

## Words from the Story An Aldersgate Church Advent Journey

This is, for lack of a better term, an Advent\* devotional. But it's meant to turn you to wonder more than to study. We have chosen words from Luke 1 & 2, where we get the core of the Christmas Story. There is no rhyme or reason to them, necessarily. Everyday has one word, with a very brief write-up on that word. You are encouraged to carry that word with you throughout the day. Just let it rumble in your mind, heart, and spirit. And if you're on social media, look for something in your day that may express that word for you (however loosely), and post it on social media. Use #AldersgateAdvent2020 and, if you're on Facebook, tag us at @AldersgateUnitedMethodistChurch-SLP. Have a blessed Advent, beloved.

Aldersgate Church Advent Calendar 2020						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
29 (Nov) Blessed	30 Keeping Watch	1 (Dec) Called	2 Holy	3 Mercy	4 Ancestor	5 Spirit
6 Time	7 Mother	8 Return	9 Glory	10 Sent	11 Living	12 Power
13 Peace	14 Afraid	15 Night	16 Praise	17 Born	18 Turn	19 Shepherd
20 Joy	21 Light	22 Child	23 Home	24 Wrapped Christmas Eve	25 Rejoice Christmas Day	

This is our 2020 Advent Calendar! Here's how it works: Each day has a word from the Christmas story in Luke 1 and 2 to reflect on. See the accompanying document for a very brief guide/devotional on each day's word. The point is simply to reflect on and watch for each day's word throughout your day. We also encourage you to take a picture of when or how you "see" that word that day, however loosely, and post it on social media (get creative!) with #AldersgateAdvent2020 and tag us on Facebook at @AldersgateUnitedMethodistChurch-SLP. Have a blessed Advent!



**Day 1, November 29, "Blessed":** The word "blessed" shows up most prominently in the Christmas story with Elizabeth saying to Mary, "blessed is the fruit of your womb". Since we've just come off of Thanksgiving, it seemed appropriate to start Advent with the word "blessed". How do you feel blessed today? Where do you see "blessing"?

**Day 2, November 30, "Keeping Watch":** Ok, so this is two words (but it's one word in Greek!). It appears in the Christmas story with the "Shepherds keeping watch". They were keeping watch over their sheep, which is to say they were guarding them or protecting them. What in your life are you keeping watch over? What in your community needs protection?

**Day 3, December 1, "Called":** The word "called" shows up several times in the Christmas story, but perhaps most importantly when Luke says "and he was called Jesus." Here this word means essentially "named", but let's play with the word "called". What does it mean to be called? What does God "call" us to? What is God calling you to these days?

**Day 4, December 2, "Holy":** The most key place in which the word "holy" shows up in the Christmas story is when the angel Gabriel informs Mary that "the child to be born will be holy". "Holy" speaks to set apart, particularly for God. Look for holiness today. That is, look for God in the midst of the world and proclaim it as "holy".

**Day 5, December 3, "Mercy":** The word "mercy" shows up a few times, including Mary's Magnificat. Mercy speaks to compassion or kindness for someone in need. It's a running

theme throughout the scriptures. When have you received mercy? Where do you see mercy today?

**Day 6, December 4, "Ancestor":** Part of the Christmas story is the connection to ancestors, in particular Jesus being of the lineage of the ancestor, David. Who has been there for you in your past (it doesn't have to be a literal ancestor)? Who are you remembering today. Watch for something or for a moment that calls that person to mind today.

**Day 7, December 5, "Spirit":** The Holy Spirit is all over the Christmas story. Invite the Holy Spirit into your day, to guide you and speak to you. Then watch for the Spirit at work.

**Day 8, December 6, "Time":** "Time" may not be a word we would associate with the Christmas story, but it shows up a few times and most notably when Mary and Joseph are in Bethlehem and "the *time* came for her to deliver her child". Time can move slowly, and time can fly by. How do you feel about time? Are you wishing it would speed up, slow down, or just hold steady? How do you use your time? Be mindful of time today, knowing that you cannot escape it, but you can rest in it, and move with it.

**Day 9, December 7, "Mother":** Mother is of course a central image in the Christmas story. Both Mary and Elizabeth become pregnant and will be mothers. But of course Mary is the core Mother in the story. "Mother" as an image and identity for God does not get enough attention. How is it that God is our Mother? Also, who has been a mother to you in your life in a positive way?

**Day 10, December 8, "Return":** There are few instances in the Christmas story when people "return". Returning can seem like a pretty mundane thing, but it's actually pretty important. Just think about times when you've returned home after a long trip. Returning can merely be a physical thing, but it can also be a spiritual thing, as we return to things that ground us. What do you need to return to? What is something you often find yourself coming back to that helps you feel grounded?

**Day 11, December 9, "Glory":** "...and the glory of the Lord shone around them." You can almost hear Linus reading those words. What is "the glory of the Lord?" And why did it terrify the shepherds? "Glory" speaks to something transcendent, something beyond us, bigger than us and our mind's ability to conceive. Watch for transcendence today.

