowing the truth gives us hope – not a hope that the world has, a feeling that what you want might come to pass, but the hope spoken of in the Bible, a certainty that what has been decreed will certainly come to pass. This is not a hope that is a guess, but a hope that is knowing. Knowing our calling and baptism are sure, knowing that Jesus meets us in the sacraments, knowing that the church is the supernatural body of Christ, and knowing that Jesus is making all things new.

But why now? Why is this collect placed in Advent and not during Trinity-tide? Shouldn’t all the Advent collects be about Christmas? Of course not – after all, none of the historic collects during Advent are about Christmas. They are, as a whole, about what Advent and Christmas point us toward, the mystery of faith: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ WILL come again. Our hope is not that Jesus came, did some very important things, and left us here on earth to

work it out. It is that He is coming again to restore the world to its rightful relationship with our creator. May we, by patience and comfort of God's holy Word, embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which He has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.



Advent Week 2 - Advent Repentance: Returning to God with Whole Heart and Riven Soul (Part 1 of 2)

The Reverend Ben Knoblet

*"Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord."
Jerimiah 8:7 KJV*

Advent marks the "now" of turning—a sacred summons to repentance in light of Christ's first coming and in anticipation of His second. As Scripture declares, "repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47), and "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2). The season of Advent is not merely a countdown to Christmas; it is a divine invitation to return to God with contrite hearts.

This turning is not a one-time pivot but a perpetual motion—a rhythm of repentance echoing through the Church's homiletic tradition. Lancelot Andrewes, in his penitential preaching, evokes this cycle with his "now therefore" at the year's equinoctial turn, when even creation returns to its appointed course (Jer 8:7). Advent repentance, then, is a complete circle: a turning from sin to God with whole heart, and a turning back to confront sin with rent heart. It is marked by *fasting, weeping, mourning, and rending*—actions that embody the soul's yearning for restoration, grounded in the assurance of God's merciful nature (Joel 2:13; Exod 34:6).

Part I of this reflection will explore one of the four principal movements of Advent repentance outlined in Andrewes' Sermon, each enriched by his twofold motion and manner. Through this lens, we may see how the Church's liturgical rhythm calls us not only to prepare for Christ's coming but to be transformed by it. Let us begin with a collect that frames our journey:

Almighty and merciful God, who in your loving-kindness calls us to repentance and reconciliation through your Son Jesus Christ: grant us true contrition of heart, that turning from our sins, we may be grafted anew into your grace and await with joyful hope the coming of our Savior; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

From What We Must Return: Forsaking All Sin and By-Ways

Advent repentance begins with a decisive turning from sin in all its forms. The homily preached before King James, at Whitehall from Andrewes's first call is clear: we must forsake not only gross outward deeds but also inward lusts, false opinions, and superstitious practices. As Isaiah laments, "your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God" (Isa 59:2), and Paul confesses the war within: "another law... making me captive to the law of sin" (Rom 7:23). Lancelot Andrewes warns against a shallow repentance that merely shifts from one extreme to another—from fleshly indulgence to worldly distraction—without truly turning toward God (Deut 5:32). Such repentance is incomplete, a detour that leaves the soul wandering in sin's by-ways.

The Old Testament validates this concept from the very beginning with the Hebrew verb *shub* (שׁוּב), "to return or go back, bring back" (Vine, Unger, and White 1996, 203). In its first occurrence, God tells Adam that he and Eve will "eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). This pronouncement marks the original instance of the need for course correction and, by extension, the ancient biblical longing for Advent.

Advent calls us to a higher turning. Just as the stars return to their appointed place in the heavens, so must repentant souls abandon sin's blind alleys and walk the *via recta*—the straight path—toward the presence of God (Psalm 16:11, KJV). This is no passive drift, but an active forsaking—a deliberate reorientation of heart and life. Tertullian, in *On Repentance*, urges believers to tear up the roots of sin, not merely trim its branches. He writes, "While it abases the man, it raises him; while it covers him with squalor, it renders him more clean; while it accuses, it excuses; while it condemns, it absolves." He adds, "The less quarter you give yourself, the more (believe me) will God give you." For Tertullian, true repentance must be seen in how we live—not just in what we confess (*On Repentance*, ANF 3:657–68).

