Praying with Creation

An Advent Devotional



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Bishop's Committee for Creation Care

Welcome to *Praying with Creation: An Advent Devotional.* This simple devotional is designed to accompany you during your Advent pilgrimage. May this time of prayer and reflection draw you closer to the One who came into creation in the Incarnation and who is coming into our hearts anew this Christmas season.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Romans 8:19-25

First Week of Advent

Written by The Rev. Alison Kemper

In the first week of Advent, Christians often focus on how hope lives in our lives. We are filled with longing for a better world, for signs of change and promise. It's a core part of being human. But in Romans 8, one of the most important and famous passages in all of Paul's writing, Paul makes it clear that humans are not the only creatures who long for God and who hope for God's reign. Like us, all of creation yearns to be fully alive in God.

Paul is clear: we long for our future as the children of God just as creation yearns for a new day. Creation is harmed by our enslavement to wealth, to prestige, war, power and consumption injures. Together we yearn for lives without suffering and fear. Together we hope for freedom.

We cannot see the realm of God: we wait, we hope, and we live in and with God's creation for the coming of Christ. Nothing in creation separates us from the love of God: all of creation brings us into grasp of God's love.

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As we await the coming of Christ, we pray with the monarchs clustering in the trees in a small reserve in Mexico, with the bees overwintering in the leaves on our yards, with the orcas keeping their calves safe and strong throughout their migration, with the loons hoping their lake is quiet enough for nests next spring. May our hope in God liberate us from greed, overconsumption and all of the forces pressing us to destroy God's creation, so that we may live together in fullness of life. Amen.

But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you;

ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of God has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

Job 12:7-10

Second Week of Advent

Written by The Rev. Andrienne Clements

Advent is a time to prepare ourselves for the arrival of Christ. Job offers us a way to prepare and to begin to understand the nature of God by looking to God's creation.

In this passage Job is telling us that we should turn to the natural world to study God's secrets and experience God's truth. In doing so, we will learn of the intricate relationships that connect each part of the universe to every other part and learn something about the character of God. Here we learn that nature has its own intrinsic value, power, integrity and beauty. God reveals a cosmos pulsing with energy and life. In nature, we see that this is God's world and that here God is never far. "In nature we have not obscured the epiphany of God's presence."[1]

For those of us who look to science for answers, science is finding structural and functional patterns in the tiniest atoms that are similar to forms found in the far reaches of the galaxy. Isaiah emphasized God's work as creator. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God. The creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary;' (Isaiah 40:28). God marshals the divine forces and creates the world we live in.

Have you ever laid on your back on a summers evening and watched the stars drifting by. It is as if they are beckoning you to join them. Or walked through a wood on a cool October afternoon and heard the wind blow through the drying leaves. It is as if you are hearing God's voice.

God created the earth and its inhabitants. Creation reveals God and supports life on earth. All are inseparably linked. We must look to the natural world, as Job asks us, not as a resource but 'to appreciate its mystery and cry holy, holy, holy.'[2] We are the handiwork of God, made in love and created for the purpose of loving all of God's creation, which is the nature of God.

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Creator Lord,
In your love we have been created,
In your hand is the breath of every living thing.
Help us to see the beauty of this world,
to hear what it is teaching us about you
and our place within it.
May we be reminded of your love
in its transforming beauty and mystery.
In your name we pray. Amen

1. Kohak, Erazim, 1984, The Embers and the Stars a philosophical inquiry into the moral sense of nature.
2. Armstrong, Karen, 2023, Sacred Nature, Restoring Our Ancient Bond with the Natural World.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 68:11

Third Week of Advent

Written by The Rev. Andrew Kuhl

In the winter, it can be hard to think about the first shoots of the garden. We have just put our beds to rest, frosts have come and coated the remaining stems and leaves with fine ice crystals, and snow (hopefully) is covering the ground around us. But it is now, in the winter, when the hidden work is being done in the soil that brings about the bursting forth of seeds and bulbs. All the plants that require the cold to germinate start that work now, and wise gardeners pay attention to this time of year.

