# Worship Prayers for Advent



*These prayers are written by Susan Blain, and were first published for Worship Ways based on the lectionary readings for Year B, 2020.*

## Preparation

Have an Advent Wreath in your worship space and/or consider inviting households to create at-home advent wreaths.

The Advent Wreath, which in recent years has been adopted enthusiastically as a congregational ritual during public worship, actually began as an at-home devotional practice.

An Advent wreath has 5 candles arranged in a circle. Candles may be tapers or pillars:

* 3 blue or purple, lit on 1st, 2nd and 4th Sundays
* 1 rose or pink, lit on 3rd Sunday
* 1 white or gold, placed in the center, to be lit on Christmas Eve.

Surround the candles with evergreen boughs or other decorative elements that speak to the season of the year. You may want to hold off on the reds and greens of Christmas; Advent is a celebration of anticipation, waiting, getting ready.

Each week of Advent you may invite a household to share their Advent wreath, and take the lead in lighting the appropriate candles.

The Advent Candle Lighting time may be used at the start of worship or perhaps during the Sermon time, as an interactive devotional time, or a simple Bible study. It may be a moment to help the community reflect on the past few years, with their trauma and displacements, in light of the scriptures that call us to faithfully get ready for a new moment in the coming of Christ.

A caution regarding prayers of the People online: Folks gathered in person often recount a lot of detail in their prayers concerning other members or family (“Elderly Name, living alone, experiencing isolation…” In a private, in-person gathering, this information may be safe, but online, it can expose vulnerable people to harm, since we can’t control who will join the gathering or access it later online. Invite people to be prudent in offering prayers: “For First name only, in need of healing”; “For First name only, comfort in grief” etc.

Encourage people to contact the pastor directly with news of those needed extra pastoral care.

## Advent 1

### Welcome and Territorial Acknowledgement:

### Call to Worship:

After such suffering,  
We go searching for a sign, any sign.  
The sun seems to dim, the moon fails, the stars fall.  
We need a sign, any sign.  
**Be aware, stay awake, change is coming.**

We hope that the Human One is on the way,  
 gathering the faithful from the four winds,  
 into a place of peace–  
We need a sign, any sign.  
**Be aware, stay awake, change is coming.**

Nature once offered signs to depend on:  
The fig tree put out tender leaves,  
 and we knew summer was near—  
 but climate today  
 is hurting, and unpredictable.  
We need a sign, any sign.  
**Be aware, stay awake, change is coming.**

So together we search for a sign of the One who is coming—  
 clarity in confusion  
 green shoot in a barren landscape  
 song arising in a weary soul.  
**Be aware, stay awake, change is coming**

Come, let us worship!

Opening Hymn Suggestions:

### Invocation

Come into our midst, O Holy One,  
Rider of the Clouds of Heaven,  
Surprising answer to heartfelt prayer.  
In whatever way you choose—  
Come. Shake us up.  
Help us find you at work in our lives  
Showing the way to make all things new.  
In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

### Prayer of Confession

(Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19)

This has been a time to lament—  
 grief and loss,  
 crisis when social structures have failed the common good  
 complicity when age-old prejudices found new and cruel expression:  
**Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

This has been a time to wake up—  
 to read the “signs of the times”  
 to wake up to painful truths, and give them voice  
 to ponder the changes needed for a just world for all:  
**Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

This has been a time to call God into our sorry midst—  
Show us your face!  
Encourage us in the face of brutal realities,  
Empower us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with you  
On the way in which you make all things new.  
**Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

*Silence*

### Assurance of Grace

(1 Corinthians 1: 3-9)

God is faithful,  
and gives us grace in Christ Jesus.   
In this fellowship we can count on being in enriched  
In speech, in knowledge, in every spiritual gift.   
Let us give thanks, in Christ, we are forgiven  
and sent forth to work for God’s reign among us.

### Sermon Reflection:

Consider a simple message or even an interactive Bible Study that engages people with the Scriptures for today.

