

EVERGREEN ADVENT

ROOM FOR ALL
@ROOMFORALLRCA

ADVENT 2024
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About Room for All

A non-profit organization founded in 2005, Room for All's mission is to support, educate, and advocate for the welcome and full affirmation of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions in the Reformed Church in America and surrounding communities of people of faith.

This devotional was written in collaboration by Mitchel Leet, Joy Leet, Elliot Weidenaar, M. Div., and Cameron Van Kooten Laughead.

Stay in touch with us

201-364-4538
@roomforallrca
info@roomforall.com
www.roomforall.com

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Thank you!

Dedication

30 years ago, quite out of the blue, a pastor and her husband made room for and brought home a newborn baby. They raised all their children in unconditional love and unrelenting faith. Their sacrifices and supports along the way directly shaped his heart for service and his mind for wonder.

This devotional, and all I create, is dedicated to my mother and father, Joy and George Leet.

--Mitchel Leet (he/him/his), Program Manager

Welcome to Advent!

While historians disagree on who first used evergreens to remind them of the promised return of summer during the winter solstice, these plants have been representative of the season long before the birth of Christ.

Over the generations, colonization has shifted and changed the ecological landscape here in North America. Celebrations have changed, symbols have been appropriated and incorporated, but our human instinct to gather what remains vibrant as most of nature rests persists.

This weekly Advent devotional explores the symbolism behind many of the plants that appear in wreaths and on altars this time of year, through the nature-rooted poetry of Mary Oliver. Many of the poems are in her collection 'Devotions', and the page numbers with them are for that book. Others have been published in many places online, and can be found by searching for "[the title] Mary Oliver".

Whether you join RfA for virtual weekly discussions, read this guide alone or share it with your family or other people in your life, we hope that it will enrich your season and encourage you to continue to seek justice for all of God's beloved creation.

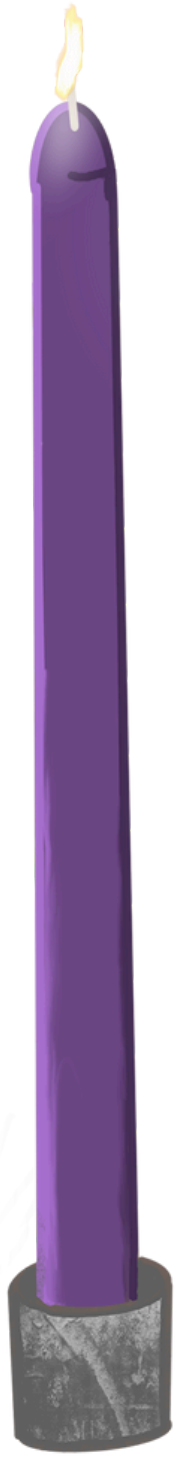
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WEEK ONE Hope, Balsam

If you wish to light an Advent wreath during your reflection, please do so safely! You will need three purple candles, one pink, and one white in the center. On Week One, we light the first purple candle.



Lighting & Opening Prayer: God of Grace, who sat in the ever-moving dark waters in the moments before all creation and waited: sit with us in this darkest, softest, and stillest part of the year. Rejuvenate us as the darkness rejuvenates the light--so we may be anointed with hope, as the balsam, seeking to rise each morning to continue in your service. **Amen.**

Scripture: Psalm 25: 4-5

Poems: I Wake Close to Morning, page 3
The World I Live In, page 5

Reflection: When we find ourselves in a place in life where we need to call for aid from God, of course, we desire to be heard. This psalm is a prayer for guidance, and a celebration of our nearness to God. In verses 4 and 5, God is asked to teach, and it is in hope that we seek wisdom that opens us to hear.

With the Christmas season around us, and the implications of magic, it's a time for getting our hopes up. As the year draws to a close, green bows of balsam fir surrounded by gray, white, and brown encourage endurance in our hopes.

The Latin word in fir's genus name, Abies means "rising one," and was used to refer to tall trees or ships. As we rise each morning in the darkness of the winter season, let hope remind us of the possibilities of a new beginning, and remind us to stretch our branches toward it.



When the psalmist writes "for you I wait all day long," he doesn't mean waiting has to be passive.

Just as the Queen of Sheba traveled for years to seek wisdom, active waiting requires us to observe, discuss, listen and follow as attuned hearers of the world and of God. We can look for hope wherever we rise and climb toward it every day. That's where God is, too, a constant companion in our journeying.

