

## **ctkAlive! Scripture Study** **Second Sunday of Advent** **2020—B Cycle**



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*Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.*

*Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.*

*Exception: In the course of these reflections, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.*

### **Opening Prayer**

*(edited and abridged for Catholic use during Advent Season)*

### **Today**

Today is a time to catch my breath.

Whatever I have been doing, making, working, creating . . .

Advent is a time to catch my breath.

No matter how necessary my work, how urgent that I continue it;

no matter how joyful my work, how fully and profoundly human;

no matter how flawed my work, how urgent that I set it right;

no matter how hard I have worked, I pause to catch my breath;

I pause to share whatever I have gathered.

Advent calls for wisdom to pause and catch the breath of God's Spirit.

Amen.

Prayer by [Rabbi Marcia Prager](#)

*(Website indicates "not secure" because it lacks the "s" in https)*

Original source: "Jewish Wisdom: Shabbat Prayer," by Joe Katzman

### **Introduction to the First Sunday of Advent**

The great spiritual writer, "[Henri Nouwen](#) (1932-1996), says this about Advent.

"We can only *really* wait if what we are waiting for has already begun for us.

So, waiting is never a movement from nothing to something. It is always a movement from something to something *more* . . . The secret of waiting is the

faith that the seed has been planted, that something has (already) begun.”  
— from the anthology, “Waiting for God,” in [\*Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas\*](#) (Plough Publishing House)

— *How does Nouwen’s perspective on waiting resonate with my personal life? With my family life? My participation in public life as a citizen of my country and the world?*

Christ came to earth 2000 years ago, yet we still wait for him.

— *What do I make of this countercultural or “upside-down” approach to the way we prepare for Christmas (waiting for what is already here)?*

### Readings

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 “Prepare the way of the Lord!”

Psalms 85: 9-14 “The Lord himself will give his benefits.”

2 Peter 3: 8-14 “In the Lord’s eyes, one day is as a thousand years.”

Mark 1: 1-8 “One more powerful than I is to come after me.”

### **A Reading from the Book of Isaiah (40: 1-5, 9: 11)**

Be comforted, my people, be strengthened, says your God.

Speak to the heart of Jerusalem,  
proclaim that her time of bondage is at an end,  
that her guilt has been paid for,  
that from the hand of Yahweh

she has received double punishment for all her iniquity.

A voice cries,

“In the wilderness, prepare the way for Yahweh.  
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley will be raised up;  
every mountain and hill will be laid low.  
The stumbling blocks shall become level  
and the rugged places smooth.

The glory of Yahweh will be revealed,  
and all mortals together will see it;  
for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”

Go up onto the high mountain,  
messenger of good news to Zion,  
lift up your voice with strength,  
fear not to cry aloud when you tell Jerusalem  
and announce to the cities of Judah:

“Here is your God!  
Here comes Yahweh Sabaoth with might;  
his strong arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him, and here before him is his booty.  
Like a shepherd he tends his flock:  
he gathers the lambs in his arms,  
he carries them in his bosom,  
gently leading those that are with young.”

Listen to “[Like A Shepherd](#)” by [Bob Dufford](#), SJ, sung by [Chris Brunelle](#).

### Personal Reflection

Isaiah uses the same “shepherd” image of God as did Jesus hundreds of years later.

— *Who shepherds Jesus’ flocks, in addition to the pope, bishops, and clergy?*

— *Whom do I shepherd? Whom do I carry in my arms, physically or spiritually?  
How do I feel about my ministry as divinely chosen shepherd?*

— *When I grow weary, how good am I at ‘shepherding’ myself? Why do I need  
self-shepherding, while shepherding others?*

### **Antiphon: Psalm 85 (9-14)**

King Cyrus of Assyria conquered Babylonia around 539 BC/BCE (500 yrs. after David’s reign). Cyrus changed the course of Judaism by allowing the Israelite slaves to return home. For centuries after his benevolent decree, Jews revered their deliverer. This psalm is thought to have been written by a musician other than King David. It dates from that post-exilic period.

A plea for the return of God’s favor.

Listen to [Psalm 85](#) by [Bob Hurd](#)

*Lord, let us see your kindness,  
and grant us your salvation.*

Would that he promise peace to his people, his saints  
—lest they come back to their folly.

Yet, his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
and his glory will dwell in our land.

*Lord, let us see your kindness,  
and grant us your salvation.*

Love and faithfulness have met;  
righteousness and peace have embraced.

Faithfulness will reach up from the earth  
while justice bends down from heaven.  
*Lord, let us see your kindness,  
and grant us your salvation.*

Yahweh will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its fruit.  
Justice will go before him,  
and peace will follow along his path.  
*Lord, let us see your kindness,  
and grant us your salvation.*

### Personal Reflection

— *What dominant mood do I find in this psalm (e.g., joy, sadness, triumph, of something else)?*

— *At what point in my life did I experience the elation of having been set free (from illness, addiction, an oppressive life situation, etc.)? What feeling(s) dominated that moment? Since then, how successful have I been in resisting the temptation to self-imprison once again?*

— *For whom have I played the “Cyrus role,” helping someone find and choose freedom once again?*

### **From the Second Letter of St. Peter (3: 8-14)**

“Do not forget, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day. The Lord does not delay in fulfilling his promise, though some speak of delay; rather, he gives you time, because he does not want anyone to perish, but that all may come to conversion. The Day of the Lord is to come like a thief. Then, the heavens will dissolve with a great noise; the elements will melt away by fire, and the earth, with all that is on it, will be burned up. Since all things are to vanish, how holy and religious your way of life must be, as you wait for the day of God, and long for its coming, when the heavens will dissolve in fire, and the elements melt away in the heat. We wait for a new heaven and a new earth, in which justice reigns, according to God’s promise. Therefore, beloved, as you wait in expectation of this, strive, that God may find you rooted in peace, without blemish or fault.”

