

A detailed illustration of a nativity scene. In the foreground, a rustic stable with a thatched roof is illuminated from within, casting a warm golden glow. Several figures in traditional robes are gathered around the entrance, some kneeling in prayer. In the background, a landscape of rolling hills and trees is visible under a dark, starry night sky. A bright, glowing star is positioned at the top center of the image, with a vertical line extending downwards from it, suggesting the Star of Bethlehem. The overall atmosphere is serene and sacred.

THE  
WORD  
MADE  
FLESH

DEVOTIONS  
FOR  
ADVENT

Jacob Torbeck

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

## GOD PROVIDES

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And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son."

**1 KINGS 17:13**

When Elijah encounters the widow of Zarephath, they both are in the midst of a terrible drought and famine. Elijah, for his part, has been wholly reliant on God, being ministered to by ravens. When God sends him to Sidon, he does not know how he will continue to survive in the drought-stricken land. The widow has resigned herself to the likelihood that she and her son will starve. However, through her hospitality to God's prophet, she discovers what Elijah has already encountered: God's abundant care.

The bread that the widow gives Elijah is all that she has. And yet, she finds that despite, or maybe because of, this radical act of hospitality, she is always able to offer more. Her food stores, though meager, do not run out. The daily bread she bakes for Elijah and her son does not diminish how much she can give. In this way, it is a symbol of love. No loving parent ever runs out of love for their children, just as there is no limit to God's love for us.

Loving God, give us this day our daily bread. Help us to love and care for others with the same abundance you have shown us. Amen.



TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
**BREAD OF ANGELS**

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...he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance.

**PSALM 78:24-25**

**T**his passage from the Psalms is but one of a half dozen references in the Bible to the story of the manna in the desert. The frequency with which the biblical authors go back to this story tells us that they see it as an important event in God's relationship with Israel: The Lord not only freed the people but nourished them, even when they grumbled and complained.

The grumbling of the Israelites and God's response may remind us of a common scenario between children and parents: Even in lean times, good parents will do all they can to provide for their children, even if those children grumble and complain. Confronted with this story, we are convicted. How are we sometimes like the grumbling Israelites? How has God provided "bread" for us or our community? How can we imitate a God who provides "bread" for even those in our life who seem not to appreciate us? As we journey together through the desert of Advent, how can we practice trust and gratitude for a God who has given us and will give us each day bread from heaven?

**God, grant that we may grow in our likeness to you through our reception of every good thing you give us. Amen.**

**WEEK 1**

**BREAD *of* LIFE**

WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
**BREAD FROM HEAVEN**

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Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

**JOHN 6:32-33**

**W**hen things seemed grim for the Israelites, God sent manna from heaven to sustain them on their sojourn in the desert. Here, in what is often called the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus says that he is the Bread of Life come from heaven to give life to the world.

Ancient Christians tell us that the “bread of heaven” is nothing other than the Word of God, which normally sustains the angels and has become food for us in the Incarnation. A mother nursing her infant is an apt metaphor. We cannot eat the food of heaven as we are but infants not ready for the solid food. This food must first be made milk. The food is made milk for us only by passing through the flesh. The metaphor here is saturated with an excess of meaning, and Christians have pondered this to great lengths, but the important thing is that the Word of God, by whom the angels are sustained, has become True Bread for us.

**Bread of Life, you nourish us day to day by your Word and presence. Sustain us ever on our Advent journey. Amen.**



THURSDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
**OUR COMPANION**

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When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

**LUKE 24:30-31**

**T**he last few days, we read about how God accompanied the ancient Israelites and provided them with manna in the desert. Here, in this story of the Emmaus Road from the New Testament, disciples find themselves coming alongside a fellow traveler, a companion on their journey. As they walk, their new companion explains to them the meaning of the events they recount. Then, when they sit down for the evening, he breaks bread with them, and they realize in that bread-breaking moment it is Jesus, their teacher.

