



ROYAL LANE BAPTIST CHURCH

Diverse People United in Christ

Advent, 2019

The Mosaic

Special Edition

The Work of Christmas

Advent & Christmas – 2019

December

December 1 – Advent I

10:55 am — Sanctuary

December 4 – Advent Study & Noah's Pudding

5:30 pm — Vickrey Hall

December 7 – La Fiesta de la Posada & Parents Night Out (childcare provided)

5:00 pm — Children's Building & Vickrey Hall (5:00 – 8:00 pm)

December 8 – Advent II – Hanging of the Green

10:55 am — Sanctuary

December 13 – Youth Christmas Party

6:00 pm — Youth Basement (6:00 – 9:00 pm)

December 13 – Parents of Children & Youth

6:00 pm — Vickrey Hall (6:00 – 9:00 pm) (childcare provided)

December 14 – Women of the Church

10:00 am — Vickrey Hall (10:00 am – 12:30 pm)

December 15 – Advent III – Choral Music Sunday

10:55 am — “The Work of Christmas” presented by the Sanctuary Choir — Sanctuary

December 18 – Mourning Light & Food Offering (benefiting North Dallas Shared Ministries)

6:00 pm — Vickrey Hall, Holy Communion offered

December 21 – Men of the Church Breakfast

9:00 am — First Watch, Preston Forest

December 22 – Advent IV – Worship

10:55 am — Sanctuary, Festival Carol Sing featuring Glen Hummel's Classic Brass Quintet

December 24 – Christmas Eve

6:00 pm — Sanctuary (childcare provided)

Carols, Candlelight & Communion

December 25 – Christmas Day

Church Office Closed, No Wednesday Activities (Activities resume January 8)

December 29 – First Sunday after Christmas – Worship

10:55 am — Sanctuary



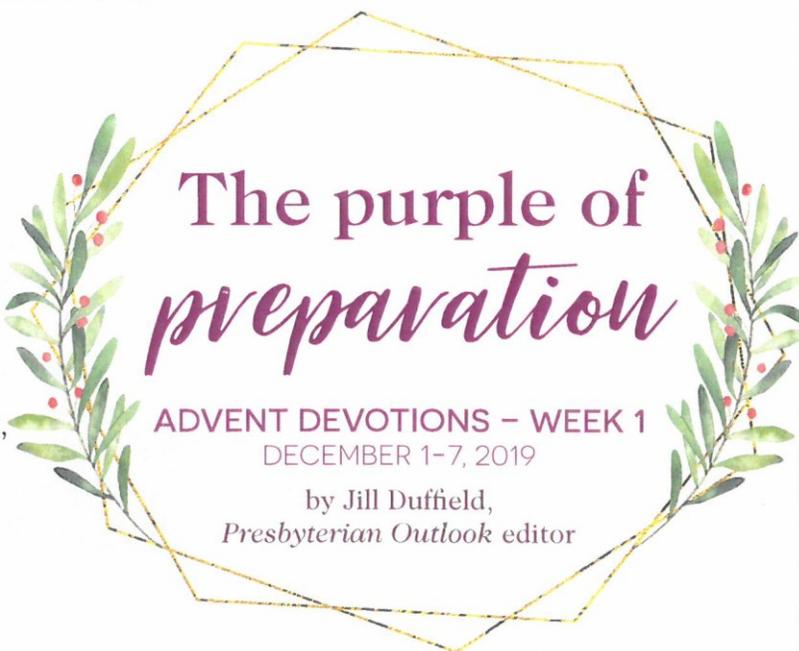
Sunday | ROMANS 13:11-14

Paul practically comes through the pages of this ancient text, begging his hearers to recognize what time it is. The time is at hand, he seems to shout, for those of us who follow Jesus to get it together and reflect the One on the cusp of coming to meet us. Salvation is near, nearer than when we first believed, so we best wake up, stand up, look up and get ourselves ready for this transcendent, transformative, life-upending encounter with God. Imagine if we thought of the season of Advent in these terms.

When the purple paraments adorn the pulpit, we ought to know the time is at hand to prepare to meet the Son of God. The purple dotting the sanctuary or resting on the pastor's shoulders should signal to us a sense of urgency, a feeling of nervous anticipation, because salvation is drawing near and time is running out to make ready for Jesus' arrival.