God is not a higher force to be summoned for the purpose of granting all our wishes, but is in a living relationship with us where we can come to place our hopes and trust. Instead of locking ourselves "in the orderly house of reasons and proofs", our liminal, faithful relationship with God offers us the hope of "what if?"

Letting ourselves live in that "what if" means letting ourselves envision a day where we are all free from discrimination and violence, free to live our lives as God created us to be.

What is an angel in our head if not the voice of hope? It is a call to see what some call magic in the world as not just mere possibility. What if it is an intrinsic part of yourself, a call, a constant messenger for you to be a part of bringing hope to others?

Live & Serve: As you rise each morning, what expectations do you hold for this day/season?

What recently has given you hope? Create a visual reminder of that moment to serve as an anchor. Put it where you need to see it most.

Loneliness is a public health crisis in our country. This week, plan a visit with a friend, loved one, or shut in member of your community. Contact your pastor or another community leader to find out where your company is needed.

The Queen of Sheba is believed to have come from Saaba, part of what is now Yemen. As we meditate on hope, we continue to pray for the people in Yemen, Syria, and Palestine who have been displaced and harmed by violence. If you are able, match your prayer with action by financially supporting one or all of these efforts to help:

RCA Global Mission maintains an RCA Global Mission Refugee Care Crisis Fund. This fund allows immediate response to crises involving refugees or other forcibly displaced people in places such as Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Haiti, Palestine, and Lebanon. You can support that fund at https://www.rca.org/give/refugee-crisis-fund/.

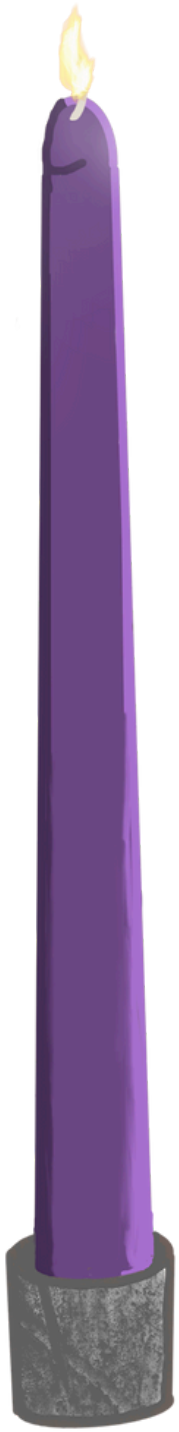
Due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, many people have been displaced in Lebanon. The RCA's Lebanon Displacement Relief Project can be supported at www.rca.org/give/lebanon-displacement-relief-project/.

Partner Relief & Development is on the ground in Syria, Palestine, and Yemen, responding to the immediate needs of civilians affected by conflict in the region. You can help them continue to serve these people, delivering life-saving food and medical supplies, helping rebuild damaged infrastructure and providing trauma care to children deeply affected by the conflict. Give at https://www.partners.ngo/our-work/middle-east.

Extinguishing & Closing Prayer: God who gives us the gift of "what if?", as we look to you in this season of hope, lead us to study and connect with fellow seekers. Help us give voice to who we are, in hope the world can come to see each person as a good and necessary part of your creation. **Amen.**

WEEK TWO Peace, White Pine

If you wish to light an Advent wreath during your reflection, please do so safely! On Week Two, we light the first and second purple candles.



Lighting & Opening Prayer: God of Grace, who sat in the ever-moving dark waters of the moments before all creation and waited, sit with us in this darkest, softest, and stillest part of the year. Use us to build your kin-dom, as you used John the Baptist before us, and as we use the white pine to make our homes, ships, and community spaces into places of peace. **Amen.**

Scripture: Luke 1:78-79

Poems: Whistling Swans, page 6
It Was Early, page 71

Reflection: The Book of Luke contains a number of songs, all of which uplift praise to the living God who remains faithful to God's people. Zechariah, who doubted, regains his voice when God's promise of a son is fulfilled and immediately uses it to sing. He realizes that this child that he and his wife, Elizabeth, have been blessed with is part of God's plan for salvation and peace.

The Haudenosaunee (HOH-din-oh-SHOH-nee), also known as the Six Nations are a confederacy of Native Americans and First Nations peoples in northeast North America. The 'people of the longhouse' were united by the prophet known as the Great Peacemaker with the help of Jigonhsasee (Jig-GOHN-sah-say), the Mother of Nations.

