

HENRI J.M. NOUWEN

Unto us a
CHILD
is **BORN**



Daily Advent Meditations and Prayers

INTRODUCTION

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Henri Nouwen is one of the most widely read spiritual authors of all time. His thoughtful and thought-provoking reflections lead us to a deeper understanding and appreciation of God's grace and mercy in Christ our Savior. At the same time, Nouwen's thoughts move us to follow in our Lord's footsteps as we live in love and service toward others.

During this holy season of Advent, let these meditations from several of Nouwen's timeless books lead you away from your busy life to the peace of that humble manger in Bethlehem. There you will find and worship the Christ Child. Then, filled with the joy of Christ's birth, let Nouwen's reflections lead you back out into the world to share the good news of the Child born to us, the Child who is called the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace.

Carol Geisler, editor

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Unto us a child is born...
and his name shall be called...

Wonderful Counselor...

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

Luke 1:26-35

MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Leap for Joy

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Luke 1:41-42

I find the meeting of these two women very moving, because Elizabeth and Mary came together and enabled each other to wait. Mary's visit made Elizabeth aware of what she was waiting for. The child leapt for joy in her. Mary affirmed Elizabeth's waiting. And then Elizabeth said to Mary, "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Luke 1:45, Jerusalem Bible). And Mary responded, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" (Luke 1:46, JB). She burst into joy herself. By being together these two women created space for each other to wait. They affirmed for each other that something was happening that was worth waiting for.

Finding My Way Home

*Lord, fill me with the Spirit's gift of joy as I await the celebration of your birth.
Amen.*

TUESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Rejoice in the Word

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Colossians 3:16

The purpose of spiritual reading, however, is not to master knowledge or information, but to let God's Spirit master us. Strange as it may sound, spiritual reading means to let ourselves be read by God! We can read the story of Jesus' birth with curiosity and ask ourselves, "Did this really happen? Who put this story together and how?" But we can also read that same story with spiritual attentiveness and wonder: "How does God speak to me here and call me to a more generous love?" We can read the daily news simply to have something to talk about at work. But we can also read it to become more aware of the reality of a world that needs God's words and saving actions.

Here and Now

Lord and Counselor, may your holy Word dwell richly within me during this Advent season and always. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

God Revealed

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.

1 Timothy 3:16

At first, in the story of the Exodus, God is revealed as a God-for-us, guiding us out of our slavery with a pillar of cloud by day, and with a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Later, in the story of Jesus of Nazareth, God is revealed as a God-with-us [Matthew 1:23], accompanying us in solidarity and compassion. Finally, in the story of Pentecost, God is revealed as a God-within-us, who enables us to breathe the divine life ourselves. Thus, Pentecost completes the mystery of God's revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and invites us to become fully part of the inner life of God.

Behold the Beauty of the Lord

Lord Jesus, God with us, fill us with your Spirit, who is God within us. Amen.

THURSDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Forgive Without Question

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Luke 6:37

I am moved by the idea that the peacemaker never judges anybody—neither his neighbor close by, nor his neighbor far away; neither her friend nor her enemy. It helps me to think of peacemakers as persons whose hearts are so anchored in God that they do not need to evaluate, criticize, or weigh the importance of others. They can see their neighbors—whether they are North Americans or Russians, Nicaraguans or South Africans—as fellow human beings, fellow sinners, fellow saints, men and women who need to be listened to, looked at, and cared for with the love of God and who need to be given the space to recognize that they belong to the same human family as we do.

The Road to Peace

Prince of Peace, you bore the judgment we deserved so that, by faith in your name, we are declared not guilty. Keep me from judging others and lead me to share with them your forgiving love. Amen.

Unto us a CHILD is BORN

Henri Nouwen has given the world a rich source of inspiration and enduringly relevant resources for spiritual enrichment. Through select excerpts from Nouwen's works, *Unto Us a Child Is Born* offers reflections and prayers for each day of the Advent Season.

Known for his ability to speak to the hearts of Christians with simplicity and sincerity, Henri Nouwen continues to walk with us on our journey with Christ. Walk with this trusted and loving friend through Advent and meet Jesus again as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

Each day begins with a line of Scripture, followed by words of wisdom from Henri Nouwen and closes with a brief prayer to focus on throughout the day. The Advent season calls us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus, our loving Savior. Henri Nouwen, with his unique pastoral sensitivity to our needs, remains an ideal companion.