Paul instructs us, purple Presbyterians that we are, to lay aside works of darkness — that's what urgent preparation requires, first and foremost. Whatever sin clings closely, shake it off. Take stock and be honest and then lay aside whatever it is that obscures the light of Christ in you. Let the purple of preparation prompt you to step away from the darkness and bask in the light. Put on the whole armor of it: the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith and the like. Advent is the season to prepare to meet Jesus by stepping away from and out of the dark and into the light of faith, hope and love.

God of all that is seen and unseen, you know what works of darkness we commit. Nothing is hidden from you. Despite our propensity to do what we know we ought not to do, you send your Son to save us. During this Advent season we seek you, your wisdom, your strength and your will in order to be prepared to meet our Savior, the light no darkness can overcome — not ours, not the world's. Amen.



The purple of preparation

ADVENT DEVOTIONS - WEEK 1
DECEMBER 1-7, 2019

by Jill Duffield,
Presbyterian Outlook editor

Monday | MATTHEW 1:24

Today imagine responding as Joseph did to God's instructions. Being prepared to meet God entails being not only awake to God's presence, but willing to follow God's commands. What act of mercy and grace is God asking of you? Do it. What did you learn from heeding God's will?

Lord, we are humbled by Joseph's courage. His obedience makes us wonder if we would be so bold. Prepare us to act on your will. Grant us both careful discernment and the faith to take major risks for your sake. We pray for the wisdom to follow your plans, no matter how different they are from our own. Amen.

Tuesday | EPHESIANS 5:12-14

Today consider those things you do not want exposed to the light. Make a list of all that you wish to remain hidden from God, from others, perhaps from yourself. Now imagine all of those shameful things being exposed to the loving, healing light of Christ, trusting that nothing is beyond his power to redeem.

Gracious God, we expend extraordinary energy attempting to hide that which we find shameful, painful and unlovely. We compare ourselves to others when your opinion of us is the only one that matters. We offer you all our shame, guilt and fears, knowing that Jesus comes to save sinners, trusting that his light will reveal all that is hidden not to expose or humiliate, but to illumine and heal. Amen.



The purple of *preparation*

Wednesday | EPHESIANS 4:22

Today review how you spend your time, where you expend your mental and emotional energy and what holds your attention. In preparation for Jesus' coming, prayerfully consider if these are the ways, things and places you want to be investing in every day. Choose one thing to put away for Advent.

Too often, Lord God, we go about our days on autopilot, mostly unaware of where we focus, how we speak and what consumes our time and resources. Knowing that you call us to be ready for your arrival, we ask for discernment and discipline to put away anything that distracts us from you, your will and your ways. Amen.

Thursday | HEBREWS 12:1-2

Today remember the people (present or past) who love you, support you, inspire you and guide you. How does their witness challenge you to do and be better? Looking to Jesus' coming and remembering all the people cheering you on, what risk will you take for the sake of the gospel?

Gracious God, our culture lauds the supposed self-made person, but we know that we cannot run the race of faith alone. We give you thanks for all of the people, past and present, who surround us and spur us to on as we seek to emulate Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Amen.

Friday | JAMES 1:21

Today take just a few minutes in silence and notice what comes to your consciousness. Are you anxious or worried about something? Do particular people or words come to mind? A looming change or pressing decision? Offer all of these to God in prayer, knowing God will do more than you hope or imagine possible.

Loving God, you made us in your image and implanted your word within us, giving us all we need to rest in your grace, follow your instructions and lead a life worthy of our calling. Forgive us when lesser things consume us and yet again aid us in our desire to welcome your word. Amen.

Saturday | EPHESIANS 6:10-12

Today imagine as you get dressed that you are also putting on the whole armor of God. What does that armor entail? What does it protect you from and what does it prepare you for? Keep in mind that Jesus' power was made known in sacrificial love. How does that color your image of God's armor?

Prince of Peace, Lord of all, you come to us as a helpless infant and will submit to a painful death. We forget that you made your power manifest through sacrificial, vulnerable love. May the armor of God we wear reveal not aloof invincibility, but instead help us to stand up for those yearning for compassion, justice and care. Amen.