According to one version of the Haudenosaunee oral tradition, she welcomed warriors of all the nations to her hearth for food and rest as they traveled to and from battles

and home. In her home, they all came in peace, and she acted as counsel for all of them. She recognized the power of uniting in peace, and when the Great Peacemaker and his disciple Hiawatha came to her, it was because of her hospitality that she was uniquely able to bring the law of peace to all of the nations. Through her, they knew this vision of peace would not be complete without holding women as equals.

"According to Haudenosaunee philosophy, peace is not the mere absence of war but calls for justice and a conscious society through action and reason." -- Cornell Botanic Gardens

Sacred to the people of the longhouse is the symbol of the Great Law of Peace, the White Pine. The Peacemaker chose the Tree of the Great Long Leaves as a symbol of unity because its needles always grow in clusters of five, with broad branches to shelter all nations seeking protection.

When the tree is portrayed as a symbol, an eagle nests at the top of the tree, said to be a messenger to and from the Creator that is always watching over all the nations for signs of danger or aggression.

Oliver talks about the pines surrounding her, heavy with cones. We consider the pinecone to represent human enlightenment, resurrection, and regeneration, and truly, each one is ordained to open by our Creator.



They are vessels that protect the seeds from the cold, windy winter days. They only open and release their seeds when it is warmer, so that each seed might germinate. Mary Oliver didn't write about eagles, but in Whistling Swans, she mentions that prayers fly from all directions, "and don't worry about what language you use, God no doubt understands them all."

By encouraging our imagining that swans know as much about God as we do, we can recognize the sacredness in all of Creation. Singing as they fly, an ancient song of peace.

Live & Serve: When you wake up, how do you begin looking at the world?

Choose a day this week to take a meandering walk in the early morning to get a look at the world around you. What creatures do you see? What sounds do you notice? Whether you bow your head or "look up into that blue space," take your prayers outdoors today.

We too often talk about our Indigenous neighbors as if they are antiquated, failing to recognize their vital presence and stewardship of peace and environmental protection in the present. Learn about your neighbors by visiting https://americanindian.si.edu/

The Town of Peace, Ganondagan (Gah-nun-dah-gan), in Victor, New York is home to the Seneca Art & Culture Center. Support their ongoing interpretation of the living art, culture, agriculture and government of the Haudenosaunee people on the original site of a 17th century Seneca town, that existed there peacefully more than 350 years ago by giving at https://www.ganondagan.org/support. Come visit when you are able!

In 2023, the RCA's Native American and Indigenous Ministries Council gathered a list of Native and Indigenous-owned businesses for us to support so we might add to the prosperity of their communities As you're shopping, consider how your actions harm the environment, sacred practices, and relationships with your neighbors.

Extinguishing & Closing Prayer: God who gives us the gift of waking each morning, as we look to you in this season of peace, lead us to study and connect with fellow seekers. Help us give voice to who we are, in hope the world can come to see each person as a good and necessary part of your creation, so that we may live in peace with one another. **Amen.**

WEEK THREE Joy, Poinsettia

If you wish to light an Advent wreath during your reflection, please do so safely! On Week Three, we light the first and second purple candles and the pink candle.



Lighting & Opening Prayer: God of Grace, who sat in the ever-moving dark waters of the moments before all creation and waited, sit with us in this darkest, softest, and stillest part of the year. Remind us, God, that like this flower, we are a remedy-- bringing healing for those who must be healed, bringing confrontation for those who must be confronted, and being balm for those who must be comforted. In these ways, we help bring Your joy into our world. **Amen.**

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7

Poems: Don't Hesitate, page 61
We Shake With Joy, page 70

Reflection: God is giving us the gift of joy in this season in the gift of His son. In the aching humanity of it all, the place and time where we live, joy isn't something we have to earn, or work towards. If you look around you, it is present in big and small ways. Joy doesn't wait to be invited– it stays present so that we can be content in all circumstances.

The original Nahuatl (naa-waa-tl) name for the plant we call "poinsettia" is cuetlaxochitl (kwet-la-SHO-she), cultivated by the Aztecs long before the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Aztecs and Mayans derived medicines from the plant's sap and employed its leaves and flowers in the production of colorful dyes. As many of our neighbors are reclaiming their connections to their Native ancestry, names, and customs, their relatives– the plants– also deserve to be called by their true name.

