

# Christ Comes on the Wings of Prayer

## Advent 2020

Advent 2020—and what a year it’s been! For most of us, this past year has left us feeling helpless and, at times, hopeless. For months we’ve been engrossed in a twisted litany of overwhelming challenges, conflicts, and tragedies. We’ve spent much of our waking moments burrowed in our own homes, seeking safety and relief within our own private thoughts and domains.

And now Advent 2020 begins—the celebration of the coming of Christ! Yet much of the world is in no mood to celebrate. And that may be just as true for you and me.

Yet, let’s consider for a moment something that this tradition of Advent features. It’s never been simply about the birth of Christ. It’s always incorporated the present coming, as well as the future coming, of Christ. Jesus *came* to us more than 2000 years ago. Jesus *will come again* at a time only the Triune God knows. And, miracle of miracles, Jesus *continually comes* to us each and every day!

But how? How does Jesus come to us today? And what might we do to participate in his daily coming?

One mysterious yet rarely considered way is through prayer. Christ comes on the wings of prayer. Through prayer we summon the Advent of Christ into our lives, our families, our neighborhoods, and our world. Do you believe that? If not, let us introduce you to someone who did.



Image credit to artist Dale Witherow

## Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World

Frank Laubach, a missionary and champion of world literacy, in his little book, *Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World*, set about to call 500 million people around the world to pray. He was writing in 1946, the ravages of World War II barely behind him. He’d witnessed the horrors of this war and was deeply concerned that it should never happen again. And so, he sought to engage ordinary citizens around the world in a renewed call to prayer.

Laubach wrote, "I must plunge into mighty experiments in intercessory prayer, to test my hypothesis that God needs my help to do His will for others, and that my prayer releases His power. I must be His channel, for the world needs me." (Letters by a Modern Mystic, pg. 12)

How does his perspective strike you? Have you ever considered that God needs *your* help to do his will, that prayer releases God's power? Take a moment, reflect on, and respond to Laubach's words.

During this terribly helpless, powerless time of ours, when our world has been torn asunder by a deadly pandemic and insidious racism, our nation by a political schism, might you and I consider that God needs our help to do his will? Might we be a channel for the present Advent of Christ as we pray for a world that desperately needs a Savior?

## Prepare the Way of the Lord

To frame this call to prayer during Advent 2020, consider the words of Isaiah, a foreshadowing of John the Baptizer, who prepared the way for the first Advent of Jesus the Christ. Read the text three times, slowly and reflectively.

A voice is wailing, "In the wilderness, get it ready! Prepare the way;  
make it a straight shot. The Eternal would have it so.  
Straighten the way in the *wandering* desert  
to make the *crooked* road wide and straight for our God.

Where there are steep valleys, treacherous descents,  
*raise the highway*; lift it up;  
bring down the dizzying heights.  
Fill in the potholes and gullies, the rough places.  
Iron out the shoulders flat and wide.

*The Lord will be, really be, among us.*  
The *radiant* glory of the Lord will be revealed.  
All flesh together will take it in. *Believe it.*  
*None other than God, the Eternal, has spoken."*

*Isaiah 40:3-5, The Voice translation*

Now imagine this voice that is wailing in the wilderness as *your* voice crying out in prayer. Picture the Holy Spirit working through your prayers to straighten, level, lift up, fill in. Imagine Christ coming to those you love through the wings of prayer. Your prayer. Take a moment to write down a prayer of response.

In this season of Advent you will be invited to prepare the way of the Lord, to pray for Christ's recognition and entrance in the lives of people all around you. Your prayers will make a difference in raising up the low places and bringing down the high places, so that the Holy Spirit may draw near without impediment. You will not be praying primarily *to* God, but *with and for* God. Jesus is standing at the door and knocking on each person's life, their heart, their mind. What will help them shift their interior stance to open to the One Who is Love? In prayer we can pray for friend and foe alike that they feel safe enough, loved enough, curious enough to open to Jesus. We can participate like John the Baptist and prepare the way for the Lord.

## Advent Prayers

In this guide you will be introduced to familiar characters from the first Advent of Jesus. Each will serve as a representative of those in your life who need your prayers. Today you will be invited to hold them in recollection and pray for them by name that they would experience what your heart longs for them. You will be given a series of prompts to use, but feel free to adapt. Above all, hold their names and their faces in your mind's eye and then whisper a simple prayer to God for them. And don't forget to listen, to notice any impressions you have of how God is speaking to you.