Practically, this turn demands vigilance. The daily examination becomes a spiritual compass, guiding the soul away from occasions of sin, corrupt objects, and harmful company. It is not enough to regret sin; we must flee from its sources. Advent's penitential tone invites us to fast not only from food but from every indulgence that clouds the soul's vision of God. We weep not only for what we've done but for what we've become—and we mourn the distance sin has placed between us and our Creator. Repentance is an ongoing process, not a single conversion moment. Advent is an annual observance for a reason.

Thus, the first motion of Advent repentance is a forsaking—a turning from all that separates us from God. It is the beginning of the circle, the first step toward restoration, and the necessary clearing of the path for Christ's coming. Only by leaving behind the by-ways can we hope to walk the way that leads to life.

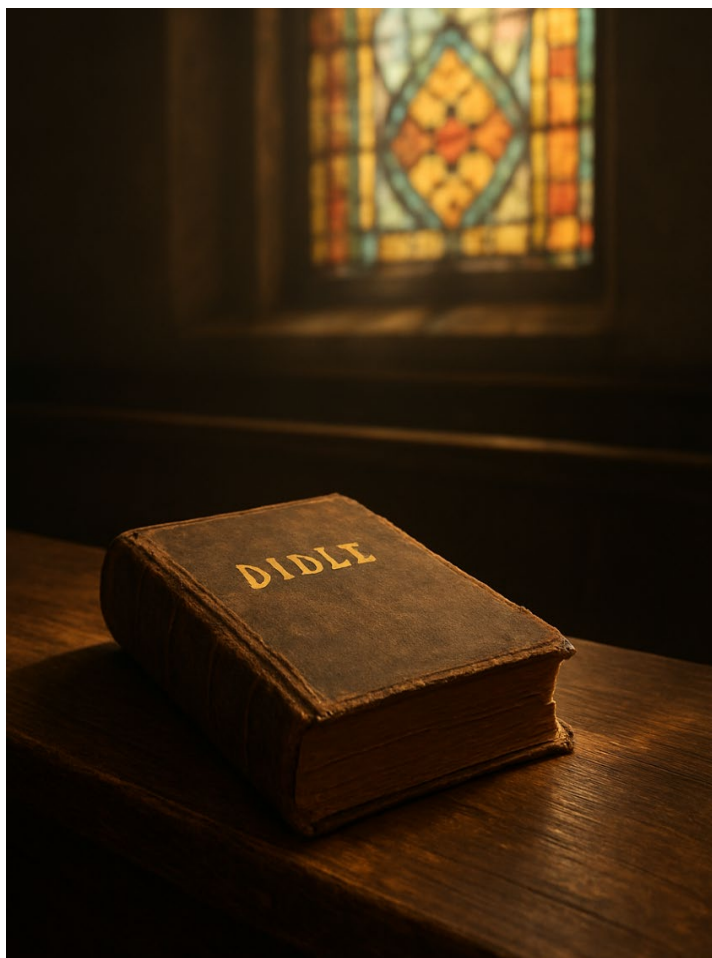
In the second part of this reflection, I will explore, through Bishop Andrewes' sermon, our return to God—how Christ mediates this reconciliation—and the practical means of turning through fasting, weeping, mourning, and rending the heart.

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Advent Week 3 - Psalm 51- Renewal

The Archdeacon Dan Hardin

Our theme this evening is *renewal* — not as the world understands it, but as the psalmist prays it. “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Renewal, you see, is not self-improvement; it is God’s re-creation of the heart. We do not mend ourselves. We are made new by the same power that once called light out of darkness.

First, *the cry for renewal*. Psalm 51 is not the prayer of a man seeking only forgiveness, but of one who longs to be changed. David has confessed; he has been pardoned — yet he yearns for more. Forgiveness removes the guilt; renewal restores the strength to walk uprightly. Every true penitent desires not simply to be cleansed, but to be *made whole*.

Second, *the divine work*. “Create in me,” he says — *create*. The Hebrew word is *bara*, used in Genesis for God’s act of bringing forth creation from nothing. This is no moral tune-up, no mere turning over a new leaf. It is new creation. Only God can do this work. Our resolutions and disciplines may be good, but they are not enough. The human will cannot purify itself any more than darkness can generate light. Renewal is the miracle of God’s grace — the Spirit brooding once again over the chaos of the human heart, saying, “Let there be life.”

