

*Advent Companion*  
2024

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## HOW TO USE THIS COMPANION

This Advent Companion is meant to be just that — a companion for you during your Advent journey. If you're reading this book, you're obviously taking ownership of your spiritual growth; and this pleases God. Your spiritual life could change dramatically over the next several weeks if you allow the Holy Spirit to lead you.

The reflections and ideas within this booklet should serve as a starting point for Advent, not an ending point. You might find this companion most helpful if you journal daily, or weekly, as you go along. Journaling is simply a written record of your dialogue with God. When you journal as a form of prayer, you are expressing your thoughts (or more specifically, the movements of your heart) through writing instead of through speaking or silence.

There is no “right” or “wrong” way to journal — simply write what is on your heart. Over time you can go back to see what you’ve written on the pages (and later, the filled journals). You’ll be amazed not only at how your life and your perspective change over time but by how faithful God is to you, both daily and eternally. He will not let you down, ever. He is waiting for you. Go to Him in prayer.

Scripture promises us, “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” (**James 4:8**) Advent is the perfect time to do this.

Once you’ve spent some time in silence and in prayer, just start writing. You can journal as long or as briefly as you feel inspired to do so. Some days you might journal for an hour or more. Other days you might write one sentence or nothing at all. The latter is no failure on your part. Any time you put yourself in the presence of God and listen is a success.

In addition to journaling, here are a few more ideas on how to “get the most” out of each section in the Advent Companion:

## **Scripture Passages**

Each Gospel reading is taken directly from the Gospels (read at Mass) for each day of Advent. Take time to read and pray through the passage a few times prior to Mass. You'll be amazed at how much more you get out of the liturgy this way. Make it a point as well to look for details, adjectives, and other descriptive words that bring the story to life. Underline key words or phrases that jump out at you, and write out any questions that you may have so that you can find answers to them later. Remember that the Gospel stories aren't just nice tales of old. They are part of your history. The Gospels are your story of how much God loves you! Know them and cherish them as your own.

## **Reflections**

Reading Holy Scripture is like eating a great steak — there is so much flavor to taste and savor in each bite. These reflections are intended to help you focus on one “flavor” of the day's Gospel reading, and in turn reflect on it more deeply. After reading the reflection, spend some time journaling about what you read, as well as sharing your own thoughts with friends, family, or others in the Church. If you have a hard time relating to a specific reflection right away, that's okay! Read

the Gospel and reflection again, and ask the Lord very specifically to speak to you through these inspired words.

### **Daily Challenges**

There is a personal challenge included for every day of the week to help you better live out and enter into the themes and readings discussed. Some might need to be adapted to your specific age, vocation, or state in life, so use these as practical ideas that you can implement and build upon. Be intentional. The resolutions you make in response to prayer should become actions, and in turn, become a prayer in itself. Do something every day to enter more deeply into the Advent and Christmas seasons.

### **Bonus Material**

Along with the daily reflections, we've included some bonus material in this companion. There are two additional entries — one to begin Advent (the new liturgical year) and one to conclude the Christmas Octave (and begin the new calendar year).

In addition, we've included a daily offering to pray at the beginning of every day. The goal of these additional entries is not only to give you even

more to reflect on during this Advent season, but to encourage you to recognize Christ in every moment — on that one random day in August as much as you do on December 25th.

This companion is our gift to you, inspired by your Father in heaven. May He bless your Advent with abundance! And as always, know of our prayers for you.

You are loved,  
Life Teen



# INTRODUCTION

BY MARK HART

Hide-and-seek was my favorite game growing up. The thrill of the countdown, the heart-stopping stress that my six-year-old body endured from me frantically scurrying to hide, holding my breath as I heard the seeker getting closer — it was almost too much pressure for my little heart to take.

The lessons learned in hide-and-seek are lessons we can carry with us throughout life: the importance of thinking under pressure, the integrity necessary not to look while counting, the ability to remain silent for long periods of time, as well as the joy derived from taking a break and playing a game with friends, just to name a few.

Too often, however, I treat my relationship with God like a game of hide-and-seek. At times I run from Him. At times I try to hide from Him, acting

as though He cannot see me. At times I even hold my breath and don't talk to Him, hoping He won't find me. I figure that if He can't find me, He can't ask me to change.

There's just one problem with this thought process: we can't hide from God.

To God everything is exposed: all of our faults, imperfections, and little personal secrets. To God everything is also known: all of our talents, traits, successes, and achievements — that's the good news. The even better news is that God is always seeking you and me: "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." **(Luke 19:10)**

This is one of the reasons that the Church gives us the season of Advent. Over the four weeks preceding Christmas we prepare not just for Jesus' coming as a baby in a manger but also for His Second Coming. The word Advent means "the coming" or "the arrival," and the Church, with great wisdom, nudges us with a four-week "wake-up call" to ensure that we are honest with our God and in right relationship with Him before He comes again.

