

DEVOTIONS
for
ADVENT

*"You have made
us for yourself,
so that our hearts
are restless
until they rest
in you."*

AUGUSTINE

MOSAIC
HOLY BIBLE



New Living
Translation[®]
SECOND EDITION

TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
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Introduction

For some Christians, “Advent” is a strange word vaguely equivalent to the “Christmas season.” While that is true on the surface, Advent is so much more. Advent is a four-week season leading up to Christmas, a time when Christians have historically prepared their hearts for the coming of Christ as a baby in Bethlehem and a time when we actively anticipate his promised return. At Advent, there should be a palpable sense of celebration for God’s revelation of himself to the world—in the past, present, and future.

Advent also marks the beginning of a new church year. The church year might not be familiar to everyone who uses this book, but it is an excellent way to help focus our attention on God. Rather than following the solar calendar’s more familiar structure, organized by the rhythms of nature, the church calendar is organized around God and his activity in the world. The church calendar follows six seasons of varying length: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. More information about the church year and how it can shape your spiritual life can be found at www.HolyBibleMosaic.com.

Each of the following weekly meditations is labeled with a week from Advent, and the Scripture readings are drawn from the passages that are traditionally read during that week by churches around the world. If you choose to follow this plan for reading the Bible, you will truly be connected with the global, historic church. And if you enjoy your Advent experience, extend it by using *Holy Bible: Mosaic*, which contains meditations for the entire church year, following the rhythms of God’s redemptive work in the world.

ELEMENTS OF WEEKLY MEDITATIONS

Each weekly meditation centers around a specific theme and uses several elements to create an environment for a meaningful experience with God. A brief introduction at the beginning of each weekly collection will start you on the path, and the remaining elements will help guide you along the way. This sampler will give you a taste of what is available throughout the year in *Holy Bible: Mosaic*.

Scripture. The first and most important element is the weekly listing of five Scripture readings. Four of these readings are adapted from standard lectionaries used by different Christian traditions around the world. These selections provide one reading each from the Gospels, the Psalms, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. The Suggested Reading is specifically chosen to complement the other readings in connection with the weekly theme.

Scripture is at the heart of each weekly meditation. Read these passages. Meditate on them. Read them again. Allow the text to penetrate your soul throughout the week as you engage with the other elements. Don't let the other elements eclipse the Scripture in your devotional time. They should complement the Scripture readings, not supersede them.

Historical and Global Contributions. One major distinctive of *Holy Bible: Mosaic* is the collection of reflective material from every continent and every century of Christian history. This material comes in many different forms that work together in each week's collection. You will find full-color artwork, excerpts from influential Christian thinkers throughout church history, quotes from brothers and sisters in Christ who have wrestled with ideas related to each week's theme, and worshipful pieces (including prayers, hymns, and poetry), all designed to bring you into contact with the global, historic church as you engage with God's Word.

Meditations. Each week also features an original meditation that connects the weekly theme to the modern world. These meditations were written specifically for this Bible by Christians engaged in living out the gospel in their own communities.

Whitespace. In addition to the lined spaces inviting you to write your thoughts down, ample space was purposefully given for you to draw, write, or interact with the material in any way that is helpful to you. Make use of the space however you want.

WAYS TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

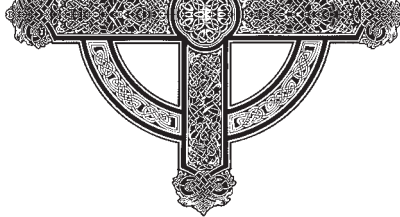
Individually. Use this Advent devotional in your personal devotional time, and allow the Scripture readings and meditative elements to serve as a springboard for your own prayer and reflections. Read the Scripture from the back of this booklet, or use your own Bible and see the readings in context.

In a Group. Families, Bible studies, and small groups can use this devotional to share in the experience together. Read the Scripture together, discuss the quotations and readings as a group, and talk about what God is doing in your lives through the Scripture and other material.

Any number of other ways might be imagined for using this book. Please feel free to share the unique ideas you have by e-mailing us at NLT@tyndale.com or by logging on to www.HolyBibleMosaic.com. There you will also find resources to extend the experience beyond the printed page, and you can add your piece to the Mosaic by contributing to the community forum or commenting on the blog.



THE ANNUNCIATION—EL GRECO (GREECE/1541–1614)



Longing

Advent, Week 1

ISAIAH 2:1-5 † P. 31 • PSALM 25 † P. 32
1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9 † P. 33 • MATTHEW 24:32-51 † P. 33

Waiting doesn't resonate well in our culture. Our spending habits serve as one good example. Because we need it *now*, we rack up outlandish debts we may have no plan for repaying.

The Christian life is—and always has been—filled with waiting. Whether it was the Old Testament anticipation of the promised Messiah or the New Testament eager expectation for Jesus Christ's return, believers are often focused on what is to come.

It seems that God teaches us the most poignant lessons when we pay attention to the ways in which his Kingdom is upside down from ours. Perhaps God wants us to feel strongly dissatisfied with the imperfections of our current state and long for what is to come. Could it be that in those moments of yearning we grow to better understand the ways of our Lord?