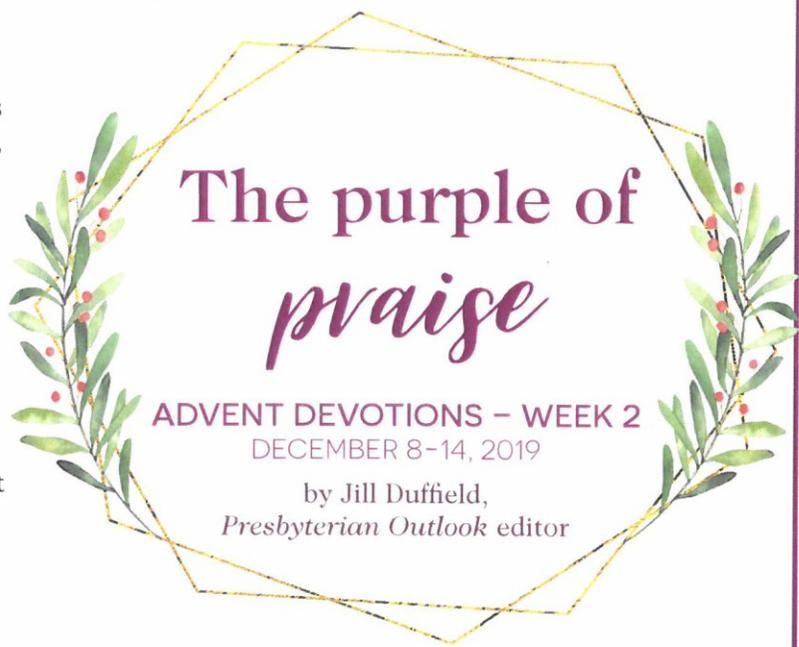
Sunday | ROMANS 15:4-13

Romans soars with a litany of words this week: steadfastness and encouragement, hope and harmony, glory and truth, mercy and rejoice, praise and joy. The combination of verbs and adjectives describes the Christian life. We who know the grace and goodness of God through Jesus Christ respond with lives of hope and harmony, praise and joy. As Paul admonishes earlier in Romans: Do not be conformed to this age, instead be transformed. In other words, be different than the culture that often does not relish or reveal all of these beautiful characteristics: steadfastness and encouragement, glory and truth.

The purple of Advent reminds those of us in Christian pews to rejoice, give thanks and sing. Good News, not disaster, looms. Good News of great joy for all people will soon resound through the cosmos and we are to share it, shout it, show it right along with the heavenly host. The color purple this Advent season, in the midst of painful headlines and personal challenges, invites us to remember the story, the salvation history of which we are a player, that redeems all creation and leaves nothing and no one God forsaken.

Romans 15 lifts up the barrier-breaking, breach-bridging love of God made known in Jesus Christ, the Incarnation that reconciles all estrangement, Emmanuel who is with us all, the Messiah who comes not to condemn the world but to save it. How can we not see purple and praise God with hearts and hands and voices?

God of Good News, when the world around us overflows with bad news, we struggle to rejoice. We become mired in the script of inevitable suffering when we ought to be steadfast and encouraged by Scripture that tells us nothing is impossible through you. We rejoice that you do not give up on us and we praise you for your truth and glory made known to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.



Monday | ROMANS 8:24-26

Today read these verses aloud several times. What do you hope for that you do not currently see? Can you rest in the truth that as you wait, with more or less patience, the Spirit is interceding on your behalf? In this liminal space of waiting, for what can you praise God right now?

Loving God, we want our hopes fulfilled immediately. We grumble rather than give you glory. We doubt rather than remain steadfast. We do not trust your providence. We do not pray as we ought, and yet your Spirit advocates for us and you never leave us alone. Grant us the ability to wait patiently in hope and praise you for the gifts of this day. Amen.

Tuesday | COLOSSIANS 1:11-14

Today joyfully give thanks to God. Begin and end your day with gratitude. Make a list of five things for which you are thankful. Then five more. Can you add five more? Are there situations or circumstances that do not immediately spark gratitude but may contain within them gifts in unexpected packages?

Generous God, each moment of every day you pour out your grace upon us. You give us the beauty of the earth, the companionship of others, talents and skills to use in ways that glorify you. And, in this season of Advent, we remember the greatest gift of all, your Son, Jesus Christ, the one through whom we are forgiven, freed and redeemed. Amen.



The purple of *praise*

Wednesday | 1 TIMOTHY 4:10-15

Today ask yourself: What is the gift that God has put within me? What talents, passions and skills do you possess and how are you being called to share them in order to show the love of God? Praise God for the gift of God's Word put within you and share it ways that uniquely you are able.

Lord, you write your Word on our hearts and send the Spirit to remind us of all that Jesus taught. We are not left to our own devices in our calling to share the Good News and show forth your love to a hurting world. Help us to embrace the gift you have put within us that we might proclaim the gospel boldly in word and deed. Amen.