### Personal Reflection

Advent is a season of expectation of God’s blessings. Its theme is: “Take hope! Keep hope alive.”

— *How does the good news of Christ counterbalance all the bad news I witness, hear about, and see on TV every day?*

— *What happened in my life or in the world this week—no matter how small—that gave me hope for the future? What happened in the last year that gave me hope in the midst of global, national, and local disasters—man-made and natural?*

— *What gives me hope for my future and that of my children and their children?*

### **Proclamation from the Gospel according to Mark (1: 1-8)**

The beginning of the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark

“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths.’

“John the Baptizer appeared in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins . . . . As he preached, John said: ‘One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

### **Personal Reflection**

John the Baptist urged those who received his change-of-heart baptism to be “serious in [their] conversion.” Advent invites me to reflect on how serious I am about my ongoing need for conversion (change of heart).

— *How would a stranger, co-worker, neighbor—my own children—know from my daily life, words, and actions that I take my daily conversion to Christ seriously?*

— *How would I answer the direct question: “Have you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior?” Am I harboring an “EXIT” plan, so in reality my act of faith is a “yes but”? (Don’t settle for an easy answer. Go deeper.)*

### **Shelter-in-Place**

With covid cases rising throughout the world, we find ourselves in a holding pattern awaiting final approval and distribution of an effective corona virus vaccine. We congratulate and pray for the scientists, medical personnel, and those local, state, and federal government leaders who are making this happen.

On the downside, vaccine developers and processors warn us to expect a *gradual* distribution process based on criteria of vulnerability. Until then, we can expect continued sheltering orders, as pharmaceutical companies, government agencies, and the medical profession sort this out. Sadly, the effect on service businesses, jobs, and housing can only get worse (if possible) before it gets better.

— *How has shelter-in-place impacted me financially during the past year? What am I doing to keep myself and my family healthy, fed, and clothed—and SAFE—during these times?*

*To see what some Americans are doing to “make a difference,” watch an inspiring 15 min. video segment that aired Nov. 22, 2020, on [CBS Sunday Morning](#).*

— If I have not personally suffered financial setbacks during this time, what am I doing—or what am I willing to do—to help those hardest hit by inability to earn a living, pay rent, feed their families, etc. This applies especially to the fortunate ones among us, who watch our bank accounts grow as our living expenses shrink.

— Will I choose to be vaccinated or will I decline this opportunity? Why will I or won't I choose to be inoculated when the time comes? “What would Jesus want me to do?”

Write about your feelings and lived experience of these issues during your journaling time (below).

### **Journaling Prompts**

What insights have I gained from reflecting on this weekend's liturgical readings?

Suggested prompt:

— *After reflecting on this weekend's scriptures, what impresses me the most?*

We mustn't simply be grateful “recipients” of God's good gifts. We also need to “give back.”

— *How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love, and “give back” during the week ahead?*

### **For Inspirational Viewing / Reading**

#### Video:

Bishop Robert Barron on what people like me can do to strengthen their faith during the [Coronavirus Quarantine](#) (13 min.)

#### Book:

In the video (above), Bishop Barron recommends reading [The Confessions of St. Augustine](#), a recent translation by Maria Boulding.

Augustine speaks about his Christian mother—St. Monica—and pagan father. As a youth, Augustine chose the loose life of his mostly pagan environment, rather than the path of his mother. Only later did he convert, in response to his mother's incessant prayer for him.

*(The eBook is now available on Amazon.com for only \$0.99!!! Also available in hardback and paperback editions.—AJG)*

#### Music:

*Music videos are found among this week's Scripture readings and reflection questions.*

### **Preview of Next Session**

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11 “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.”

Responsorial . . . Luke 1: 46-50, 53-54 “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.”

First Thessalonians 5: 16-24 “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.”

John 1: 6-8, 19-28 John the Baptist responded, “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’”

### **Closing Prayer**

*(edited and abridged for use here)*

On this Second Sunday of Advent, we pray with longing and expectation for the coming of our Savior. What it is that I particularly “long for” and wait for” during this Advent Season—for myself, my family, and for the world?

(Pause)



Image by

[Sister Mary Grace Thul, OP](#)

Descend, Holy Spirit of Life!  
Come into my heart,  
that I may live.  
Descend into emptiness,  
that my emptiness may be filled.  
Descend into dust,  
that my dust may flower.  
Descend into the dark,  
that your light may shine in my darkness.  
Amen.

—by Caryll Houselander

(Learn more about Caryll Houselander at [CatholicAuthors.com](http://CatholicAuthors.com))

### **Questions?**

Send any questions or comments you might have to [algarrotto@comcast.net](mailto:algarrotto@comcast.net)

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