If at any time during your Advent Retreat you become tired or weary, take a break! Get up and move about, look out the window and let your mind wander, go for a short walk, or do some stretching. You might even consider praying through the seven movements of this guide over the course of a week. Don't make this burdensome, but rather a joyful way to participate with God in the healing of the world.

### Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee,<sup>27</sup> to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.<sup>28</sup> Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

<sup>29</sup> Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. <sup>30</sup> "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

<sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

<sup>35</sup> The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For the word of God will never fail."

<sup>38</sup> Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

➤ **Pray for single mothers, married mothers, spiritual mothers, women who yearn to become mothers, mothers with prodigal children**

Take a moment to quiet your mind and simply allow the mothers you know, or know of, to drift into your awareness. You don’t need to be thorough and obsessive, praying for every mother you know. Maybe it’s just one or two. As each woman’s name or face comes to mind, pray some of the following prayers for her, which ever ones you are most drawn to, using her name. Linger with each prayer, imagining it reaching and resting upon this woman.

- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel loved”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel secure”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ attention shift toward her true identity”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be flooded with peace”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ come to life”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ experience freedom”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be curious about what brings God pleasure and joy”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ hear the Inner Teacher and the question that God is asking her to consider”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel her humanity and humbly open to her need for God’s love and light”

## **Joseph, the Father of Jesus**

Luke 2: 1-7

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. <sup>4</sup> And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. <sup>5</sup> He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

<sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. <sup>7</sup> She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

➤ **Pray for single fathers, married fathers, spiritual fathers, men who yearn to become fathers, fathers with prodigal children**

Now take a moment to quiet your mind and simply allow the fathers you know, or know of, to drift into your awareness. Again, don’t worry about being comprehensive in praying for every father you know, just the ones the Spirit brings to mind. As each man’s name or face comes to mind, pray some of the following prayers for them, which ever ones feel right, using their name. Linger with each prayer.

- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel loved”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel secure”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ attention shift toward his true identity”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be flooded with peace”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ come to life”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ experience freedom”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be curious about what brings God pleasure and joy”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ hear the Inner Teacher and the question that God is asking him to consider”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel his humanity and humbly open to his need for God’s Light”

## **Simeon, Anna, and the Elderly**

Luke 2:25-32, 36-38

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him <sup>26</sup> and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup> That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, <sup>28</sup> Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup> “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised.

<sup>30</sup> I have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared for all people.

<sup>32</sup> He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. <sup>37</sup> Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. <sup>38</sup> She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

### ➤ **Pray for the elderly, widows, and widowers, those who live alone, those who may live with others but are lonely**

Now take a moment to quiet your mind and simply allow the elderly men and women you know, or know of, and anyone who might feel alone, to drift into your awareness. As each one’s name or face comes to mind, pray some of the following prayers for them using their names.

- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel loved”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel secure”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ attention shift toward their true identity”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be flooded with peace”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ come to life”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ experience freedom”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be curious about what brings God pleasure and joy”

- “May \_\_\_\_\_ hear the Inner Teacher and the question that God is asking them to consider”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel their humanity and humbly open to their need for God’s love and light”

## John the Baptist and Children

Luke 1: 57-66

When it was time for Elizabeth’s baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. <sup>58</sup> And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

<sup>59</sup> When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. <sup>60</sup> But Elizabeth said, “No! His name is John!”

<sup>61</sup> “What?” they exclaimed. “There is no one in all your family by that name.” <sup>62</sup> So they used gestures to ask the baby’s father what he wanted to name him. <sup>63</sup> He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s surprise he wrote, “His name is John.” <sup>64</sup> Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

<sup>65</sup> Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. <sup>66</sup> Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, “What will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.

- **Pray for children who are neglected and/or abused, for orphans, for the unborn, as well as children you know who you sense may have unique callings and gifts to offer the world**

Now take a moment to quiet your mind and simply allow the children you know, or know of, to drift into your awareness. As each one’s name or face is present to you, pray some of the following for them using their name. Linger with each prayer, imagining what you have prayed to be absorbed into them.

- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel loved”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel secure”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ attention shift toward their true identity”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be flooded with peace”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ come to life”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ experience freedom”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be curious about what brings God pleasure and joy”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ hear the Inner Teacher and the question that God is asking them to consider”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel their humanity and humbly open to their need for God’s love and light”

## **Shepherds, the Poor and Marginalized**

Luke 2: 8-15

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, <sup>10</sup> but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. <sup>11</sup> The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! <sup>12</sup> And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

### **➤ Pray for the poor or marginalized**

Now take a moment to quiet your mind and simply allow the poor or marginalized whom you know, or know of, to drift into your awareness. Consider praying for people of color, those who belong to the LGBTQ community, those who live in poverty, the homeless, or those who struggle with addictions or mental illness. As each name or group comes to mind, pray some of the following prayers for them.

- "May \_\_\_\_\_ feel loved"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ feel secure"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ attention shift toward their true identity"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ be flooded with peace"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ come to life"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ experience freedom"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ be curious about what brings God pleasure and joy"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ hear the Inner Teacher and the question that God is asking them to consider"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ feel their humanity and humbly open to their need for God's love and light"

## **The Wise Men and the Wealthy**

Matthew 2:1-12

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, <sup>2</sup> "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

<sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

<sup>6</sup> ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

<sup>9</sup> After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! <sup>11</sup> They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

<sup>12</sup> When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

➤ **Pray for the wealthy, the educated, the gifted, those who have an abundance of resources**

Now take a moment to quiet your mind and simply allow those you know, or know of, who are wealthy, bright, gifted, and people of means come to mind. Consider praying for scientists, researchers, medical personnel, educators, sports stars, actors, musicians, and people with an abundance of resources to bless the world. As individuals or groups of people come to mind, pray some of the following prayers for them using their names.

- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel loved”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel secure”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ attention shift toward their true identity”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be flooded with peace”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ come to life”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ experience freedom”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ be curious about what brings God pleasure and joy”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ hear the Inner Teacher and the question that God is asking them to consider”
- “May \_\_\_\_\_ feel their humanity and humbly open to their need for God’s love and light”

## **Zechariah and Herod, Leaders of Faith and State**

Luke 1: 5-6

When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. <sup>6</sup>Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations.

### ➤ **Pray for leaders of state and leaders of faith communities**

Now take a moment to quiet your mind and consider the leaders that come to your awareness. The President Elect, the out-going President; governors and mayors, senators, and congressmen. Pray also for leaders of faith communities, pastors, preachers, evangelists, authors, church planters. Simply allow the leaders you know, or know of, come to mind. As each one's name or face is present to you, pray some of the following prayers for them using their names.

- "May \_\_\_\_\_ feel loved"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ feel secure"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ attention shift toward their true identity"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ be flooded with peace"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ come to life"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ experience freedom"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ be curious about what brings God pleasure and joy"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ hear the Inner Teacher and the question that God is asking them to consider"
- "May \_\_\_\_\_ feel their humanity and humbly open to their need for God's love and light"

## **What About You?**

As we conclude these moments of summoning the Advent of Christ on wings of prayer, we'd like to invite you to consider your *own* needs. If a friend were to ask you what *you* would most like them to pray for you this Advent, what would you want them to pray for? Now take a few minutes to write a prayer expressing what you need from Jesus today.

Is there anyone that comes to mind that you could ask to pray this for you as well? Who would that be?

Finish your time by praying any of the following that you are drawn to.

- “May I feel loved”
- “May I feel secure”
- “May my attention shift toward his true identity”
- “May I be flooded with peace”
- “May I come to life”
- “May I experience freedom”
- “May I be curious about what brings God pleasure and joy”
- “May I hear the Inner Teacher and the question that God is asking me to consider”
- “May I feel my humanity and humbly open to my need for God’s love and light”

## **Closing**

As your Advent retreat comes to a close, how do you feel now? What was it like for you to engage with the mightiest force in the world—prayer? Note your reactions and any significant moments that stand out to you as especially meaningful.

What if this Advent you prayed for others and for the hurts of the world as you never have before? What if God needs your help in bringing the Advent of Christ into the world today, this year? Will you keep praying for whoever comes to mind until he or she awakens to the coming of Christ on the wings of your prayer? May it be so.