Thursday | ROMANS 5:1-5

Today prayerfully review pivotal life experiences: painful ones and happy ones, unexpected twists and planned transitions. In looking back, where do you see God at work in all of those seasons? What questions do you have for God? For what do you praise God in your life past and present?

Almighty God, your providence imbues every aspect of our lives, but often we do not see it. While suffering may well produce endurance, sometimes we long for relief, for resolution, for an end to those circumstances that test our strength and our faith. Pour your love in our hearts and send the Holy Spirit to assure us of your presence in all and through all. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 15:31-32

Today do an honest assessment of yourself and note the grudges you keep and the mercy you withhold. Are there people you cannot celebrate? Perhaps even people you wish would get what's coming to them? Make an effort to pray for them and, if you are able, find a way to celebrate with and for them.

God, your grace defies any logical limits and yet we protest when you show your mercy to others. We enjoy your forgiveness, but fail to be forgiving. We begrudge your kindness to those we deem unworthy, even as we want you to ignore our sin. You call us to celebrate the restoration of our siblings. Give us the maturity in Christ to join the party. Amen.

Saturday | ACTS 2:25-27

Today picture Jesus with you, beside you, strengthening you, guiding you. What difference does it make when you are conscious of Jesus' presence? Does the awareness of Jesus shape your interactions with others? How do you feel knowing that Jesus is before you and beside you? Can you practice this awareness throughout Advent?

Lord of all, we know the promise that when two or three are gathered, you are in the midst of us. We call you Emmanuel, God with us, but often we go about life unaware of your constant presence, power and love. We praise you that you never neglect us, even though we forget you. We pledge to be mindful of you this day. Amen.

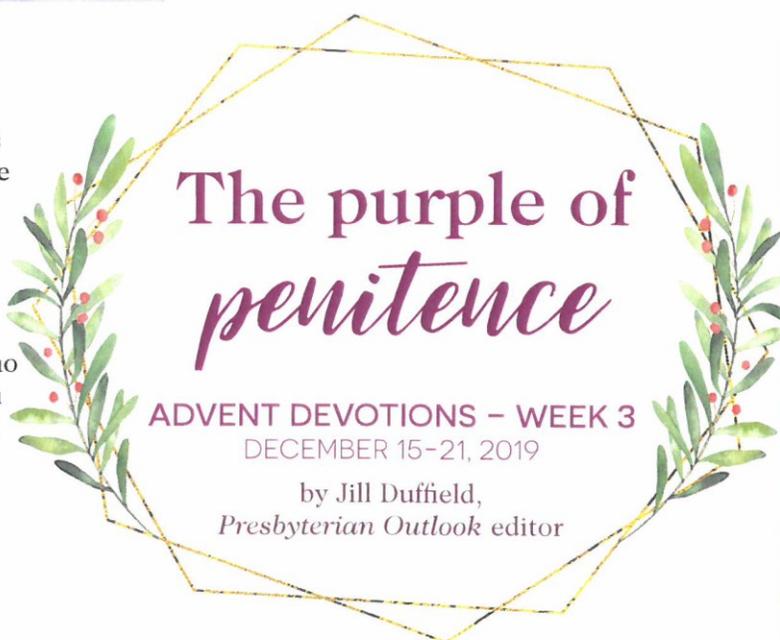
Sunday | JAMES 5:7-10

Be patient. Wait with expectation, but not anxiousness. Strengthen your hearts because the Lord is near. Do not grumble against each other, as not complaining about our siblings reflects our patience and strengthens our hearts. Be patient. Strengthen your hearts. Do not grumble against one another. In so doing we will be ready to meet the Lord, our judge, who is very near. Advent provides us a season to reflect on our readiness to meet Jesus Christ. James gives plumb lines for us to evaluate that readiness.

In a culture enamored with instant gratification and an age with answers to every question in our pocket, the virtue of patience feels antiquated, perhaps unnecessary. James reminds us, however, that relationships – strong, good, faithful relationships – depend on patience. Inevitably, we hurt each other. We let one another down. We take important people in our lives for granted. We complain about more than we praise the communities God gives us. Like the Israelites before us, we gripe about God, too. We neglect gratitude. We point out the speck in the eye of those with whom we disagree and neglect the log in our own. Imagine if instead we took James' advice and practiced patience: a patience that begins with penitence, a recognition of our impatience and grumbling, an honest asking for forgiveness from God and those we have hurt and a daily commitment to listen before we speak, pause before we press send, pray before we act.