For the people of Taxco, Mexico, local legend tells of a young poor girl named Pepita, who was on her way to church on Christmas Eve. Realizing she had forgotten an offering, Pepita gathered a humble bouquet of roadside weeds as a gift for the newborn Jesus. When Pepita placed the bouquet at the base of the altar, the weeds burst into the colorful blooms of the cuetlaxochitl.



The plant subsequently came to be called la flor de Nochebuena, "the Christmas Eve flower," or simply "the Christmas flower." Pepita brought joy to her church with the simplicity of her gift.

To ensure blooms, cuetlaxochitl need extended periods of darkness, as many as 14-16 hours per night. Flowers grown by humans (especially those with intensive cultivation, like this one) often become more vibrant and stunning than those without human intervention.

Joy, too, with a little work on our part, can bloom brighter. The cultivation of a little joy, a joy which persists in sorrow can be as simple as Pepita's gift. It is a joy to know that while our hearts deserve to feel sadness in the face of this world's evil, suffering, and death, joy also recognizes that it is the defender of our hearts, our God's response to impossible situations.

We can take all of our feelings to God with thanksgiving that She is there, and know She'll be with us as we face tomorrow.

Live & Serve: What does it mean to rejoice always?

What's the most recent encounter or event that brought you joy? How can you express gratitude for it, to God, and for who or what brought it?

What can you do to bring joy to others?

Be patient with store employees and checkout clerks, and smile when you are shopping. Leave compliments with their management when you can.

If you can, offer treats by your front door for the overwhelmed delivery and mail drivers. They don't always get breaks during December.

Contact your local food pantry and find out what they're needing more of. Items for holiday baking like spices, sugar, measuring equipment and eggs and butter are often hard to come by, and donations of these things provide an opportunity for families to make sweet memories together.

Before Christmas, not after, encourage your children to go through their toys and clothing and make your donations to secondhand shops then. That makes it possible for families to shop and wrap gifts up for their children to open on Christmas Day, too.

Find your local Angel Tree program or other toy drive, and "adopt" a child or two! Make it a family project and find out if you can help the organization wrap.

Dig out tapes, records, and CDs of holiday music that you haven't heard in a while, and put them on in the background of your daily activities. Let the memories and magic of that music brighten even the most simple of moments, reminding you each second of this life is one worth rejoicing in.

Extinguishing & Closing Prayer: God who gives us the gift of rejoicing, as we look to you in this season of joy, lead us to study and connect with fellow seekers. Help us give voice to who we are, in hope the world can come to see each person as a good and necessary part of your creation, so that we may live in peace with one another, learning to find joy always. **Amen.**

SOLSTICE Blue Chrisimas

If you wish to light an Advent wreath during your reflection, please do so safely! On Week Three, we light the first and second purple candles and the pink candle.

Lighting & Opening Prayer: God of Grace, who sat in the ever-moving dark waters of the moments before all creation and waited, sit with us in this darkest, softest, and stillest part of the year. On this darkest day, when no light seems like it could ever return, remind us, God, that nothing grows without the dark. And help us rest, safe in knowing that all journeys are graced by the wisdom of the night. **Amen.**



Scripture: Isaiah 40:27-31

Poems: The Sun, page 281
Snowy Night, not in book

Reflection: Whether you look at it as the longest night, the shortest day, or the marker of the days getting longer again, the winter solstice has been a powerful observance for people of all cultures and beliefs. One thing we have in common with everyone around us is being under the same sky! Another thing that we have in common is that we all lose people we love. Whether that has happened in the past year or not in your life, some people we love will not be here with us to celebrate the gift of God's son this year.

Grief snatches so much from us, making it hard to breathe, eat, or even simply be in the world. Joy and grief are two sides of the same coin. The coin is contentment. Joy is the rising sun, which raises the creatures, gives them the nutrients they need, and sets them on a path about one another. Grief is like the moon. We grow under her despite the pain and sorrow it brings. It is in grief that we learn what it means to love, what it means to forgive, and what it means to relinquish things that are not in our power.



Grief is complicated, but so is joy. And if you cannot let yourself feel the one (grief) how will you ever know the other (joy)? The same is true in the reverse.

"I love this world, but not for its answers."

There are some answers that cannot be found in this world. When we rejoin the ones we love, trust that we will fully understand. Until then, the light of the love that does not end stays with us always.