“Companion” comes from the Latin words meaning “with” and “bread.” It is one with whom we break bread. On the road to Emmaus, Christ gives the Bread of the Word to the disciples as well as the Bread of the Table that he takes, blesses, breaks and shares. In offering us the Bread of Life, Christ has become our companion. Emmanuel is with us, even as we anticipate his coming. In this time of “already but not yet,” we pray that we will invite him, as these disciples did, to stay with us.

**Christ, Our Companion, as we journey toward Bethlehem, the House of Bread, give us eyes to recognize you in our fellow travelers and to break bread with one another in joy and thanksgiving. Amen.**

**WEEK 1**

**BREAD *of* LIFE**



FRIDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
**EVERYTHING IS GIFT**

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They devoted themselves to...the breaking of bread...

**ACTS 2:42**

**T**he early Church was in awe of the great things God was doing in their midst and chose to live in radical fellowship centered around Temple worship and thanksgiving over shared bread in their homes. Understanding everything as gift, they gave all they had to the common cause of the community.

Outside of a religious community like a monastery, such radical fellowship might seem impossible or unrealistic. It is still possible, however, to view everything as a gift from God to be offered back much like Jesus offered bread: To be taken, blessed, broken and given so that all have what they need. In this busy season of giving, it can sometimes be a challenge to stop long enough to count our own blessings and to remember the source of all our time, our talents and our treasures. Pause for a moment, and reflect upon these gifts. How might God be calling you to make use of them? Is there anything you lack that you truly need? Are there ways you can offer these gifts for the good of your community?

**Generous God, all that we have is yours. Help us to treasure what you have given to us and offer your gifts to your glory. Amen.**



SATURDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
**ONE BREAD, ONE BODY**

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...is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

**1 CORINTHIANS 10:16-17 (NIV)**

**H**ow is it that Christians participate in Christ through breaking bread together? Through breaking bread and giving thanks in the pattern of Christ at the Last Supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:23-26), Paul says we are participating in his body and his blood just like those who consumed the sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem participated in the sacrifice at that altar (1 Corinthians 10:18).

The Lord's Supper, Communion, Eucharist—each name for this ancient practice says something important about how Christians are to celebrate: A meal, a coming together in unity and thanksgiving. While Christians have long debated *how* exactly this happens *or* whether “how” is even ours to know, it is nevertheless Paul's assertion that through this bread we are united to Christ and one another in a holy Communion. Now, on the evening before the Second Sunday of Advent, we pause to contemplate our own unity with the Church, the Body of Christ.

God of Unity, help us to discern the ways we may more fully participate in your Body and find communion with one another in Christ. Amen.

**WEEK 1**

**BREAD *of* LIFE**

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

# SALTINESS

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You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

**MATTHEW 5:13**

Salt is a multilayered metaphor in the Bible. Salt is used to purify, preserve and season. It is also an implement of punishment and cursing (Lot's wife becomes a pillar of salt, a victorious army "salts the earth" and so on). Jesus calls his audience "salt of the earth" and cautions that flavorless salt is good for nothing but being gravel. As hearers of Matthew 5:13 now, how are we to receive these words?

In the very next verse, Jesus uses metaphors of light that cannot be hidden—while salt can be used as punishment, Jesus seems here to be calling us to be a flavorful and preservative presence. Saint Augustine once wrote in praise of God, "Thou hast put salt on our lips, that we may thirst for thee." As a flavorful presence, we season and preserve the world if we possess the Beatitudes Jesus mentions in his Sermon on the Mount, and these same traits might also provoke thirst for the things of God that Jesus has mentioned earlier in the sermon (the thirst for righteousness). Today, we may think about whether we ourselves are truly "salt of the earth" and about those in our lives who might be whetting our thirst for the things of God.

Almighty and Eternal God, preserve us from sin and death, and place salt in our mouths, that our thirst may be for you and your righteousness. You are the Water of Life. Amen.

WEEK 2

SALT *of the* EARTH



As we anticipate the birth of Jesus at Christmas, we reflect on the many ways God is revealed to us in Christ—God feeds us and invites us to table with bread and salt, and becomes for us a sure and steady rock and a light unto our path. By meditating on these images in these Advent devotions, we are invited to practice hospitality and humility, to trust in God and to walk in his ways.



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