

A photograph of a nativity scene set in a dark stone stable. A baby Jesus lies in a wooden manger filled with straw, wrapped in white swaddling clothes. A woman, likely Mary, is seated behind the manger, also wrapped in white. In the background, a narrow arched window looks out onto a night sky with a bright star and clouds. The title 'God with Us' is overlaid on the image in a white and gold script font.

*God  
with Us*

Devotions for Advent

DAVID BOYD



*“Behold,*

THE VIRGIN SHALL  
CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON,  
AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS  
NAME IMMANUEL” (WHICH  
MEANS, GOD WITH US).

**Matthew 1:23**

## INTRODUCTION

**W**e so often say to one another “God be with you!” But we frequently fail to contemplate the miracle and meaning behind the message of “God with us” in the person of Jesus Christ. Theologians call this the incarnation. We simply call it Christmas—the day God came down to be with us, embodied in the human flesh of a baby born in Bethlehem.

There is something very real and personal about God coming down to be with us in this way. It is not something that is separate from humanity, but something that happened in the midst of humanity and continues to happen today, especially during this Advent season.

Our Immanuel is divinely present wherever we may find ourselves in these days. His dwelling among us is something that shapes us, comforts us, nurtures us and directs us. Each day in this time of preparation for our Savior’s birth, explore the deep impact this embodiment of God has on our very hearts and souls and life of faith.

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## Re-enactors

*Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth.*

PSALM 86:11

Civil War battleground sites hold re-enactments of battles fought there. They do this to teach the next generation when, where, how and why the battle was fought.

The church year is like that—a yearly re-enactment of God’s plan to seek and save those who were “walking in darkness” (Isaiah 9:2). It’s a teaching tool reminding us of what God did to save us, how he did it, why he did it—and at what cost.

The Story is told this way:

- + Advent = “He is coming!”
- + Christmas = “He is here!”
- + Epiphany = “Who is he?”
- + Lent = “Who am I?”
- + Holy Week = “What it cost him.”
- + Easter = “He is risen.”
- + Pentecost = “His love, our response.”

We begin the Story with something Isaiah said about the Coming One: “They shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)” (Matthew 1:23). But is that good news or bad news? Is he coming on a “search and destroy” mission or something else?

The first hint that his coming might be good news is the choosing of Mary as Jesus’ mother. A humble servant is soon to give birth to the One who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

**Lord Jesus, remind me how deep and wide is your love—  
that you would come to serve even me. Let your love now form  
and shape me into a fitting servant. Amen.**



MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

## Talk Is Cheap

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book  
were written, every one of them, the days that were formed  
for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

PSALM 139:16

Before the cameras rolled, Alfred Hitchcock knew every scene and every camera angle of the film he was to direct. He could see the finished film playing in his mind, even before it came to be.

The words “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you” were spoken to Jeremiah—but are no less spoken to you today as well. Jesus, through whom all things were made, knew you before you came to be.

But living on this side of eternity, we will at times pray, “O God, have you forgotten me? Do you still know me? Do you know what I’m going through? Do you still care whether I live or die?”

His answer stuns us: “I have loved you with an everlasting love ... I have continued my faithfulness to you” (Jeremiah 31:3). But talk is cheap, and so when we see Jesus in action, in the manger, by the sea, in the garden, on the cross, we come to understand that he will never leave us or forsake us. That Gospel reality begins to form and shape us from the inside out.

**Almighty and eternal God, even before the foundation  
of the world, you knew everyone, even me. And still you went  
to the cross—for me, for them, for us. O Lord, let that reality  
form and shape me today. Amen.**

TUESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

## Ants?

*Christ Jesus ... though he was in the form of God ... emptied himself ... being born in the likeness of men.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7

Ant farms were popular some years ago. You added sand, placed some ants inside and watched them dig. You were fascinated with how they dug tunnels and chambers. But soon you got bored. You then took the farm outside, dumped the ants out and went on with your day.

You liked the ants, but you did not love them. And even if you saw they weren't doing well and needed help, you would never consider becoming one of them.

The Lord's attitude toward us is not like that. He saw that we weren't doing well. He said, "Don't try coming to me—I am coming to you. I will become as nothing, so that you might have everything. Hold on—I will be there on time."

He did and he will. God's attitude toward us forms a liberating attitude in us. We're freed up to see our fellow image-bearers, not as ants in an ant farm, but as those created in God's image, redeemed by his blood and, therefore, worthy of dignity—and help.