Live & Serve: Visit page 22 of this guide to find an optional Memory Lantern Activity, to create a reminder that our love for those we've lost is never extinguished.

Switching off all the electric lights and doing dinner, homework, bath, story time, and more by the light of flickering candles and warm lantern light makes even mundane activities extra special and spiritual, and also makes the long, dark night more real. It also helps everyone appreciate the modern conveniences we take for granted!

Think about the people in your family, life and community that have experienced loss this year, or are having a hard time. Whether it's a call, a card, a direct message or knocking on their door, reach out today. Let them know you're thinking about them, that you care, and ask how you can support them.

Additionally or separately, look around your community for the helpers that support people experiencing homelessness, food shortages, or loss of employment. Find a way you can be a part of their efforts. Sit and talk with people eating at a soup kitchen, call up your local food pantry and see what they need, donate your gently used clothes to local community closets, or see if you can offer mentorship to help build up people looking for work. Don't just pray for them– do some good works!

Prayer for Blue Christmas
Written by Rev. Molly Bolton, enfleshed



They say all is calm and all is bright,
but our spirits toss and turn and our hearts are not glad.

They say angels echo a joyous strain,
but our thoughts are looping on what we have lost.

They say a place was made in a manger for a wondrous child,
but there are empty spaces in our beds, vacant chairs in our workplaces;
we reach for the phone to call a familiar voice that will not answer.

Our anger points us towards what should not yet be gone.

Institutions prize profit over people,
Illness and war break bodies and spirits,
The last of a species, even now, breathes its final breath.

We rage against systems that are made for death instead of life.

Our grief is love with nowhere to land.
We go door to door but there is no place for it to stay.

So we welcome the sun setting early,

for only the longest night can tend to this sorrow;
only the bluest hues can meet us in this ache.

The collective grief of the world is too much to comprehend,
so we speak the names of the ones we know.

We light candles for all this love we still have burning.

WEEK FOUR Love, Ivy

If you wish to light an Advent wreath during your reflection, please do so safely! On Week Four, we light the first, second and third purple candles, and the pink candle.

Lighting & Opening Prayer: God of Grace, who sat in the ever-moving dark waters of the moments before all creation and waited, sit with us in this darkest, softest, and stillest part of the year. God, let us grow in the places others deem unsuitable for growth. Let us not be hindered by the rocks or the tares; instead, let our hearts be ever fixed on you and our neighbors, growing upward together. **Amen.**



Scriptures: Luke 1:46-55, Jonah 4

Poem: The Other Kingdoms, page 93

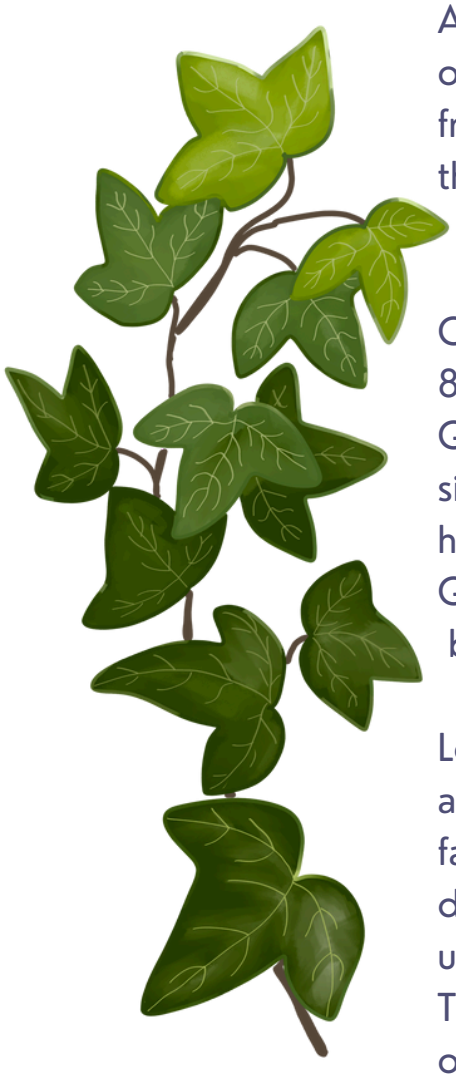
Reflection: It's hard to think of a plant that grows more rich and wild than ivy. Wherever it lives, it is resilient, constantly reaching up and clinging to its support. As our faith grows, may it be rich and sweetly wild, as Mary's was, in the most incredible of circumstances. Even as a young woman, she was willing to accept God's plan for her, knowing that it would shame her. Yet, the words of the scripture do not show that Mary felt any bitterness toward God. Mary was able to embrace God's love for all the world, praising that "His mercy extends to those who fear him."