**Day 12, December 10, "Sent":** The angel Gabriel was sent by God to Mary. The word "sent" is the Greek word, "apostellō". It's where we get the word "apostle". As we are apostles, we too are sent into the world. What does it mean to be sent? How are you sent? What are you sent to do?

**Day 13, December 11, "Living":** This is kind of an odd one, maybe, but this word shows up a couple times, one of which is with the shepherds who were "living in the fields". They're just living, doing their thing, "living" their lives. How and where is it that you are "living"? It matters. Seek today to find joy and peace in where and how you're living. God is in it. And so are you.

**Day 14, December 12, "Power":** The angel says to Mary that the "power of the most high will overshadow you". Power is a tricky thing. It's not necessarily a bad thing, but when misused it can be among the most destructive things in our world. Reflect on "power" today. When have you seen it used well? When have you seen it misused or disordered? What kind of power do you have in this world? How can you use it for good? What does power look like?

**Day 15, December 13, "Peace":** "...And on Earth peace..." Simply reflect on peace today. What does it look like? How do we get there? How can you be maker of it?

**Day 16, December 14, "Afraid":** Fear is a real thing, a common reality. In many ways, 2020 has been a year consumed by fear (among other things). Three times angels have to tell people not to be afraid in the Christmas story. And another time the word shows up describing the Shepherds being "terrified". What are you afraid of today? What is causing you anxiety or apprehension? Where do you need God to show up and say "do not be afraid"? How can you overcome fear?

**Day 17, December 15, "Night":** Night time is an interesting concept. It often represents evil or "darkness", because, well... it's dark. But it is in the night when the angel summons the shepherds to the manger. It is a "silent night, holy night" for which we pine on Christmas Eve. The night can also be a beautiful place of peace and quiet. Advent itself is much like a night, where we wait, wonder, and slumber in expectation of a new day. Take a moment tonight to simply notice the night. Maybe step outside and just listen. Shhhh.

**Day 18, December 16, "Praise":** What does it mean to praise? We often refer to someone affirming someone else as "praising" them, but it's more than this, isn't it? What does praise look like? Sound like? What does it mean to "praise God"?

**Day 19, December 17, "Born":** Of course the word "born" and "birth" are connected to the Christmas story. But we often sanitize being born, don't we? Or we at least do with the Christmas story. In reality any woman who's given birth will tell you that while it is beautiful, it is also hard, and messy, and rigorous. So reflect on what it means to be "born" today: Born from above, born again, born of water, and born of the spirit.

**Day 20, December 18, "Turn":** This word only shows up twice in the story, both in the context of how John the Baptist will "turn" people's hearts. To "turn" is to alter direction, to go a different way. In Hebrew the word for turn and repent are connected. Advent, like Lent, is a season of repentance, of turning our hearts to God. What turns do you need to make? Where do you need to move in a new direction?

**Day 21, December 19, "Shepherd":** The shepherds are a long loved tradition in the Christmas story and especially in Christmas pageants. But why do they get so much focus? There are a lot of reasons, but one of them is they, in a way, represent the working class of society. This is who God chooses to announce the birth of the Christ-child. How can you celebrate those laborers in our society that we often take for granted (maybe you're one of those workers- celebrate yourself today!). Let's remember that we're all a part of one connected kind of labor-ecosystem.

**Day 22, December 20, "Joy":** It's the 4th Sunday in Advent, always a jubilant time. An angel says to the Shepherds, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." Advent is a season of waiting and hoping and longing, but on the horizon is the joy of Christ come to all and for all. Where do you see joy today? What brings you joy?

**Day 23, December 21, "Light":** The word "light" shows up in Zachariah prophesying over his son (John the Baptist), and he says that "the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death". Look for light today, whether literal or figurative. Watch for the light of God breaking through.

**Day 24, December 22, "Child":** The Christ-child is, of course, the central image of the season. God shows up in the coo of a baby. Reflect on images of the Christ-child today. What does he have to say to you?

**Day 25, December 23, "Home":** Home also becomes a primary image in the Christmas story. The word only shows up twice, and simply in places of people returning home, but it becomes central as we think about Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem with no place to stay and experiencing a form of homelessness. Yet they make one in the stable. Everybody deserves to have a home, and that can take many forms. What makes a home a "home" for you?

**Day 26, December 24, "Wrapped":** "...and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger". There is something about this verse that leads us to believe that the Christ-child is going to be ok. Sometimes we all need to be wrapped up, held, comforted. When in your life have you felt "wrapped" by others. Look for images of being wrapped, of being safe, comforted, and protected today.

**Day 27, December 25, "Rejoice":** Merry Christmas, Beloved. We made it! It's Christmas Day. Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel has come to thee! Christ is here, Christ is with us. Rejoice and be glad today.



*\*A word about Advent: Contrary to popular belief, Advent (and thus the Christian recognition of the Christmas season) does not begin on December 1, nor does it begin "after Thanksgiving" (though that shouldn't stop you from putting up decorations!). Advent literally means "coming" and is a season in which we and long for the coming of Christ. It is marked by the 4 Sundays before Christmas Day, so its start day fluctuates from year to year.*