



**Greetings from Columbia Theological Seminary! In this season of Advent,  
we join you in longing for God's hope, peace, joy, and love.**

These Advent gifts are more needed now than ever as we enter in to a second Advent season of disruption and loss due to a global pandemic. We have faced significant challenges this past year at the seminary and we know that you have as well. And so we long for the hope of Advent and wonder anew what God has in store for us next. We long for the peace of Advent as we are called to enter into spaces of anxiety and fear as peace-makers and peace-encouragers. We long for the joy of Advent, a joy that is rooted in God's extravagant gift of love in Jesus Christ. This joy stretches us into our callings in ministry even when the waves of exhaustion and discouragement lap at our shores. We are rooted in love and so we bear one another's burdens in love, receive and accept each other in love, and always forgive each other in love.

One way we express our gratitude and commitment to you is to offer this reflection journal and prayer resource. We hope that these daily reflections will offer a pathway for you to recognize the hope, peace, joy and love in your life in this season.

When I pray for you in this Advent season, I will pray that Christ will go before you to lead you, beside you to befriend you, behind you to guard you, and beneath you to support and comfort you.



From all of us at Columbia Seminary, we send you our warmest greetings,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Leanne Van Dyk".

Leanne Van Dyk

P.S. You can find a free shareable version of this journal on our website: [ctsnet.edu/advent](https://ctsnet.edu/advent).

## ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

This Advent Journal is a tangible expression our deep desire for you to have comfort and peace this Advent season. It contains scripture passages and prompts, designed for you to reflect and record your responses, four prayers written by our faculty, as well as spiritual practices woven throughout. The spiritual practices in this journal were contributed by the Certificate in Spiritual Direction Program at Columbia's Center for Lifelong Learning.

Columbia is committed to offering you resources that nurture you and your community of faith. We would love to hear from you as to what feeds your soul so that Columbia might be able to offer more resources.

Here are some other ways we'd like to connect with you:

- Consider inviting a Columbia professor or student to preach or teach at your church.
- Come for a visit; we'd love to show off our beautiful fifty-five acre campus to you.
- Or support Columbia's mission tangibly through Meet the Call (Annual Fund), or the Columbia Friendship Circle, which provides scholarships to PCUSA students with family responsibilities.

We would love to connect with you in any way you find helpful, so please be in touch.

*Deep peace to you in this Advent season.*

**Prayer by Dr. Christine Roy Yoder,  
J. McDowell Richards  
Professor of Biblical Interpretation**

We've been waiting for a long time, O God.  
Waiting for vaccines to be available for everyone everywhere.  
Waiting to gather without counting and distancing and masking.  
Waiting to have to worry less about so many things.  
Waiting for good news—any good news.

Some wait this day for a phone call, a diagnosis, a cure.  
    Some wait for a job. A meal. A home. A loved one.  
Some wait for the words to come. The seed to sprout.  
The fighting to end. The pain to ease.  
Some wait for courage. Some wait for justice. Some wait for safety.  
    Some wait when they should not wait.

Bless our waiting, O God,  
    waiting that in these days is so heavy and weary and spent, and

Open in us the waiting of this holy season: our waiting for you.  
    Waiting with roots in your sure promises of old, your words that never pass away...  
        *the days are surely coming...*  
    Waiting that stays awake and wonders and listens and learns.  
    Waiting that hopes, loves, prepares, and hangs on as the world shakes and terrors roar.  
    Waiting that stands up, helps up, lifts up, and looks up  
    for your light—  
        the true light coming into the world.

Bless our Advent waiting, O God.  
Amen.

# Lectio Divina

## (Sacred Reading, Praying the Scriptures)

*“Spiritual Reading (lectio divina) is the ancient practice of savoring a text with patient playfulness. This way of reading is alert with expectation that a transforming word of life will make its way from the written narrative of the author to the lived narrative of the reader.” from Weavings Journal*

Lectio Divina has four movements: reading, reflecting, responding, and resting. The movements may unfold in a different order each day.

Note that we have added “Quiet your Soul” before the four movements, to encourage you enter the time of prayer with a quiet heart.

### Quiet your Soul

Be still and invite God to open your heart and mind to understanding.

Take a few deep breaths to relax your body and connect your whole being.

### Reading (and listening) (Lectio)

Read the passage slowly a few times. You may wish to read it out loud so that you can also hear the words.