In contrast, let's look to the book of Jonah, which while out of left field for Advent contains the only canonical reference to ivy in Protestant tradition. Different translations name it as a plant, a bush, a vine, and a gourd. The task that God gave Jonah was against his own wishes. He was forced to respond and became angry at the result.

His task in going to Nineveh was to extend love to the people that he didn't think they deserved.

After Jonah stormed off to sulk and stew in his anger at God's compassion for the wicked, this ivy springs up and grows over his shelter to offer him shade in the heat on the mountain. He was happy for the plant, but in the morning, God sent a worm to make it wither and a hot wind that made Jonah so uncomfortable he asked that he might die. God spoke to him one more time, pointing out that he cared more about the ivy he did not tend and his own comfort than the one hundred and twenty thousand people in Nineveh.

While the story ends there, and we don't get to know Jonah's response, really this is a question that scripture asks of us.



Are we willing to commit ourselves the way Mary did, or be like Jonah, angry at God's plan being different from his own? How can we be more like gentle Mary than angry Jonah in the face of God's love and mercy towards everyone?

One meaning of the name Mary is 'bitterness.' Roughly 800 years after Jonah's temper tantrum, Mary embraced God's directive, even knowing that it would come with significant challenges to the life she'd imagined for herself. She made a lifelong commitment to doing God's will rather than her own comfort, even in the bitter days that were to come.

Love is not easy, and beyond feeling, it calls us to take action. We must renew our commitment to love in the face of bitter moments in our lives. We, too, sometimes don't believe others are worthy of God's perfect, unconditional love, the grace that redeems each of us. The story of Jonah ends in his sulking and stewing, but ours cannot...

Live & Serve:

Pray for all of God's creation.

Pray for the people who would oppress you.

Pray for the people who don't know love. (They might be the same people as above.)

Strive to live your life as a reflection of Mary's faith and grace as you stand up to oppression and discrimination. Take some time to read about or find a workshop on non-violent communication, a practice we all need familiarity with in the face of adversity ahead.

Know when to leave a situation, and that it's alright for you to do so. Just because it's the holidays does not mean you need to put yourself in emotionally unsafe places, even and especially if you're being guilt tripped into being present.

Organize a meal or other gathering with the people who do show you love, whether that's family of origin, chosen family, friends or neighbors.

Extinguishing & Closing Prayer: God who gives us the gift of unconditional love, as we look to you in this season of love, lead us to study and connect with fellow seekers. Help us give voice to who we are, in hope the world can come to see each person as a good and necessary part of your creation, so that we may live in peace with one another, learning to find joy always, and share love with the world. **Amen.**



CHRISTMAS EVE
Strength and Goodwill, Holly

If you wish to light an Advent wreath during your reflection, please do so safely! On Christmas Eve, we light the first and second purple candles, the pink candle, and the white candle in the center.

Lighting & Opening Prayer: So, in the silent night, a child to God is born and all is brought again that had been lost or lorn. Would but our souls, O friends, become a silent night! May God be born in us, and set all things aright. **Amen.** –adapted from 15th century poem

Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

Poem: Making the House Ready for the Lord,
Christmas Poem both not in book

Reflection:As we ready our homes for the holiday tomorrow, we're often anxious and overwhelmed. There's potatoes to peel, last minute gifts to wrap, guest towels to fold, boughs of holly to straighten...

Placing a ring of holly on doors originated in Ireland, as part of celebrating the winter solstice. The Druids believe that the evergreen is sacred, and that it is meant to keep the earth beautiful in the bleakness of winter.

Later, Christians associated the plant with Christ's crown of thorns, and kept the tradition of adorning their homes with it. A tree easily found along roads and in gardens, sprigs of holly gave the poor a way to decorate their dwellings. Doing so, they believed would provide protection and bring the inhabitants good luck in the coming year.

