

**Bible Challenge**  
**December 4-10, 2016 - The Second Week of Advent**

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

**INTRODUCTION**

*At the heart of our Advent preparation stands John the Baptist, who calls us to repent and make a new beginning. As the darkness increases we turn toward the light of Christ's coming. For Christians he is the root of Jesse, the righteous judge who welcomes all, especially the poor and meek of the earth. We wait with hope for that day when the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and there will be no more hurt or destruction. From the Lord's table we are sent in the spirit of John the Baptist to proclaim that in Christ the kingdom of God has come near.*

**DAY ONE: Isaiah 11:1-10**

*In today's reading the prophet describes the ideal ruler who will come in the future as a green shoot springing from a dead stump (David's royal line) of Jesse (David's father). Gifted by the Spirit, this messiah will seek justice for the poor, and the reign of this monarch will be experienced as paradise regained.*

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. <sup>2</sup>The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; <sup>4</sup>but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. <sup>5</sup>Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. <sup>6</sup>The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup>The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. <sup>9</sup>They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. <sup>10</sup>On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

**Adventure Challenge:** Isaiah 11.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Read 1 Samuel 16:1-12 to learn about Jesse and how the choosing of David to be king in some ways parallel's Isaiah's prophesy that a great king will arise.

*Option B.* What do you understand from the declaration in verse 3 that "he shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear"? Does this statement have application for our Advent expectations?

**DAY TWO: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19**

*A prayer that those who rule will defend the needy and rescue the poor, refreshing the nation like spring rains nourish the earth.*

- <sup>1</sup>Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to the king's son;  
<sup>2</sup>that he may rule your people righteously  
and the poor with justice;  
<sup>3</sup>that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness.  
<sup>4</sup>Let him defend the needy among the people,  
rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.  
<sup>5</sup>May he live as long as the sun and moon endure,  
from one generation to another.

<sup>6</sup>Let him come down like rain upon the mown field,  
like showers that water the earth.  
<sup>7</sup>In his time may the righteous flourish;  
and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.  
<sup>18</sup>Blessed are you, LORD God, the God of Israel;  
you alone do wondrous deeds!  
<sup>19</sup>And blessed be your glorious name forever,  
and may all the earth be filled with your glory. Amen. Amen.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 72.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Re-read this prayer applying it to the inauguration of President Trump.  
*Option B.* Read 1 Kings 3:16-28 to see an example of a king making a righteous judgment.

### **DAY THREE: Romans 15:4-13**

*God's promise to include Gentiles within the circle of God's blessed people has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christians live out their unity by welcoming and encouraging each other just as Christ has welcomed them into God's family.*

<sup>4</sup>Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup>May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. <sup>8</sup>For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, <sup>9</sup>and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; <sup>10</sup>and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; <sup>11</sup>and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; <sup>12</sup>and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope." <sup>13</sup>May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Adventure Challenge:** Romans 15: 1-21.

**Explorer Challenge:** The quotation from Isaiah in verse 12 is the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 11:10, a text that is part of the Day One reading. *Option A.* Research *Septuagint* to learn why Paul quotes it (rather than the original Hebrew text).

*Option B.* The Septuagint version of Isaiah 11:10 cited by Paul differs slightly from the version in the Day One reading. Reread the Day One reading and the passage from Roman's to see if you think Paul accurately captures the key idea from Isaiah.

### **DAY FOUR: Matthew 3:1-12**

*Just before Jesus begins his public ministry, John the Baptist appears, calling people to mend their ways and speaking of a powerful one who is to come.*

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, <sup>2</sup>"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>3</sup>This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" <sup>4</sup>Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, <sup>6</sup>and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>7</sup>But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruit worthy of repentance. <sup>9</sup>Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup>Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup>I baptize you with

water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

**Adventure Challenge:** Matthew 3.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research *John the Baptist* to review what is known about him and his relationship to Jesus.

*Option B.* The description of John's clothing is likely a reference to a similar description in 2 Kings 1:8; read that verse to find out who is being described; then read Micha 4:5-6 to see why John can be identified this way.

## **DAY FIVE:**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming nurture our growth as people of repentance and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Prepare the way of the Lord. All flesh shall see the salvation of God. (*Luke 3:4, 6*)

**Explorer Challenge:** Advent is traditionally a time of anticipation and preparation. Pause to re-consider what you are preparing and what you are preparing it for.