Read and Listen as if you’re hearing it for the first time, seeing with new eyes.

Notice a word or phrase that shimmers or resonates with you.

Linger whenever you are “moved or touched” by a word or phrase.

Silently focus on that word or phrase. Repeat it a few times.

Allow it sink into your heart and mind.

### Reflecting (pondering, savoring) (Meditatio)

As you continue to focus on your word or phrase, pay attention to the thoughts and feelings it evokes.

Do images, thoughts, memories come to mind?

Approach this with wonder and curiosity...*I wonder what God has in mind...*

Ask God to speak to you through this word, and continue to explore, pay attention, and listen for the reply.

How does this text speak to my experience?

What is this text saying to me?

## **Responding (Oratio)**

At some point you may wish to reply to God or engage in a conversation.

Has your prayer awakened a desire in you?

Is there an area of your life that needs some attention? Hold up feelings, discoveries, joys, and anguish to God (prayers of adoration and confession may occur here).

Do you sense an invitation toward a new action in your life?

Perhaps you find you are grateful for something and you wish to express that gratitude.

Whatever you sense do not rush the prayer. Continue to wait and listen as God forms your prayer and desire in your heart.

Speak or write your prayer of desire, longing, or action to God.

Continue to listen in silence.

## **Resting (Contemplatio)**

In this final phase of the prayer, the conversation with God draws to a close.

Having heard a word from God and having expressed your response to that word, you now allow yourself to rest in silence.

Allow your mind to settle. Become silent, tranquil, at peace with God.

Receive God's Love.

Rest in God's embrace.

When you feel that the prayer has come to an end, express your gratitude to God.

This can be as simple as saying "Thank you" or Amen.

Advent begins with a promise, a promise that the very thing we crave is what the Lord is eager to bring: justice and righteousness. Reflect on the ways you yearn for justice and righteousness this Advent, either “in the land” as the prophet says, or in your own life.

*“In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.” — Jeremiah 33:16a*

Think of all the ways we have worked for safety during COVID-19 in our churches, our workplaces, our personal lives. To live in safety has moved to the top of our Christmas wish list. If you wake up tomorrow and feel safe, what will have happened to give you that feeling?

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*“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust.” — Psalm 25:1-2*

The Psalmist proclaims trust in God. How do you think the writer came to trust in God?  
How do you decide who or what to trust?

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Where do you look when you are trying to find your way? A map? Your phone? Ask for directions? We usually need some kind of help to find our way around in the world, but how often do we rely only on ourselves to find God's path? Use your memory of times when you have needed help finding your way in life. Have there been tools that you found helpful in seeking God's way for yourself, your family, or your church?

— *Psalm 25:5*

Truth is a big word. Jesus said, “I am... the Truth...” Pontius Pilate asked, “What is truth?”

Make a list: In your own life what are some things you can say are absolutely true?

Where do you see the divine at work in your list of truths?

SATURDAY

*“All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep the Lord’s covenant and decrees.”  
— Psalm 25:10*

Reflect upon a time you have felt God’s steadfast love and faithfulness in your spiritual journey.

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**Prayer by Dr. Mark Douglas,  
Professor of Christian Ethics;  
Director of ThM Program**

You who interrupt our settled ways and bring fresh visions  
to the unsettled,

we pray today for a sense of the work you call us to and of our  
places in time and space.

With Malachi, we look forward, seeking messengers of the covenant,  
those who will point us towards you and refine our disordered  
thoughts and goals.

With Luke, we give thanks for those messengers  
who have already come,

those whose faithful voices give pause, give courage, give wisdom,  
give hope.

With Paul, we share a confidence that works begun in the past will be  
completed in your future,

knowing that you are beginning and ending, Alpha and Omega.

With John the Baptist, we ask that you use us to prepare your way,  
leading others from wilderness to promise; leading others in the  
wildness of your spaces.

Remind us today that we are an Advent people, living between your  
first coming and your second,

And living into the unsettledness of that pilgriming life.

Help us to learn from the past without trying to live in it; to hope into  
the future without trying to determine it;

to attend to the present without imagining that  
this is as good as it gets.

Guide us in your ways that we might be guides for others,  
embracing them in their spaces and bearing witness to your  
transforming love.

And remind us, always, that we are not alone in our journeys,  
but you are with us as goad, guide, and goal.