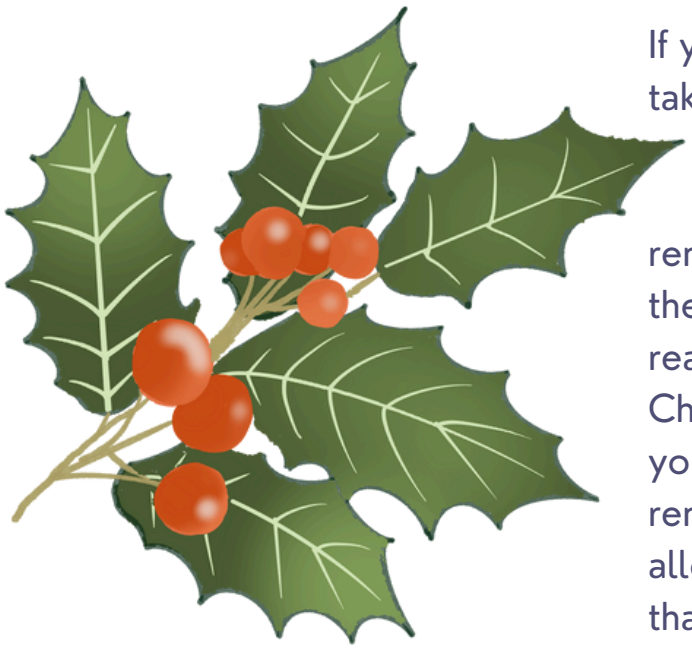


Each and every year we set out our elaborate nativities and creches as decorations, but also a reminder of the place that provided protection as God's love came into the world. We can too easily forget that the miracle of our savior came from a family of migrants in the most humble of circumstances.

Mary and Joseph ended up in a barn, as the only dwelling that would have them when they were seeking shelter. Going to a barn, among the animals who bed down in the straw, remind yourself that the first Christmas was messy. When the people wouldn't welcome the strangers, the animals did. Simplicity is sacred.

Live and Serve: Give yourself a break, and spend some time in silent prayer with your nativity/creche, or with ones on display in your community or church. Observe each figure, of beautifully diverse backgrounds, and remember that we all still come to adore him and wonder at this gift.

If you attend services tonight, look around you for the single parent, the elder sitting alone, the stranger in the back and ask if you might sit with them. Share the ministry of your presence by choosing to be in that sacred space with someone you don't normally worship beside.



If you don't attend services tonight, take some time for what resonates in your heart. You might watch It's a Wonderful Life on TV, and be reminded of the gift that you are. If there's a favorite storybook that was read to you or your children at Christmas time, curl up with it. Nurture your inner child or past self by remembering Christmases past, allowing yourself to feel all the feelings that come with it.

If you're gathering with family, of origin, marriage, or chosen, suggest a carol/hymn sing. If making music isn't a part of your gathering, you might ask each person what their favorite carol/Christmas hymn is and create a playlist. Leave room in your celebration for all the feelings the holiday brings. Meet your company where they are without trying to make them be joyful or merry if they aren't feeling that.

Extinguishing & Closing Prayer: God who gives us the gift of Your son, as we look to You on this holy night, lead us to be present with ourselves and others, basking in your love. Help us embody who You would have us be, on this eve of holy light. **Amen.**

CHRISTMAS DAY
Unfading Affection & Everlasting Love, Amaranth

Scripture: Titus 3:4-7

Poem: The Gift, page 14

Reflection: Kindness sometimes eludes us during the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Likewise, gratitude, and our expression of it are things we must bring to the front of our minds. Today can bring unparalleled joy, wonder, and a sense of deep, abiding love. It can also bring frustration, stir up grief, and feel incredibly lonely.

No matter where you are today, or how the season has been, be still and know that we are saved, not from evil or destruction, but for good, to do and be good in this world. It's not because there's someone keeping score, but because of the gift of unearned mercy and grace brought to us through Christ.

In pre-Hispanic times, amaranth was cultivated by the Aztec communities, who called it huāuhtli. Native to the Americas, amaranth is thought to have represented a major part of their daily diet, and was used in ritual drinks and foods. The grains have historically been toasted much like popcorn and are still today mixed with honey, molasses, or chocolate to make a treat called alegría, meaning "joy" in Spanish.

After the destruction that came with the Spanish conquest of the Americas, amaranth was outlawed. The missions would later incorporate some of the Aztec festivities into their Christmas celebrations, restoring the presence of amaranth, but not the indigenous peoples' independence.