The season of Advent is like the countdown in hide-and-seek. The only difference is that if we are living the way we are called to, we have no desire nor reason to hide ourselves from God.

He is seeking you. Are you hiding from Him? If not, good. If so, stop.

He loves you even more than you love yourself, so let Him. He's coming back at some point. This fact is only scary if we're not where we need to be in relationship to God. A relationship with Jesus is all the fun without any of the games.

Advent is a beautiful gift, so seek God and make this season one of depth and of honesty. Expose your soul before God and allow Him to love you for who you truly are: a sinner in need of His mercy, a work in progress.

As hide-and-seek reminds us, "Ready or not... here He comes."

Have a blessed Advent.

## A DAILY OFFERING FOR ADVENT

When we make a daily offering, we tell God that we desire His presence and His plan more than we desire our own plans for the day. In other words, we offer (or “give”) God our day. It’s true, we can’t physically hand God our day, but what we can do is start it with a prayer that says, “God, I want what you want.” In turn, this prayer becomes (through God’s grace) an action, perhaps in school when we have to find patience with our peers, or at home when we are tempted to fight with a family member.

A daily offering means starting our day with Christ in mind.

It’s important to offer God your day. It’s also important to offer Him your time in prayer. So, before you read the Gospel and reflection for the day, offer this prayer:

*“Father, I thank you for the gift of this day. I offer you the ups and the downs, the joys and the frustrations. Teach me more about myself today. Holy Spirit, open my eyes to see how Scripture is as much my story as it is the story of Christ and His apostles. Father, open my eyes to your love today, and teach me how to say ‘yes,’ as Mary said ‘yes’ to your Son. May your will be done, now and forever. Amen.”*

We challenge you to continue to make a daily offering even beyond the completion of this Advent Companion. It is truly a beautiful way to say “good morning” to our God.

# FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## DECEMBER 1ST, 2024

### **Reading I**

Jeremiah 33:14-16

### **Reading II**

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

### **Gospel**

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

### **Reflection**

“Ready or not, here He comes!”

Do you remember playing hide-and-seek when you were a kid? Whenever the seeker shouted that phrase, there was always that one friend who would yell, “NO!” because they were completely unprepared and without a hiding spot. Fast forward to life today and ask yourself, “What (or who) are you actually prepared for?”

Advent is such an exciting time for us as Catholics. However, it can be a slippery slope. What begins as the joyful anticipation of a Savior can quickly become a focus on everything that has to “get done” in the coming weeks. The world isn’t going to stop selling us a commercial Christmas. Maybe for you, your “Christmas to-do list” involves shopping for presents, or attending tacky sweater parties. Possibly, it has nothing to do with the season. Maybe you are cramming for exams or rushing to extracurricular activities. While there is nothing wrong with all of these things, we should be people who live within the season of Advent daily, instead of people who pick and choose when we pay attention to our faith and the coming of our Savior.

Today, we hear Jesus reminding us to be aware and be present, so that we can be prepared for the day when the Son of Man will come to redeem us. How cool is it that we are given the gift of these four weeks to focus more on our Lord than ever before? How fantastic an opportunity to hit the “restart” button and begin a new year excited for the greatness that Jesus can bring into our lives? And what a blessing to experience the joy and hope that He offers to us through His birth! May we be people who choose to focus on what



our daily preparations look like by beginning with the one who gave us life.

### **Today's Challenge**

Prepare your heart and your daily life for the coming of Christ this Advent. Choose a specific time every day this Advent season (and hopefully beyond) when you will use this Advent Companion to read through the Scriptures and reflect on God's great love for you. Input this commitment into your calendar so there is a set time to fulfill it. Consider inviting an accountability partner to join with you in the coming weeks as we journey closer to the birth of our Savior.

# MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 2ND, 2024

## **Gospel**

Matthew 8:5-11

## **Reflection**

In our modern culture today, there are so many celebrities that have such a grip on us, that if they so much as smile, we fall to our knees. Although they are people just like us, we give them this power and reverence that places them above everyone else. People will follow their every word, every action, every bit of drama. In a sense, they are placed on a pedestal, even though a lot of times they shouldn't be admired for how they live their lives.

Imagine a celebrity or well-known figure were coming over to your house for dinner. How would you act? What would you wear? Would your house be spotless? It surely wouldn't be the same

as when your best friend comes over.

Now, imagine Jesus were the one visiting for dinner. What would change, if anything? Nothing should change, and in fact, there should be the utmost reverence for His holiness that you don't feel worthy for Him to enter your house.