Third, *the outcome*. A renewed heart does not remain silent. David continues, “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” When God renews the heart, gratitude becomes witness. Renewal always overflows — in mission, in joy, in compassion. The heart that has been recreated begins to beat in rhythm with the heart of God.

And so, as Advent draws to its close, we prepare not merely to celebrate a birth long past, but to receive the Incarnate Word anew. Advent ends where Christmas begins — with a clean heart

ready to welcome Christ. He who once came to Bethlehem now comes to dwell within us. May our prayer be the psalmist's prayer:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Amen.



Advent Week 3 - Advent Repentance: Returning to God with Whole Heart and Riven Soul (Part 2 of 2)

The Reverend Ben Knoblet

“Therefore, also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart... Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly” Joel 2:12-15 KJV

To Whom We Must Return: God Alone, with Whole Heart

If Advent repentance begins with forsaking sin, its true fulfillment lies in returning to God—*usque ad me* (“unto me”), as the Lord pleads through Jeremiah (Jer. 3:12). The homily preached before King James at Whitehall by Bishop Andrewes (on February 10, A.D. 1619) underscores this second point: not a vague spiritual drift, but a deliberate return by faith, persisting without fainting. Andrewes captures this in his first penitential motion: a turning *toto corde*—with the whole heart—rejecting the divided affections that fracture devotion (Ps. 86:11). The early Church recognized this same danger. In Acts, Barnabas exhorts believers to “remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” (Acts 11:23), a call to undivided pursuit.

Advent sharpens this focus. As the Word prepares to come among us, faith must apprehend Him—not partially, but wholly. The season’s penitential tone is not merely about sorrow; it is about reorientation. Hebrews warns against the deceitfulness of sin that leads to hardened hearts and spiritual relapse (Heb 3:12–14). Only a whole-hearted return can counter this drift. Advent faith is not passive belief but active longing, a soul stretched toward the Incarnate Word.

Practically, this means renouncing divided affections—those subtle idolatries that dilute our love for God. It means sequestering time for prayer, creating space for communion with the One

to whom we return. Richard Hooker, in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, affirms that true religion is not merely external conformity, but the soul's inward bent toward God when he writes about the "nature of spiritual jurisdiction" (Hooker, *Polity*, VI, 2). Advent invites us to cultivate this inward bent, to turn not just our actions but our affections toward the divine.

Thus, the second motion of Advent repentance is a return—not to moralism, not to vague spirituality, but to God Himself. It is a movement of the whole heart, a faith that refuses to faint, a longing that seeks its end in the presence of the living God. Only such a return can prepare us to receive the Word made flesh.

By Whom We May Reconcile: Christ the Mediator, Turning Aversion to Access

True repentance not only turns from sin and toward God—it must pass through Christ, the Mediator. The homily's third point affirms that Christ alone reconciles sinners to God, for his sacrifice alone satisfies divine justice. As Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Hebrews confirms that "the blood of Christ . . . shall purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14). In the Old Testament, "repentance" with reference to sin is not so prominent as a change of mind or purpose (Vine, Unger, and White 1996, 525). Without Christ, the soul remains estranged; with him, it finds access.

The parable of the lost (or prodigal) son is rich with the connection between confession and correction. "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee" (Luke 15:18–19). Christ is the bridge between aversion and embrace, between wrath and welcome. "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him" (Luke 15:20).

Advent intensifies this reality. The incarnate Mediator comes not only to dwell among us but also to turn away wrath and open the way of peace. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Though in English a focal component of repent is the sorrow or contrition that a person experiences because of sin, the emphasis in the New Testament words *metanoieō* and *metanoia* is more specifically the total change—both in thought and behavior—with respect to how one should think and act (Louw and Nida 1996, 509). Advent repentance is not despair but hope—hope grounded in Christ's merits, not our own.

Practically, this calls for bold confession and a firm grasp of Christ's passion. We do not come before God in fear, but in faith—trusting wholly in the sufficiency of the cross. As Ambrose reminds us, God desires to be asked: "You are a man, and wiltest to be asked to forgive, and do you think that God will pardon you without asking Him?" (Concerning Repentance, Book II, Ch. 1, 48). In Christ, we find not only the courage to confess, but the assurance that our plea will be heard.