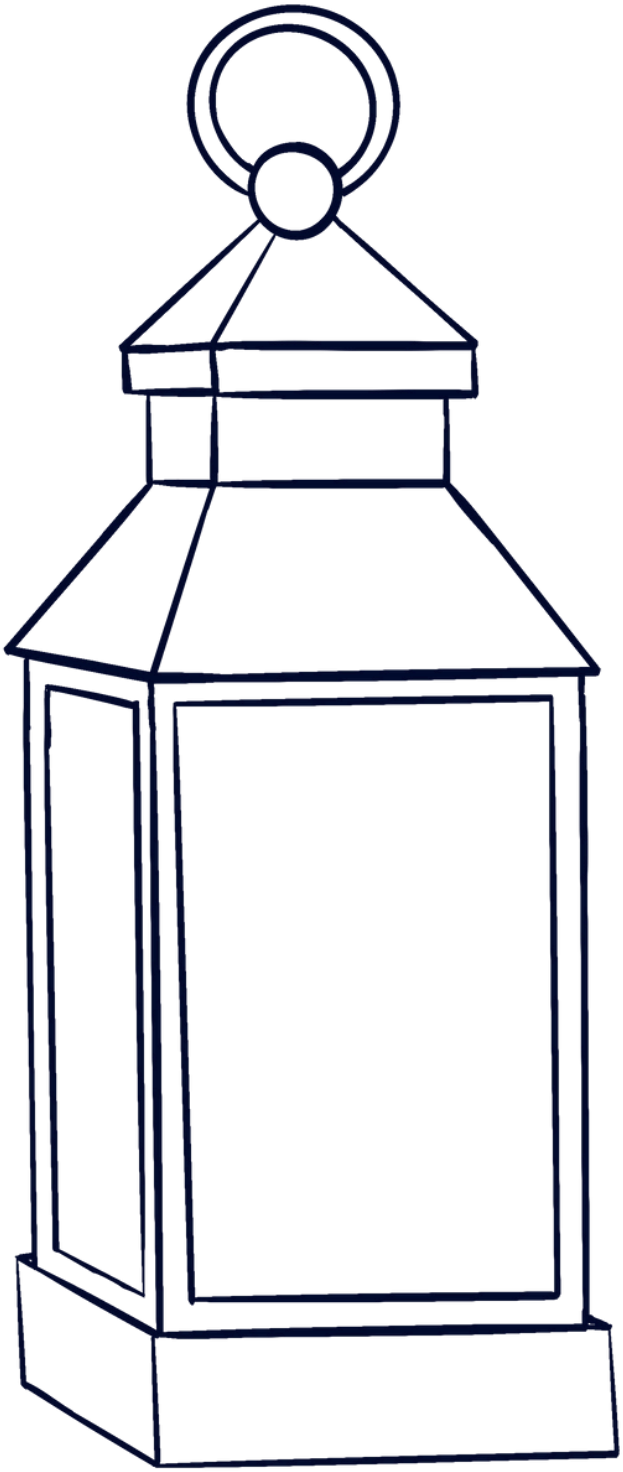


Hope, Peace, Joy and Love persist even in the face of cruelty and injustice. At the culmination of this season, they take center stage in our hearts, but are often forgotten in the months to come.

May we look to the evergreens that will remain vibrant through the rest of the winter season and remember these gifts from God. May Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, be with us through this day, and for all time.

Prayer: God of grace and glory, thank You for the gift of Yourself. Christ's coming to be with us has, throughout the generations, been a persistent source of strength and goodness. Continue to lead us in Your will, even when our human nature misunderstands what that means. In the name of Your son, **Amen.**

MEMORY LANTERNS



Lights and lanterns have been incorporated into winter holiday traditions since humans first began to celebrate. Every December, plazas, churches, homes, and businesses across New Mexico are lit up with luminarias, (or farolitos as they are known in Northern, New Mexico.) In Spanish, luminaria means “illumination” and farolito means "little lantern."

In Dolly Parton’s holiday special “Christmas on the Square”, she tells the Scottish story about a lamplighter, who went from lightpost to lightpost to leave a path behind.

"Spread some light where'er you go
And always leave an afterglow
Be a beacon in the night
Light your lamp and spread the light

May this little light of mine
Cast a glow where'er it shines
Light the way to brighter times
Be a blessing to mankind."
-- Dolly Parton,
"Light Your Lamp"

Color in and then cut out one of these memory lanterns in honor of a loved one you're missing, or as a reminder to share your own beautiful light with the world.