**Heavenly Father, you saw that I wasn't doing well.  
Yet you did not turn away, but sent your beloved Son Jesus  
for me. Your attitude toward me forms a new attitude in me.  
I can see my neighbor. I want to help. Amen.**



WEDNESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

## Slow Train Coming

*But he who is mightier than I is coming.*

LUKE 3:16

A young boy stands on a train platform. It's near midnight. He looks down the track. "It's coming. Look real hard now!" encourages his mother. He does, but sees nothing.

Suddenly a white dot appears. It starts to shimmer. He turns to his father, who says, "That's it! Keep watching. It's coming!" Soon the whole place explodes in light as the train arrives right on time. The boy climbs aboard, ready for the ride of his young life.

Over the centuries, God made many promises to his people. In Christ, he's kept them all so far—except one. "I go to prepare a place for you ... I will come again and will take you to myself" (John 14:3). That's a promise.

And so we wait for him. We don't talk about it much. When times are good, the waiting isn't all that hard. But at other times we ask, "O Lord, how long?" We are all too ready for the ride of our lives. But our waiting is not empty waiting. It slowly, sometimes painfully, forms us into the very image of the One who is coming.

Jesus' second advent is like a slow train coming. Nothing can stop him. He's on track. He'll arrive right on time.

**Lord Jesus, while I wait for you, give me patience with myself and with others. Let me wait in faith, holding to your promises as a burr clings to a coat. Amen.**

THURSDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

## Fragile Clay

*O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay,  
and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

ISAIAH 64:8

Some of the most priceless objects on earth are made of dirt—clay. These objects are in museums or private collections around the world. They can be ornate vases or simple jars.

But all have these two things in common: They were exquisitely crafted by extraordinary hands, and they are fragile.

That's the word picture Isaiah uses to describe us. From God's point of view we are precious treasures to him. An extraordinary mind formed us out of dirt, but since the Fall, we are fragile. All bravado aside, we are about as strong as egg shells. We break easily enough.

But the Lord has it in his mind to make us so strong that when life comes at us hard, we don't break. How does he do this? By telling us a Story. And though we are not the main character in this story (Jesus is), we are part of the Story.

It is the Story of love without limits, a Story that begins, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given ... and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

**O Father, thank you for forming me  
and for making me strong in Jesus Christ.**

**Amen.**





FRIDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

## Waiting for the Son

*My soul waits for the Lord more than  
watchmen for the morning.*

PSALM 130:6

Generally speaking, we're not sleeping well these days. Either we can't get to sleep or we wake in the wee hours, and then toss until daybreak.

The psalmist knew about that. His very soul waited for the beam of light on the horizon. What was he looking for? The same thing as us: reassurance. But where can that reassurance be found?

The psalmist found it in something he remembered, "Hope in the LORD, for with the LORD there is steadfast love and with him is plentiful redemption" (Psalm 130:7).

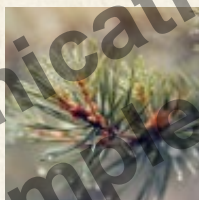
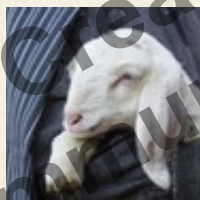
If given a choice, which would you rather hear, "I love you" or "I will never leave or forsake you"? The psalmist would have answered, "No contest—the second, of course." "I love you" is a statement, but "I will never leave you" is a promise. God reassures us of his love through a promise.

We know that Jesus loves us, but in our dark hour Jesus knows that we need to hear his promises: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age (even yours)" and "I will never leave you nor forsake you!" (Matthew 28:20 and Hebrews 13:5).

His steadfast love reassures us that, though others may walk away from us, he never will. It's that reassuring love that settles us down so that we can actually sleep in heavenly peace.

**O Lord, be with me through the night  
and wake me in the morning light. Amen.**

# God with Us



This booklet's daily devotions for Advent will focus on the ways in which God is with us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Each week will focus on a different word picture of the coming Christ found in the poetic and prophetic words of Isaiah. Devotions will reveal how Christ continues to serve as our Potter, our Shepherd, our Living Branch and our Guide through his presence with us even now.

This book, along with many other *Creative Communications for the Parish* products, is available on **amazon**kindle and **nook**.

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