The readings today are uncomfortable, giving expression to scenes of violence and desperation, natural disaster and community displacement. The feelings they evoke may be all too familiar to those who have lived through the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters of fire and hurricane due to the climate crisis, the exposure of societal injustices rooted in racism and sexism, and painful political reckonings.

Invite someone to read **Isaiah 64: 1-9**,and give some time to reflect on the feelings that may come up: weariness, anger, fear, grief, wondering where God is and has been in these past few years? Has God been hiding?

How can Isaiah ask for more upset, for God to “rend the heavens and come down!” What do we need from God in the midst of this chaos?

In verses 8-9 God is named a parent and a potter; one who shapes a people. What form is God shaping us to be by our experience after such a time? What have we learned, what needs to change, what do we need from the Holy One who is coming?

### Call To Offering

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.   
We bring forth our offerings—our tithes, our treasures, our least coins—  
to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

### Dedication

**O Faithful One,  
accept these gifts of our hearts and hands.**   
**May they be multiplied and magnified**  
**as the living presence of Christ in the world. Amen.**

### Benediction

Send us into the world refreshed in hope,   
Awake, alert,   
attuned to your presence  
ready to join your work of blessing for all.   
Amen.

## Advent 2

### Welcome and Territorial Acknowledgement:

### Call to Worship:

Let us receive what God will speak,   
Tender words for a burdened people:   
**Comfort, comfort, my people!**   
**The days of sorrow are ending!**   
Let us receive what God will speak,   
Encouraging words for an anxious people:   
**Prepare a way for the Holy One,**   
**through deserts of despair**  
**build a highway for our God!**

Let us receive what God will speak,   
words of dreams for a weary people:   
**Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;**   
**righteousness and peace will kiss!**

Come, let us worship!

### Invocation

O Holy One,   
you are tender shepherd,   
architect of the Way,   
beguiling hope of all who go looking for you  
deep in their lives.   
Surprise us here with  
Sweetness, challenge, vision—  
Whatever we may need  
In this moment to recognize you  
and follow you into the future.   
We pray in the name of Jesus, the Beloved.

### Prayer of Confession

These past years have been riddled with crisis and losses:  
Covid-19,  
natural disasters of fire and hurricane,   
exposure of societal injustices rooted in racist and sexist structures,   
painful political reckonings.

In this moment we are called to examine our hearts  
for our role in the last year:   
to name what traditionally have been called

Sins of Commission—  
that is, what we may have done  
to contribute to the pain and chaos of these days;

Sins of Omission—  
that is, what we may have left undone  
which contributed to the pain,   
or failed to help alleviate suffering.

*Silence: leave space for people to examine their hearts, and, if it seems appropriate, to voice to what they have done or left undone.*

### Assurance of Grace

Comfort, comfort, my people,   
says the God of Justice and Compassion.   
You are forgiven your sin,   
And showered with grace to change your life,   
And to work toward the kin-dom of the One who is to Come:   
New heavens and new earth, where righteousness is at home.   
Amen.

### Sermon Reflection:

The readings this week continue the theme of great change coming to a people struggling with faithfulness. God’s continuing challenge is clear, but so is God’s tenderness and care for a weary people, offering “Comfort, comfort…”. Isaiah gives voice to the emotional ups and downs of a community under stress—surely this people is only “grass”—yet that same people is called out to the hard, future-oriented work of preparing the way for the Holy One. 2 Peter acknowledges the mystery of God’s time—Kairos—where one day may be a thousand years by human reckoning, and the community is called to live attentively in this very moment, listening for the call of God. The beginning of Mark’s Gospel is one such moment: the appearance of an unkempt and unruly prophet, calling people to change their lives in the expectation that God is doing something radically new. One is coming into their midst with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Invite someone from the congregation to read portions of these three readings with their all-over-the-place emotional content; choose according to where you feel the congregation is in this moment—weary, determined, listening, ready for a jolt of surprise and challenge. Do the readings offer hints, encouragement or even direction to the congregation as they face a future unlike anything they may have imagined before the pandemic?