In this reading from Isaiah, the expected coming of the Messiah heralds long held expectations and desires: a rebuilding of ruins; a flourishing of justice and peace; a year of liberation and jubilee; a transformation from grief and sorrow to joy and praise. And Isaiah wraps up that hope with an image of the garden, likening it to how soil bursts forth the first sprouts of seeds.

The Christmas carol “Joy to the World” reflects this imagination, drawing on the language of the psalms to highlight how creation rejoices at the coming reign of God. This promised renewing and restoration, this promised bursting forth of justice and peace, is at the heart of this joy that causes all creation to sing, when Christ comes.

In this season of Advent we orient ourselves to this joy filled waiting: expecting the coming of our God. So how do we, in this waiting time of the year, pay attention to the work that God is doing in germinating those seeds? How do we both long for and rejoice with this great renewal of all things promised in the coming reign? How do we respond and help those things come into the world and into our lives for the good of our neighbours, ourselves, and all of creation?

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God who does the hidden work germinating seeds buried in soil, help us to notice the seeds you have planted, to yearn for and burst forth those shoots of the garden of your reign, so that we may rejoice and praise you with all of creation, for your saving and liberating work accomplished and started in Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

Sing to God a new song.

Psalm 33.3

Fourth Week of Advent

Written by The Rev. Canon Susan Spicer

When God comes, all creation sings for joy.

Our lectionary readings are filled with songs as we approach Christmas. Elizabeth sings a blessing for Mary as John leaps for joy in her womb (Luke 1:41-45) and then Mary's Magnificat pours forth. Zechariah sings over the infant John; the angels to the shepherds, and Simeon sings for joy as he holds the child Jesus.

Creation is singing too.

"The time of singing has come," announces the Song of Songs.
"The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom;
They give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." (Song of Songs 2:12-13)

God is coming, being formed and borne of the earth, removing any doubt that all creation is the womb, the birthplace, the home of God. God so loved the cosmos, that God came down into it, born among the creatures. God so loves our creatureliness that God joins us in it. "And the word became flesh, and lived among us," wrote John.

The earth is holy. "There are no unsacred places;" said Wendell Berry. "There are only sacred places and desecrated places."

When desecration comes through human hands, the earth mourns. In the midst of the covenantal crisis in Israel, Hosea articulates the connection between human violence and injustice, and the suffering of creation:

…the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
  and no knowledge of God in the land.
Swearing, lying, and murder,
  and stealing and adultery break out;
  bloodshed follows bloodshed.
Therefore the land mourns,
  and all who live in it languish;
together with the wild animals
  and the birds of the air,
  even the fish of the sea are perishing. (Hosea 4:1b-3)

Christmas, let us recall, begins in lament, for there was no room for him. Mary's tears were answered with a place among the creatures, where the child of Love was born.

And so perhaps this Christmas, we begin in lament, listening to the mourning of the creation God so loves, so hallowed with his presence. Our song must join the languishing cries of the wild animals and the birds whose songs are being lost to extinction. Our song must echo across the fields in mourning as even the fish are perishing from the seas. Our song must join the cry of the poor, on the front lines of the ecological disaster.

May we each sing - my soul cries out with a joyful shout that the God of my heart is great, and my spirit sings of the wondrous things that you bring to the ones who wait. You fixed your sight on your servant's plight, and my weakness you did not spurn, so from east to west shall our name be blessed.

This Christmas, may our hearts be turned to the One who came for the sake of love for all creation.

Praying with creation:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the seas laugh, and all that fills them;
let the fields exult, and everything in them!
Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the coming of the Beloved, who reigns in glory!
For through Love will come truth and justice,
offering all the people gifts of new Life. Amen.

(Psalm 96, paraphrase by Nan Merrill)



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