Be patient. Strengthen your heart. Do not grumble against one another. Remember, the Lord, our Judge, is near.

Alpha and Omega, you created all that is seen and unseen and tend to that which you have made. You refuse to give up on us, even when we turn away from you, neglect your commandments and seek our own way. Your patience with us cannot be quantified and we rejoice in such grace. Strengthen our hearts and increase our patience with one another so that we more resemble you, our good and loving Creator. Amen.



The purple of penitence

ADVENT DEVOTIONS - WEEK 3
DECEMBER 15-21, 2019

by Jill Duffield,
Presbyterian Outlook editor

Monday | 1 CORINTHIANS 13:3

Today take stock of all the acts of service you do, all you give in time, talent and treasure. Now, review your attitude around all those good deeds. Notice, too, your interactions with everyone you encounter, those you know and those you don't. In all your giving and serving, speaking and actions, do you demonstrate love?

God, the litmus test of our faithfulness to you is love. Your commandment is clear, concise and repeated, but not easy. We begrudge the good we do and look for accolades and admiration, rather than seek to glorify you and demonstrate our gratitude for your grace. May our every deed and thought be imbued with your love that first loved us. Amen.

Tuesday | 1 THESSALONIANS 5:14

Today pay attention to when you judge others or yourself. How often do you jump to conclusions about another's motives or attitude or circumstances? How often are your thoughts distorted about yourself or your own experiences? Instead, try to admonish those in need of motivation, encourage the discouraged, help as you are able and practice patience.

God, your patience defies any logical limit. No matter how many times we fail and fall short, you forgive and strengthen, encourage and help. When we judge people harshly, we dishonor the divine image in ourselves and others. Forgive us yet again and remind us to do likewise, be patient, help and encourage. Amen.



The purple of *penitence*

Wednesday | ROMANS 8:22-23

Today pray for those places of pain in yourself, your circles and the world. Look at the headlines and remember those who are groaning under the weight of their longings, the burden of suffering, the hope for relief. How can you be a midwife of new birth in some of these places?

Holy One of resurrection and rebirth, show us how to enter places of pain and become agents of your new life. When we hear the groans of suffering, empower us to go toward them and bring your good news of salvation, your promised redemption, your loving presence, your overflowing mercy, your certain justice. Amen.

Thursday | JOHN 8:10-11

Today, read these two verses remembering that they are the culmination of Jesus' encounter with the woman accused of adultery and imagine yourself face to face with Jesus. He tells you that you are forgiven of whatever sin burdens you the most. Rest in that forgiveness and resolve to go and sin no more.

Lord, we know you came to save sinners and yet we quickly condemn others. We reluctantly recognize our own sin. We try to control others' opinions of us when we ought to care only about your judgment. Hone our hearing to your word of mercy in order that we might be a forgiven, freed and grace-filled people. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 6:36

Today, write down all that mercy means to you. When have you seen it, experienced it, extended it? Alternatively, when has mercy been withheld? If God's goodness and mercy has followed you all the days of your life, how are you chasing others down with that goodness and mercy in return?

Merciful God, you hold nothing back from us, not even your Son. You relentlessly pursue us with kindness. You refuse to give up on us. You want to be in relationship with us. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; we cannot attain it, but we can attempt to emulate it and give thanks for it. Amen.

Saturday | 1 THESSALONIANS 3:12-13

Today, consider the meaning of holiness. If holiness entails being set apart for God's purposes, what are those purposes in your life and context? Right where you are, how can you increase and abound in love in tangible, visible, demonstrable ways? Review your interactions and actions. How did they abound in love or not?

Lord, how can we serve you? If we are not sure of your answer, we can always show forth your love wherever we are, however we can, with whomever we encounter. We know we are to be a holy people, set apart for your purposes, a people whose loyalty to you is obvious in our love of others. Amen.

Sunday | ROMANS 1:1-7

Paul connects all the dots in these first seven verses of Romans. He defines himself, his identity and his purpose in relation to God: a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle. Paul knows who and whose he is, as well as his ultimate “why.” He has been set apart to bear witness to the grace of God made known through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then he details the “what” of the gospel. Paul knows the message he is to proclaim and it is not his own. As he says often, he preaches Christ and him crucified. This gospel of God transforms and shapes, creates and reveals. As Karl Barth notes in his commentary on Romans, “It demands participation, comprehension, co-operation; for it is a communication which presumes faith in the living God, and which creates that which it presumes.” This message is all consuming and stunningly impacting. As it convicted and converted Paul, is still does today.