### Call To Offering

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.   
We bring forth our offerings—our tithes, our treasures, our least coins—  
to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

### Dedication

**O Faithful One,**   
**accept these gifts of our hearts and hands.**   
**May they be multiplied and magnified**  
**as the living presence of Christ in the world. Amen.**

### Benediction

Go forth into the world  
energized to seek signs of God’s future  
everywhere:   
especially in the unruly, unkempt, and persistent voices  
of Prophets in our midst:   
calling us to prepare the way  
in our lives and our world  
For the Holy One who is coming!   
 Amen.

## Advent 3

### Welcome and Territorial Acknowledgement:

### Call to Worship:

Rejoice!   
The spirit of God is sending us:   
**to bring good news to the oppressed,**   
**to comfort the brokenhearted,**   
**to proclaim liberty to the captives,**   
**to proclaim the year of favor among God’s people.**

Rejoice!   
The work of the Spirit is calling us:   
**To rebuild ancient relationships ruined by injustice,**   
**to repair the cities as places of hope,**   
**to restore land devastated across generations.**   
**to proclaim the year of favor among God’s people.**

Rejoice!   
The Glory of the Spirit is leading us:   
**To cast off any faint spirit**  
**and put on the mantle of praise,**   
**to take root as the plantings of the HOLY ONE,**   
**to display God’s glory.**

Come, let us worship in Joy!

### Invocation

Holy One,   
Builder who delights  
in making spaces of safety and beauty,   
Matchmaker who rejoices  
in presenting new spouses with a future of hope,   
fill us today with the gifts we need  
to join you in your life-sustaining, hope-giving work in the world;   
let us share your joyful vision  
of beauty and justice  
in this world you have created and loved.   
In the name of the One who is coming,   
Amen

### Prayer of Confession

**Witness to Joy**

Instead of a typical Confession of Sin,   
today let us try something that may be equally challenging  
let’s give witness instead to signs of Joy in our midst,   
Signs that our God is doing something new,   
and calling us to faithfulness in our contexts.

What are signs of hope, of encouragement, of change, of comfort,   
that point to the Holy One at work?

Are there signs which call us to join in, or amplify these signs in our community?

*Silence*

### Assurance of Grace

Holy one,   
we give you thanks that you meet us in our struggles,   
and call us into a future of hope and joy.   
You have promised to be faithful,   
and we open our hearts to you in trust,   
in the name of the one you send, Jesus.

### Sermon Reflection:

Certainly, the readings today shift in tone and imagery from the lament and confusion of the first two Advent Sundays. There is an energetic, confident tone to the readings, taking realistic note of destruction and pain, but giving voice to determination to rebuild and restore a broken world. God’s Spirit is at work anointing people to this future-building, and the dominant image throughout the readings is Joy. “Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice” is the refrain in the readings. The traditional name for the third Sunday of Advent is “Gaudete Sunday”, from the Latin word for “rejoice” in Philippians 4: 4–5 (Gaudete in Domino semper: Rejoice in the Lord always…the Lord is near.) Advent 3 year B echoes this in 1 Thessalonians 5. The English word “gaudy” comes from this Latin root, and gives a sense of the tone of this day. Pink/rose, (a gaudy “hot” pink?) the color alerting the world to the coming of dawn, is the color of this week’s Advent readings.

Invite someone from the congregation to read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24.

How does it feel to hear these words at the end of a tumultuous year?

### Call To Offering

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.   
We bring forth our offerings—our tithes, our treasures, our least coins—  
to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

### Dedication

**O Faithful One,**   
**accept these gifts of our hearts and hands.**   
**May they be multiplied and magnified**  
**as the living presence of Christ in the world. Amen.**

### Benediction

Go forth confident that God is faithful:   
Those who have sowed in sorrow will return with shouts of joy  
Bearing the harvest of God’s work.   
Rejoice always—the Lord is near.