This we ask in the name of the one who has come and is coming still.  
Amen.

*“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to the temple.” — Malachi 3:1*

God often enters our lives through a messenger.  
Who has been a messenger from God for you in the past week?

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## Create a Mandala

Reflect on the word or phrase, with simple art, like creating a small mandala. Mandala simply means “circle.” Circles are symbols of wholeness in many cultures. A circle creates a bounded space for the color and images you will add.

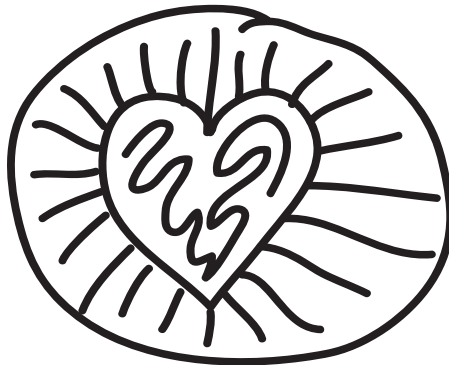
Start with drawing or tracing a circle on a paper or in your journal. You can think small, one or two inches in diameter, or try something bigger. You can trace around a bottle cap, small container, a bowl. Whatever you have at home will do.

Add color, collage, or a simple design in response to your word.

Sit back and gaze on your mandala.

What do you see?

Give it a title.



God has begun a good work in you! Where do you think that work is leading you?  
Where do you hope it will lead?



*“And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best...” — Philippians 1:9-10*

Paul prayed that the love of the Philippians would overflow and pour gifts into the world around them. Say a prayer like that for someone else. Pray for your own church or an organization or someone you know, that their love would overflow and imagine what that overflowing would look like.

Handwriting practice area consisting of 20 rows of dotted lines on a grid background.

*The word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. — Luke 3:2b-3*

Repentance isn't just about admitting our sin, but about aligning ourselves with God and God's work in the world. What part of your life could stand to be brought closer in line with God's will? Say a prayer that God would realign those things in your own mind, heart, and life.

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*As it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make the paths straight.’ ” — Luke 3:4*

Have you heard a wilderness voice, a voice from the margins, a voice that speaks truth but would be easier to ignore? What do voices like that say? How do they prepare us to meet Christ?

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What a boring, flat world that would be! But isn't this just a figurative way of saying that nothing will stand in anyone's way of seeing God's grace for all creation? God promises to make it easy for us all to see, but are there ways that we can help? Are there ways that we, too, could make it easy for others to see God's grace?

SUNDAY

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**Prayer by Dr. Mitzi Smith,  
J. Davison Philips Professor of New Testament**

Dear Mother God, Divine Doula, and Midwife

Like Mary—the expectant, soon-to-be mother of Jesus of Nazareth

We are pregnant with (im)possibilities

Because your Spirit overshadows and empowers us to carry its seed

Amidst insidious and resilient viruses of self/neighbor-hate,  
of inequality, of poverty

As seeds of the Spirit and people in whom the Spirit plants its seed

To conceive and engender justice, freedom, and mercy,

To alleviate, while laboring to eliminate, oppression and violence, and

To conceive and incarnate hope and the miraculous

Raise our consciousness to recognize and practice life-giving  
prenatal care.

Help us to nourish our bodies, minds, and spirits—our whole selves

To be nauseous and dis-eased with hatred, injustice,  
and violence in all its forms

In every space and place

So, we don't reproduce children in/of poverty, sexism, racism,  
queerphobia, and other violence

In and beyond this Advent, Mother God, Divine Doula  
and Midwife of (im)possible births,

Let your Spirit anoint us to birth freedom and wholeness!

MONDAY

*“Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.” — Zephaniah 3:16b*

Look at your hands. Remember things that you have done with them for good. Imagine Christ using your hands. How might Christ use them? Pray for God to strengthen your hands for such work.

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## Colloquy and Praying with the Imagination

This week the invitation is to write a conversation with God.

Begin by pausing to release any expectations you might have. Then start the conversation by addressing God with your preferred or fondest name for the God and writing a statement or a question you might have.

Pause and allow a response to form and write that. Continue through about 10 exchanges.

*Example:*

**Me:** Holy One, this morning the word from the scripture is ‘trust.’ What do you want me to know now about trust?

**Holy One:** I’m not sure ‘knowing’ is the right word, but if it is, knowing is about the heart, mind and spirit. I sense you’re trusting your mind and thinking more than your heart right now.