The centurion who approaches Him knows of Jesus' healing power and knows that He can cure the servant at his house. His faith is so great, however, that he understands the glory of God. He says, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed." **(Matthew 8:8)** The centurion knows he is a sinner and he knows that he doesn't deserve to be asking this of God; but Jesus can see his sincerity and humility.

It can be so easy "worshiping" these celebrities, that we often put God on the back burner. We forget the glory and power of the Lord. He is the one around whom we should care about how we act, how we speak, how we look — even though we are not worthy of a sliver of the love and mercy He gives us. This Advent season, Jesus will be arriving. How will you present yourself?

### **Today's Challenge**

At some point during your week, go to Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We don't deserve for Him to come into our houses (our hearts), but we recognize how great His power is. It's always hard to get yourself to go, but if you muster the courage, it will be one powerful way in which you prepare yourself for His humble arrival at Christmas.

# MEMORIAL OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER, PRIEST DECEMBER 3RD, 2024

## **Gospel**

Luke 10:21-24

## **Reflection**

Anyone who remembers seeing the ocean for the first time remembers that first glance. After hours of flying or driving, the vastness of the water takes your breath away — the way it catches and scatters the sunlight, the way the waves roll in and out in a rhythm of rushing water. There is something about it that makes a person feel so small and yet also a part of something so big.

There is something so powerful about the beauty of the world: the ocean, the mountains, the sky. It does something to us. It can create moments of deep connection with God if we let it. There is no need to speak when we just allow the beauty to strip away our boredom or our annoyances of

the day, and lead us into a moment of gratitude and awe.

This is the kind of attitude Jesus is inviting us to have in the midst of our day. Jesus tells His disciples, “Blessed are the eyes which see what you see!” It is an invitation to take notice of the little moments of encounter with beauty today. Maybe it’s a leaf covered in frost, a gentle breeze by the ocean, or the splendor of the mountains. It can be so easy to miss the beauty of creation especially as life gets busier: as final projects are due, family comes into town, winter sports start, and Christmas shopping gets underway. But we are truly blessed to see what we see.

### **Today’s Challenge**

Make an effort to see the beauty in creation today. When you encounter something beautiful, take ten seconds to take it in before moving on with your day.

# WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 4TH, 2024

## **Gospel**

Matthew 15:29-37

## **Reflection**

Imagine the Gospel scene. You are sitting close to Jesus listening to Him preach. You are amazed at His words, then something even more incredible happens: He starts to heal people. Jesus heals a lot of people. It is incredible and you cannot help but give thanks to God. But then it starts to get late. Jesus tells you that you need to feed the crowd, but you have barely any food. How do you respond?

Even after all the disciples had seen, they still could not believe that Jesus had the ability to feed all those people. Despite the incredible works done before them only hours before, they doubted that Jesus could do this particular miracle.

We fall into the same trap. We see the incredible things Christ does for others and we give thanks to God, but we doubt that God could work miracles for us. We let God heal certain parts of our life, but there is one area we feel is too big for even Christ. Jesus says, “Let me show you how I can work something incredible in your world,” and we respond, “But it’s not possible.”

This Advent, Jesus wants to do something big. Perhaps you’ve heard Him speak incredible things, even work miracles. Now it is time to watch what Christ can really do. Now is the time to bring our greatest need, and watch Him fulfill it — perhaps in the most unexpected way possible.

### **Today’s Challenge**

We sometimes put “limits” on Christ. These “limits” don’t actually limit Christ, but they do impact our ability to see and accept what Jesus does in our lives. Take ten minutes today to journal about ways you may have put “limits” on Jesus in the past. Then, take the next ten minutes to ask Jesus to break through these limits and do something new in your life.



# THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 5TH, 2024

## **Gospel**

Matthew 7:21, 24-27

## **Reflection**

Do the will of the Father? Oof. That's a tough one.

Jesus is talking about action here more than just belief, and more than just sitting on our hands and claiming faith. We think of Advent as a time of waiting, and it is. But too often we think of waiting as something that is passive. We can prepare as we wait for Christ — and the best way to do this is to go out of our way to serve those around us, give to those in need, pray for others, and even love those we struggle to love.

Jesus is very blunt about those who want to be passive in waiting. The letter from James echoes the urgency in His command to be disciples of

action: “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works?” **(James 2:14)**

It’s easy to get caught up in a holier-than-thou attitude and make our preparation time all about ourselves, keeping it internal and personal. But Advent, as a time of waiting, is a time for action in our hearts as well as in our lives.

### **Today’s Challenge**

Spend a few minutes in your closet or looking through your drawers and find something you can give away to the St. Vincent de Paul Society at your parish, or to a local Salvation Army. This is a tangible way of serving those who are in need, as Christ commands us.