



# Presbyterians *Read*



## Fourth Week of Advent

**Theme: Surrendering to God's Purposes**

*Christmas is a time for leaving our sober, sane world of budgets and schedules and rules and for just a moment blowing our minds with the thought that God intends other ways for us to live (p. 55).*

### Prayer

Light a candle and place it at the centre of your discussion circle. To open, invite someone to read the following prayer from p. 55:

*Break into our staid lives with the power of your holiness. Break up our old patterns and expectations, and transform us through the good news brought by the singing of angels: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."*

Follow the prayer with a few minutes of silent reflection to centre in God's presence. Close the silence with a re-reading of the same prayer followed by an "Amen."

### Overview of Theme

Our lives are not our own; they belong to God, whose plan for us and all of creation is much bigger than we can understand. Advent is a time of surrendering ourselves to God, and for embracing the new world we have received. When the world seems hopeless, we have hope because God has shown his extreme love and faithfulness to us by sending his son. This week, Brueggemann calls us to boldly step into God's future by "bet[ting] on the baby" (p. 61). This means letting God break our "old patterns and expectations" like God did for Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds when Jesus was sent to disrupt and transform their lives (p. 55). "Betting on the baby" means that we do not settle for the world as it is, but we allow ourselves to be powerfully displaced in "new and healing and liberating" ways by Jesus (p. 69).

### Opening Discussion Prompts

Have you ever experienced God changing something or opening a new possibility in your life for the sake of healing and liberation? What did it feel like?

Share an example of a time that you intentionally surrendered something to God.

## Biblical Reflection

Read the following passage slowly. If you have time, invite someone else to read it a second time. Reading it twice, especially when using a different translation with a different voice, allows people to hear new things in the passage. After reading the passage, use the questions below to guide your discussion.

### Luke 2:1–20 (NRSV)

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

## Biblical Reflection Discussion Points

Each of the characters in the nativity story had their lives disrupted in significant ways by Jesus’ arrival. How has/is your life being disrupted by God’s purposes? How are we being called to surrender to his purposes for the sake of others?

Brueggemann writes: “But we are not hopeless. We are at the break of God’s future. The Lord will come in power and in grace . . .to turn us from despair and anger and brutality and greed and fear” (59). What turning are we being called to this Advent season personally and collectively? How can we help others in our world turn towards the newness Jesus brings?

What the angels, shepherds, Mary and Joseph experienced through the birth of Jesus is described in this passage from Luke as so amazing that it caused them to glorify and praise God. What has amazed you this Advent season? What will you do over Christmas to glorify and praise God?



## Weekly Spiritual Practice

### CELEBRATION

The nativity story illustrates that when we participate in God's newness our lives are blessed in ways beyond anything we thought possible. This is a reason to celebrate! The characters in this story are so amazed by the gift of Jesus that they "glorify and praise" God. We are also called to celebrate God's presence with us—to abandon ourselves to celebration, even when the world gives us lots of reasons to despair.

This week, our spiritual practice is celebration—to celebrate God's presence with us through his son. The following spiritual exercises have been adapted from Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (pp. 28-30) to help you celebrate the glorious truth that God is with us. Please choose one or both to try this week.

- Recall all of God's gifts, provisions, guidance and love toward you. To celebrate God's grace to you, do something creative. For example: write, paint, draw or play music to praise God. Consider combining creativity with Christmas by making joyful decorations for your home or church.
- Give special time and attention to the people who give you joy. Ask God how you might celebrate them in a special way this Christmas, focusing the celebration specifically on how precious the person is to you and to God.

### Closing Prayer

We thank You, Almighty God, for giving us your son. Give us joyfulness of heart and a spirit of gladness as we celebrate the healing, liberation and freedom that Jesus brought into the world. We come before you now to give you thanks for the many gifts you've given us and to pray for the hopes we have that have not yet been fulfilled:

*[Leave time for people to give thanks and bring their hopes that have not yet been fulfilled to God]*

We will not settle, Lord, for the world as it is. Instead, we look to Jesus with hope and surrender our lives to You. Help us to take steps in the direction You would like us to go this Christmas season. We invite You to dwell with us as we celebrate Your radically glorious nature and Your perfect plan for each of us. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

### Thanksgiving

This week there will be an opportunity for people to give thanks to God and express their hopes that have not yet been fulfilled to God. Leave plenty of silent time for people to express their prayers out loud or in silence.