Thus, the third motion of Advent repentance is renewal through Christ. He turns our aversion into access, our guilt into grace. In Him, the way home is opened—and the Father waits with joy.

How to Turn: Fasting, Weeping, Mourning, Rending the Heart

Repentance, like a good tea, must steep long enough to be strong. Advent's call to turn is not merely directional—it is deeply mannered, shaped by the soul's posture before God. The homily's fourth point reminds us that true contrition is inward, not theatrical: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17, KJV). Lancelot Andrewes, preaching before King James on Ash Wednesday, outlines a fourfold manner of turning: the body chastened by fasting and weeping, the soul pierced by mourning and rending (Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons*, 1:356–74).

This is no shallow sorrow. Paul speaks of "godly sorrow [that] worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Cor. 7:10), followed by zeal, indignation, and longing (v. 11). Daniel's fast—"I ate no pleasant bread" (Dan. 10:3)—models bodily discipline, while mourning and weeping are not just emotional drops but sorrow appreciative, the soul's deep valuation of grace lost. And rending the heart? Job says it best: "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). It's not about tearing garments—it's about tearing pride.

Advent, though less famous than Lent for sackcloth and ashes, is no less rigorous. It is Lent's quiet cousin, training the soul for Easter joy. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). The deeply torn apart and divided heart is not the end—it is the soil from which resurrection hope springs.

Practically, this manner of turning invites us to a fast or a retired lamentation (a fancy way of saying cry in private), and to accept Christ's tears in default when ours run dry. There are plenty of Psalms and canticles in the classic Anglican tradition to guide us into these penitential exercises.

In short, Advent repentance is not a performance—it's a posture. It's not about looking sad—it's about being honest.

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Advent Week 4 - Psalm 130 - Hope-filled Penance

The Archdeacon Dan Hardin

Advent, in its final week, brings us to the threshold of hope... a hope forged in repentance and waiting. Psalm 130 gives us the voice of a soul standing in that place. It begins: "Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O LORD." The psalmist does not pretend that all is well; he does not mask his condition behind piety. He speaks from the deep places, the places where sin, sorrow, and limitation press hard. Yet this cry from the deep is not despair — it is penitence shaped by hope. He cries because he believes God hears.



This psalm teaches us an essential truth for Advent: repentance is not a grim exercise but an act born of faith. The penitent heart does not wallow in shame; it reaches toward the cross. It reaches toward the God who forgives, the God who restores, and the God whose mercy is more certain than the dawn. The psalmist knows if God should mark iniquities, no one could stand. Yet he anchors himself in the character of God: "But there is forgiveness with thee." That single line is the root of all hope-filled penitence. We face our sin because we trust His mercy. We bow low because we are certain He will lift up.

As Advent draws to its close, the world grows louder, but Scripture grows quieter, more deliberate. Psalm 130 calls us to that quiet: a stillness that waits. "I wait for the LORD; my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope." Waiting, in this biblical sense, is not passive. It is the posture of the soul poised toward God. The psalmist waits the way a watchman stands through the last brittle hours of night, scanning the horizon for the first trace of morning. He knows the dawn will come — he simply does not know the moment. This is how the Church waits for Christ: confident, patient, steadfast.

And here Advent speaks most clearly. We are not waiting for an idea or a memory. We are waiting for the LORD Himself — the One who entered our night by taking flesh and who will come again in glory. But to receive the light, the eyes of the heart must adjust. Hope-filled penitence is how that adjustment begins. Repentance clears away the shadows we have grown accustomed to. Hope fixes our gaze on the promise of God, not on our own efforts. Together, they prepare us for the brightness of Christ's appearing.

So the psalmist's pattern becomes our own: cry out, confess, wait, hope. This is not the preparation of self-improvement; it is the preparation of faith. The Lord does not ask us to manufacture our own light; He asks us to wait for His. And the waiting is not empty. It shapes us. It teaches us to trust Him more than we trust our fears. It teaches us that the mercy of God is not a theoretical comfort, but the only foundation strong enough to bear the weight of our lives.

As we approach the manger and the coming of the Christ Child, let this be the posture of our hearts: repentant, yet confident; humbled, yet hopeful; waiting, yet certain. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. The night is far spent, and the dawn draws near. Those who wait upon the Lord shall not be put to shame.

