

1 Thessalonians

Advent is a time of awaiting the divine incarnation— when the Word became flesh, God entered into our human experience, and lived an embodied existence. It also represents our own spiritual incarnations. We too are flesh and spirit, and bearers of Christ's presence. We too are on a journey of Christ being more fully incarnated in us and in our world.

Just like Mary's 9 months of pregnancy, Advent can be a time of preparing "our selves our souls and bodies" to receive Christ more fully as individuals and as the collected body of Christ.

What would it be like if Christ's presence was fully incarnated in us and in all of creation? As the Apostle John says, we are waiting and anticipating this with the anguish of a mother groaning in the pain of laboring to bring new life into the world.

But we are also waiting with the hope that our pain will be forgotten, because of the joy that new life has been born.

There are many areas of brokenness in our world that are longing in anguish for Christ's presence and healing today. In our readings the prophet Isaiah names people who are in mourning and brokenhearted, people who are imprisoned, which could be literally or metaphorically, like in the prison of addictions or illness or depression. There are ancient ruins, representing generational trauma and pain that is passed down both within our families and through our culture's history.

This is what Jesus entered into when the Divine became enfleshed in a body and this is what we are called to enter into in being disciples of Jesus and living our own embodied existence. Instead of trying to choose only the "good" parts We are called to enter into every part of our humanity more fully. This means going into places of suffering to be a source of comfort and healing, to be a source of gladness and hope, and to be bearers of the light. And the amazing thing is that when we allow ourselves to be a source of healing for others, we are also healed by having a closer

encounter with Christ's presence. When we sit with those who grieve or mourn, we also receive comfort in experiencing deeper connection and intimacy. When we go into the dark, we realize just how bright our light is. What a gift we have to share with others! And what a resource we have within ourselves!

But going into the dark and places of suffering isn't easy. The Apostle Paul urges his community: don't quench the Spirit. In other words, don't snuff out or extinguish the light inside of you, or, protect your inner light of Christ.

Advent reminds us that we need womb like periods of tending to our light, seasons where instead of having long sunny days and time outside with friends, we are given shorter days and darkness and solitude. And this change helps us rest, go more inward, and replenish. It helps us tend to our own inner light, to not avoid our own pain or suffering, but to enter more fully into every part of our human, embodied experience, in order to bring even ourselves comfort and hope and gladness.

In the winter Advent months our focus can shift to taking care of ourselves, souls, and bodies so that we can shine more brightly and bring Christ more fully into the world through our own divine embodiment.

How can we do this? The Apostle Paul is often good at imparting practical wisdom. So, here are a few ways he tells the church in Thessalonica to take care of themselves that can also apply to us today.

Paul says to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances". To rejoice always can also be translated as: be calmly happy, be well and thrive. Later in these verses Paul says: May your whole spirit and soul and body be taken care of. We now know that our mind, heart, body, and spirit are all interconnected. Did you know that your gut also has more than 100 million nerve cells, making it like we have two brains in our bodies that are constantly communicating with one another?

Being well and thriving involves being more of an integrated whole. Things like wordless prayer and

meditation or different types of exercise help us do this. They help us understand how our bodies and minds are connecting, and live into a fuller unification of both.

In this final week of Advent, try adopting a contemplative practice or an embodied exercise to invest in your own wellbeing and thriving.

Paul says to pray without ceasing. Another translation is “make your life a prayer”. You are one of the prayers that God is praying in the world today. Your life is this prayer’s unique unfolding. Can you fully embody your prayer in every part of your being: your thoughts, words, and actions?

During Advent we both celebrate and long for Emmanuel, God with us. Try keeping such an awareness of God with you and praying through you that your tasks and conversations and activities don’t pull you away from God or snuff out your light, but instead become a part of the prayer you are already praying.

And finally, Paul says: give thanks in all circumstances. Instead of just choosing the “good” parts, look for the gifts that are hidden even in suffering, the gifts of Christ’s presence of closer connection and intimacy with others, of discovering your own light and the impact it has in the world. Try shifting your focus from what you lack to what you have been given, having gratitude even for the challenging and painful things, because God’s grace can meet you there too. Instead of making a Christmas list of things you want and need, try making a list of what you already have and are grateful for.

So may you...

nurture and protect your inner light of Christ during this Advent season.

May you care for your spirit and soul and body as one unified being, so that you can be well and taken care of and thrive.

May you live with such an awareness of God with you that your life becomes an unfolding prayer.

May you see the abundance in your life and give thanks even for what you lack, and may this prepare you to receive Christ’s presence more fully within yourself and bring Christ’s presence more fully into the world at Christmas, and every day of this new year.