SUGGESTED READING: ISAIAH 11:1-16 † P. 34

*You also must be ready all the time,
for the Son of Man will come when least expected.*

—MATTHEW 24:44

Longing

“Advent . . . helps us to understand the fullness of the value and meaning of the mystery of Christmas. It is not just about commemorating the historical event, which occurred some 2,000 years ago in a little village of Judea. Instead, we must understand that our whole life should be an ‘advent,’ in vigilant expectation of Christ’s final coming. To prepare our hearts to welcome the Lord who, as we say in the Creed, will come one day to judge the living and the dead, we must learn to recognize his presence in the events of daily life. Advent is then a period of intense training that directs us decisively to the One who has already come, who will come and who continuously comes.”

—**POPE JOHN PAUL II** (POLAND/1920–2005)

*Now you have every spiritual gift you need
as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

—**1 CORINTHIANS 1:7**

“Let us then continually persevere in our hope, and the earnest of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ, ‘who bore our sins in His own body on the tree,’ ‘who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth,’ but endured all things for us, that we might live in Him. Let us then be imitators of His patience; and if we suffer for His name’s sake, let us glorify Him. For He has set us this example in Himself, and we have believed that such is the case.” —**POLYCARP** (TURKEY/69–155)

Longing

C. 349



C. 407

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (ANTIOCH)

Prayer and converse with God is a supreme good: it is a partnership and union with God. As the eyes of the body are enlightened when they see light; so our spirit, when it is intent on God, is illumined by his infinite light. I do not mean the prayer of outward observance but prayer from the heart, not confined to fixed times or periods but continuous throughout the day and night.

Our spirit should be quick to reach out toward God not only when it is engaged in meditation; at other times also, when it is carrying out its duties, caring for the needy, performing works of charity, giving generously in the service of others, our spirit should long for God, and call him to mind, so that these works may be seasoned with the salt of God's love, and so make a palatable offering to the Lord of the universe. . . .

Prayer is the light of the spirit, true knowledge of God, mediating between God and man. The spirit, raised up to heaven by prayer, clings to God with the utmost tenderness; like a child crying tearfully for its mother, it craves the milk that God provides. It seeks the satisfaction of its own desires, and receives gifts outweighing the whole world of nature.

Prayer stands before God as an honored ambassador. It gives joy to the spirit, peace to the heart. I speak of prayer, not words. It is the longing for God, love too deep for words, a gift not given by man but by God's grace.

REFLECTION



Imagine

MATHEW WOODLEY

A few years ago, on the first Sunday of Advent, I played John Lennon's song "Imagine" right before my sermon. It wasn't a universal hit. The lyrics may be controversial; he imagines a live-for-today existence with no heaven and no hell, but he longs for a better place where "the world will be as one."

In my defense, I clearly stated that, contra Lennon's lyrics, I believe in heaven, hell, the blood of Jesus, and things worth dying for. But Lennon was right about one thing: This world is broken, and we should yearn for its healing. Our hearts should ache for a better world.

Sadly, our culture often fosters a complacent, blasé, smug approach to Christianity. In the words of C. S. Lewis, "We are far too easily pleased." We're happy to numb and freeze our restless ache for a better world.

Advent is the season of the church year that ignites that longing in our hearts. Before we rush into "Happy Holidays," we pause and let longing rise up within us. Throughout Advent we catch glimpses of a better world.

And as we catch glimpses of this Messiah-healed world, we long for its coming now. All of the best Advent hymns capture this spirit of groaning and longing for Messiah's better world. When we sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," with its dark, unresolved melody, it cracks our hearts open with longing's wound. And yet, we know Messiah *has* come, even as we wait for him to come again. Advent is a deliciously painful mix of joy and anguish.

This Advent-like longing is at the heart of Christian spirituality. Augustine's Latin phrase *desiderium sinus cordis*—"yearning makes the heart grow deep"—became a central theme in his pilgrimage on earth. Augustine cried out, "Give me one who yearns; . . . give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the spring of the Eternal country. Give me that sort of man: he knows what I mean."

C. S. Lewis claimed that in this life the Advent-like stab of longing serves as a spiritual homing device, placed deep in our heart by God to lead us back to him. Thus, as Psyche realizes in *Till We Have Faces*, "It almost hurt me . . . like a bird in a cage when the other birds of its kind are flying home. . . . The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing . . . to find the place where all the beauty came from. . . . The longing for home."

Advent trains us to ache again. Of all the seasons of the church year, Advent is the time to acknowledge, feel, and even embrace the joyful anguish of longing for Messiah's birth and the world's rebirth. So we sing our aching songs while we light candles and festoon the church with greenery. That is Advent longing, and we couldn't imagine it any other way.

MEDITATION

OUR HEARTS ARE RESTLESS

Everlasting God,
in whom we live and move and have our being:
You have made us for yourself,
so that our hearts are restless
until they rest in you.

—**AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO** (ALGERIA/354–430)