

DAYbreaks

A statue of an angel with reddish-brown curly hair, wearing an orange robe, holding a long white scroll with the word 'GLORIA' written on it in gold letters. The angel has large, feathered wings and is set against a background of vertical wood grain.

Daily Reflections
for Advent and
Christmas

Mitch and
Kathy Finley

Introduction

Prepare Peacefully, Wait Hopefully

Welcome to Advent! We Christians can miss this season if we are not careful. Our lives can get so fast-paced that we make it to the end of another year amazed at how quickly the weeks and months zoomed by. These days of Advent can feel like just one brief moment on our way to Christmas.

Some families display an Advent wreath and light one of its four candles each Sunday to mark the season. If your home doesn't have an Advent wreath, consider getting one. A simple one with a candle will do. Perhaps you could add a candle each week. Do something that works for you to mark the passing of these special days that God gives us to cultivate hope and prepare peacefully for Christmas.

We hope this *Daybreaks* devotional can be helpful, too. Each day take a little time to pray the daily prayer and then meditate on the reflection for each day. These prayers and meditations are intended to help open your heart to the true spirit of Advent and Christmas, the meaning of the seasons, and the blessings they can bring.

We also hope our prayers and reflections help “stop time” in what can be the busiest period of the year. These days can be stressful for those who struggle with a variety of issues or long for loved ones they can't be with. For many, the Christmas they experience is not the Christmas they desire. Preparing peacefully for Christmas may help us adjust expectations and even find unexpected joy in the Christmas we are experiencing. As you engage with this devotional, we hope you find yourself calmed, inspired, and occasionally even delighted.

We wish you and yours a warm, peaceful, hale, and hearty Advent and Christmas!

Mitch and Kathy Finley

Daily Prayer

Pray Before Reading Each Reflection During Advent and Christmas

Lord and Brother Jesus,
our teacher, our Savior, our friend,
we pray for this one small grace:
just for this moment,
calm our minds and quiet our
hearts so we may hear the word
you have for us today and grow into
the person we were created to be.
We pray, be born in us, be born in
our world. Amen.



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Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehauer, CSsR, Provincial,
Denver Province, the Redemptorists

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Sunday

First Week of Advent

Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

MATTHEW 24:42

Be Gone, Hustle and Bustle!

Time slips by, the seasons change, babies are born, children grow, adults find gray hairs on their heads, elders reminisce, and here we are, another Advent, and another calendar year almost at an end.

During Advent, we look forward to Christmas, to the inspiring story of a little family making a hard journey, a baby born in a place for animals using their feed box for a bed, the humble beginnings of our Lord's life on this earth. Advent is also a time for looking to next year, to our future and the future of the world, and to the end of time and how we will live our lives until our personal end comes.

How do we want to live? How can we avoid regret as we look back on our lives? Advent provides time to think about these tough questions. Advent calls us aside, away from those false gods hustle and bustle, those petty idols that demand so much of our time. Advent calls us aside for a moment each day to be quiet.

In these weeks when the world pummels us with messages about the gifts we want and the gifts we want to give, Advent quietly suggests we already have the gifts that matter, the ones that last and can't be taken away from us.

Advent invites us to count our blessings, to notice the wonders that surround us, to give thanks for the many gifts God has given us, to share those gifts with the people placed on our path. During this time of year, it is tempting to notice what is missing—a person we wish could be with us, more money to buy better gifts, a perfectly decorated house. Maybe we wish someone special would be nicer to us or that a loved one would stop self-destructive behavior. Most of us want something to be different, and we get frustrated when we can't change what is. Advent invites us to be calm and quietly focus on our blessings, not our burdens. Then we can work on living the life we want to remember as we approach our last days: living the life of the person God created us to be.

Prayer to Begin the First Week of Advent

Lord and Brother Jesus,
you came to reveal our loving God,
you came to show us the way to life with God,
you came to teach us how to love each other.

Bless us this Advent with
a little quiet,
a little peace,
a little time to reflect on how we might be
the loving people you call us to be.
We pray, be born in us, be born in our world.
Amen.

The Light in Which We Walk

Lights of all kinds fill the world during Advent. Colorful glows decorate city streets. Many people deck their homes with bright lights. Some go all out, their homes transformed outside and in with spectacular displays. Lines of slowly moving cars drive past such homes. Sometimes whole neighborhoods get in on the act. Christmas lights sparkle in the night air like countless stars fallen from the heavens.

In stores and malls, the purpose of such luminosities is to encourage a holiday spirit that can be superficial. Of course, such displays are not the light of Advent. They shout empty promises of a hollow, secularized holiday season. The commercial year-end daze is full of false hope with no depth and little meaning.

Ah, but it's how we perceive the lights that's most important. What if we behold all the decorative brightness of the season as a sign of the Light

that is coming into the world? What if the bulbs adorning our homes are a sign of hospitality, of our attempt to be a light in the darkness? What if the lights, even those in the homes of those who do not know Jesus, are an attempt to brighten the world just a bit?

By allowing the lights—which may have been intended only as decorations—to also remind us of Jesus, the Light of the World, just looking at them becomes a simple prayer for Christ to live in us.



ONE BRIEF MOMENT

*Do the lights
of the season
remind me to
welcome the
Light of Christ in
each person?*

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Advent is a deep and wonderful mystery of the Creator's love for everything that is. During Advent, we anticipate Christmas. But, for a few weeks, Advent also brings into sharper focus the Christmas mystery we live with all the time, day by day. The mystery is this: in our midst and up ahead is the mother of all victories, our triumph over all darkness, pain, unhappiness, and suffering.

These reflections were written to spark new insights and inject new life into the older traditional language and ideas of this sacred period. Advent is a holy time for cultivating hope and looking forward to the surprising joy of the Nativity of Our Lord. As we navigate through the season, momentum builds, and the joy and wonder grow.

Mitch and Kathy Finley, a married couple, wrote their first book, *Christian Families in the Real World: Reflections on a Spirituality for the Domestic Church*, in 1984. That book was one of the first to bring to Catholic literature the insight that families constitute the smallest cell of the Church. The book earned the authors the Thomas More Medal for its “distinguished contribution” to Catholic literature. A revised edition is still in print. Mitch has written more than thirty books on theological topics, including *101 Ways to Happiness* for Liguori Publications in 2005. Kathy, a sought-after counselor, is a spiritual director and the author of nine books on topics related to everyday spirituality. The couple married in 1974 and have three grown sons.



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