This gospel of God resounds from the beginning and becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit testifies to this Word and the resurrection of Jesus Christ beckons us to belief, faithfulness and obedience. The gospel of God is good news of great joy for all people, all nations. There is no end to its scope. No one, nothing is outside of the purview of God’s power and God’s concern and God’s love. We all belong to God. God still speaks, to us and through us. The gospel of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, does not return to God empty. Do you feel its power this Advent?

God of good news, infant Savior, still-speaking Spirit, come over us again with your living, light-filled Word that humbles our certainty, quiets our opinions, chastens our self-righteousness and makes of us servants of Jesus Christ, apostles who bear witness to your love. As the birth of Jesus draws close, we yield to your power, made flesh, full of grace and truth, the glory of the one and only Son who comes to save. Amen.



Monday | MATTHEW 10:24-25

Today, examine how power works in your life and in the circles you inhabit. Where do you have power and how do you use it? What or who has power over you? If we are not to be above our Master and Teacher, how do we place ourselves under his tutelage and teachings?

Lord, our Master and Teacher, we often profess to be your disciples but act as if we are above you, your guidance, your commands. The power of this world tempts us, we seek control that is not ours and fail to emulate you. Help us to be lifelong learners of the faith, eager to sit at your feet. Amen.

Tuesday, Christmas Eve

PHILIPPIANS 2:4-7

Today, remember that Jesus, Lord of all, Son of Man, who is able to calm the sea, heal the sick, defeat evil and even death, looked to the interest of others and poured himself out for our sake. How can you use your power, talents and resources to look to the interest of others in Jesus’ name?

Dear God, on this Christmas Eve, we wait with hope and eager longing for the birth of Jesus. We cease our busyness and rest with the holy family in the stable, knowing that the pain, present and yet to come, culminates in life, birth and redemption. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.



The purple of *divine power*

Wednesday, Christmas Day

HEBREWS 3:1-2

Today, celebrate that Jesus Christ is born. Give thanks for your unique faith journey. What is your first memory of knowing Jesus? Where in your life have you felt Jesus incarnate, present and close with you? Mentally review your Christian story and make note of those times of birth, change and new chapters.

Lord Jesus, heralded by angels, visited by shepherds, held in the arms of your mother, we praise you like the heavenly host, seek you like those interrupted while tending their flocks and delight in your birth like Mary and Joseph. Today we celebrate and rejoice in your arrival, knowing that soon we will leave and proclaim your name. Amen.

Thursday | 1 CORINTHIANS 15:24

Today as any anxieties or fears arise, return to this verse from 1 Corinthians. Practice a breath prayer. As you breathe in remember: Jesus is Lord of all. As you breathe out trust that: Nothing now separates us from God. Repeat this prayer throughout the day and notice how doing so makes you feel.

Gracious God, when we see the opened presents and the remnants of yesterday's festivities, we trust that you are with us not only on high holy days, but in the mundane and the messy. We know the babe born in a manger is Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord of all. Help us to live without fear in the certain promise of Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.

Friday | 2 CORINTHIANS 13:4

Today be gentle with yourself and others, knowing that everyone is struggling with something. Remember that we worship one whose power was made perfect in weakness, therefore we are confident that God can use and work through our weaknesses, too. What weaknesses or struggles of yours is God using?

Lord, when we struggle and feel vulnerable, we do not want others to see and know for fear of being hurt or exploited or ridiculed. But you know a word before we speak it, you know all our days and every thought. We need not hide from you, but can rest in your power and love and be renewed. Amen.

Saturday | COLOSSIANS 1:28-29

Today reflect on your Advent journey. Write down what you discovered and make note of those places in your discipleship where you want to dig deeper, reflect further, do better. Choose one area on which to focus for the rest of the Christmas season, or maybe for the next year.

Emmanuel, you are with us. You know our human frailty, our finitude and our failings, and yet, you love us, meet us where we are and invite us to follow you. We praise you for your compassionate power, your overflowing mercy, your amazing grace. We ask to be the light of the world you call us to be in this season and every day. Amen.



Royal Lane Baptist Church

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ROYAL LANE BAPTIST CHURCH

Diverse People United in Christ

The Mosaic is published twice a month

Office Hours:

Monday - Friday: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Wednesday Midweek: 6:15 pm

Sunday School: 9:45 am

Sunday Worship: 10:55 am

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