Echoes *of the* Manger *in Every Offering*



Advent Week 4 - Echoes of the Manger in Every Offering

The Venerable Dr. Julie Russell-Crunk / December 19, 2025

As we enter the season of Advent, we prepare for and await the birth of Christ our Savior.

We, as Christians, prepare by praying, reading, reflecting and anticipating the miraculous gift of Jesus. This time of preparation and waiting is much like that of expectant parents awaiting the months long anticipated arrival of a child's birth, much like Mary and Joseph did two thousand years ago. Hope, peace, joy and love are embodied in these parallel periods of preparation and waiting.

Mary and Joseph, traveling to Bethlehem for the census, found themselves with no accommodations in which to stay. At the time of this journey, Jesus' birth was imminent.

As recorded In Luke 2:7, "And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

Wrapping a newborn in strips of cloth known as swaddling cloths was a custom of the culture at the time. Among the reasons this was done was to keep the baby warm and secure. Today, we care for our newborns in much the same way by tightly wrapping them in a blanket we call a

receiving blanket for the same reasons. In addition, today's babies are typically given a hat for their head, providing warmth and protection.

For those living in poverty with limited resources, providing for a newborn child can be a burden. Without the ability to purchase needed clothing and blankets, they must rely on donations and/or scavenging for these items. Having served such families, my husband and I have been saddened to see the tattered, dirty, stained and ill-fitting clothes of children and adults.

Millions of people around the world live in abject poverty. Certainly, the need for the essentials of food, clean water, shelter and clothing is real. Along with these basic human needs is the need for the good news of the salvation of Jesus.

Over 15 mission trips to Guatemala, serving in a mountainous region and in the slum and garbage dump of Guatemala City, I have encountered families living in extreme poverty. The homes were typically one room with dirt floors and one centrally located light bulb hanging from the ceiling. Their furniture, clothing and other belongings were either donated or scavenged.

A particular family living in the Guatemala City garbage dump community captured my heart. The family consisted of a mom, dad, grandmother and six precious daughters living in one room with a dirt floor and one light bulb hanging from the ceiling in a centrally located place.

In January 2020, two months before Covid hit, I had the opportunity to visit with this family. They shared the news that they were expecting a baby boy to be born in July of that year. As we talked excitedly about the anticipated arrival of a son, I thought about the needs of this child and how they would be met. As a knitter, I immediately committed to knitting their baby a hat. In March, Covid gripped the world. My anticipated May trip to Guatemala was cancelled and I had no way to get the blue and white baby hat to this family.

The shutdown continued and so did my knitting! Eventually a way to get the baby hat to Guatemala would open up and I would have more hats to take to give to families in need. Never underestimate God who always has a plan! Truly, always. On a weekday morning the last week of July, I awakened to God telling me to recruit more knitters because I could not knit all the needed baby hats. God even named this outreach ministry Hats from the Heart. God takes the very simple and makes it big, big to serve many. Remember the miracle of the fish and loaves?

God knows each and every one of us before we are born. Jeremiah 1:5 states, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart..." And Psalm 139:13-14 reads, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Every child is a blessing from the Lord.

Hats from the Heart, a ministry of Jurisdiction of the Armed Forces and Chaplaincy, is answering God's call to the most vulnerable around the world. Since August 2020, over 5,000 hats have been received from knitters and crocheters across the United States. They are lovingly made and prayed over prior to being sent to me. Anglican priests, deacons, missionaries and mission partners have taken hats to those in need in 28 countries. They accompany the message of the salvation of Jesus. Every hat is prayed over by the maker, by me as I prepare them for shipment and by the clergy, missionary or mission partner distributing the hats. These hats travel with the message of the saving grace of Jesus.

As we enter the season of Advent; a time of holy anticipation, we remember Jesus' words in Matthew 25: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (v. 40). Advent calls us to prepare not only our hearts, but also our hands, to welcome Christ by serving those in need. A simple baby hat, lovingly made and prayed over, becomes more than a gift of warmth; it is a sign of hope, a new beginning, and a quiet echo of the manger. Not a hand-me-down or a castoff, but a new offering, stitched with dignity and grace. In each thread, the love and light of Jesus is carried to a child awaiting comfort.



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