**Me:** Nailed! That’s humbling. Yes, I can see that now. But how might I change that and tend my heart knowing?

**Holy One:** . . . etc.

*“The Lord will renew you in God’s love; God will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.”  
— Zephaniah 3:17b*

When small children sing, they often sing loudly and joyfully, without much attention to hitting all the notes perfectly. Find a moment today to sing something loud and joyful to God. If you do, is there something about joyful singing that feels like being renewed in God’s love?

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WEDNESDAY

*“And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.” — Zephaniah 3:19b*

Say a prayer for someone who needs healing in mind, body, spirit or in relationships. Pray for anyone in need of healing and wholeness.

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— *Isaiah 12:2a*

Drawing water from a well is work, but Isaiah proclaims that Israel will do this work with joy!  
Reflect on times when you have found joy in your own work.

That our prayers of supplication should be punctuated with thanksgiving is a helpful reminder. Paul says we should ask God for help with everything that weighs heavy on our minds, but maybe asking for help from a place of gratitude begins to lessen our anxiety even as we pray. In a moment of prayer, ask for God's help while also giving God thanks.

Psalm 80; Luke 1:47-55 (with a hint of Genesis 1)

Prayer by Dr. William P. Brown,  
William Marcellus McPheeters  
Professor of Old Testament

Shepherd of heaven and earth,  
    whose shining countenance enlivens all creation,  
restore your people, recover the lost, and fill the hungry,  
    not with the bread of tears, but with the loaf of love.  
Celestial Mover, turn this upside-down world right-side up,  
    as the good creation you intended it to be,  
        in which supremacy in all forms is ground into the dust,  
        and all are free to flourish, each according  
        to their way.  
Turn this world around, putting the proud to shame and the strong to  
flight, just as Mary intoned.  
    Leave no stone unturned, and every tyrant torn from his throne.  
May every table be spread with the bounty of your grace;  
    may every cup overflow with the lavishness of your love.  
May our hearts sing for joy of the day,  
    when your justice and shalom have their way.  
    And may it all begin, once again,  
    in a trough filled with hay.

MONDAY

*“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!”*  
— *Psalms 80:1a*

Say this as an advent breath prayer. Breath in: Come, O Shepherd... Breathe out: Lead us like a flock.  
Repeat this prayer 7 or 8 times or more.

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## Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is a silent prayer in which one rests in silence. The posture is that of consent. Consent to the presence and activity of God in one's life. The prayer is simple yet difficult because our minds are so busy.

Find a sacred word, one that is perhaps your preferred name for God, or one that describes God's character (love, holy one, peace, etc). This word will simply be a touchstone to return your heart and intention back to God.

Find a comfortable place to sit with your back straight.

Settle yourself with perhaps a breath or two.

Notice your thoughts and release them.

When you find that you have become engaged in a thought, return to your sacred word as a way of returning your focus and intent toward God alone.

The full practice is for 20 minutes twice daily. But you can simply start where you are with the time you have. 5-10 minutes may be just enough!

### Additional Resources:

*Creating A Life with God, The Call of Ancient Prayer Practices* by Daniel Wolpert

*40 Days to a Closer Walk with God* by J. David Muyskins

*Lectio Divina – the sacred art: Transforming Words & Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* by Christine Valters Paintner, PhD

*“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.” — Psalm 80:3*

The psalm writer pleads for salvation and restoration for their community. What needs restoration in your own life? How would you ask God for restoration in communities you are part of?

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A magnifying glass is a lens through which things can be seen more clearly and in greater detail. What would it mean for your own soul to show God clearly to others? How does your soul magnify the Lord?

How does your church as a whole magnify the Lord?

These dichotomies sometimes make us uncomfortable. Isn't there room for everyone to receive a blessing in the birth of Christ? Even the rich and powerful? Maybe there is a blessing available to the rich and powerful that is tied to their willingness to participate in serving the hungry and the downtrodden. Reflect on the ways that you or your church have served others this Advent.



SATURDAY

*“O sing to the Lords a new song, for God has done marvelous things.” — Psalm 98:1a*

**It’s Christmas! Yay!**

A large grid of dots for handwriting practice, consisting of 20 rows and 40 columns of small dots.