## Advent 4

### Welcome and Territorial Acknowledgement:

### Call to Worship:

Sing out, my soul!   
Sing of the holiness of God:   
**Who has delighted in humanity;**   
**lifted up the poor, satisfied the hungry,**   
**given voice to the silent,**   
**and grounded the oppressor.**

God has blessed the full-bellied with emptiness,   
and given the gift of tears  
to those who have never wept;   
**God has desired the darkness of the womb,**   
**and inhabited our flesh—**

Sing of the longing of God:   
**Sing out, my soul!**

©1992 Janet Morley, All Desires Known, adapted; Reproduced with permission

### Invocation

O Wondrous God,   
send your Messenger to us today with a word of grace  
 if we are fearful, move us to Confidence.   
 If we are weary, offer us Rest.   
 If we are empty, fill us with Hope.   
We have been searching for you far away;   
Let us find you at home in our midst,   
Changing hearts and minds  
Urging us to join your work of Love.   
 We pray in the name of the One who is coming,   
 Jesus, the Christ.   
Amen.

### Prayer of Confession

Do not be afraid, said Gabriel,   
surprising Mary  
and confronting her with the decision of her life.   
Do not be afraid, God is with you.   
Over the past few years many of us have been confronted  
with life-changing circumstances and decisions.   
We know fear from the inside out.

In this moment, ponder that fear. Name it, if you can, at least to yourself.

*Silence*

Continue to ponder, and if you can, try to name where God may be calling you:   
 Do not be afraid.

*Silence; if it seems appropriate, the leader may invite people to share their experiences.*

### Assurance of Grace

Our God, who has been with the people since the beginning,   
is with us now  
offering grace that is more than we can ask or imagine.   
God’s love frees us from the past,   
and helps us move forward into a new future.   
Let us thank God-with-Us, Emmanuel, for faithful love.

### Sermon Reflection:

The readings this week tell the beginning of the almost-too-familiar story of Incarnation.   
2 Samuel 7 reveals God longing to be among the people. At long last “at rest from their enemies”, King David worries that the Presence of God with Israel dwells in temporary shelter. David wants to honor God with a more permanent tabernacle. But God’s Prophet Nathan challenges him: “Are you the one to build God a house?” Since the time of Exodus, God has been content to “move about” with the people in their midst, in tent and shelter, intimately engaged with them as they make their precarious way in the world. God’s desire is to “plant” the weary people in a place of safety with wise leadership and access to God’s own Presence.

Although in another generation Israel will build a Temple with a space set apart for the Holy One, in this moment God desires to live life “on the ground” with the people. David’s descendants, however, will have a different kind of house: a dynasty formed from the family of the humble shepherd, called into leadership by God.

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of God again seeking dwelling place amidst the people, in Mary’s womb. Mary, who is part of a poor branch of David’s house, will offer the Holy One shelter and nourishment to grow into the fulness of human life.

One of Mary’s ancient titles in the Church is Theotokos, “God-Bearer”. Her dialogue with the Angel sets the stage for the Holy One to continue the direct and intimate involvement of the Divine with humanity—incarnation as one of us—Divine love and presence becoming flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. Her song of joy in the Magnificat declares the promise of such Love, to change the world from within to become a place of justice and peace.

Invite someone to read aloud 2 Samuel 7: 1-9a.

Why would God choose to be at work in the world from the inside out?

How does it feel to know God longs to be with us?

### Call To Offering

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.   
We bring forth our offerings—our tithes, our treasures, our least coins—  
to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

### Dedication

**O Faithful One,**   
**accept these gifts of our hearts and hands.**   
**May they be multiplied and magnified**  
**as the living presence of Christ in the world. Amen.**

### Benediction

Let us go forth  
without fear,   
creating in our lives a space for  
the One who longs to dwell with us,   
to share our lives,   
and bless our world,   
and lead us into the Kin-dom of Justice and Peace.  
 Amen.