

ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2022: PART 1

LOOKING BACK

Heart. As you think about the past several months, can you identify a few significant moments in your relationships? You might remember a sweet time with a family member or a friend, or perhaps there are some moments of grief in your relationships. Hold these gently before God.

Soul. In what circumstances have you felt most connected with God this fall? What has that been like for you? If you have felt distant from God, maybe you would like to talk with God about that.

Mind. What intellectual pursuits have been rewarding for you recently? What has been frustrating? If you're teaching or taking classes, where have you noticed the presence of God in the material you're working with?

Strength. How has your body felt this fall? What have your habits of sleeping, eating, and moving been like? Are there parts of your body that need tuning up?

Isaiah chapter 9 says:

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light,
On those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.

Gather up your reflections for a moment and give thanks to the God who illuminates our past and brings light to our futures.

ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2022: PART 2

LOOKING AHEAD

Heart. As you look into the coming weeks of Advent, what experiences would you like to enjoy with loved ones? Are there plans that need to be made to prepare for those? Are there any special experiences you would like to enjoy by yourself?

Soul. This December, how would you like to connect with God? What rhythms of personal prayer might you incorporate, realistically? What does church involvement look like for you this month?

Mind. As you wrap up the semester, what kinds of tasks need to be addressed? Are there professional or research goals you'd like to complete? If you have students in your life, how do you wish to end the semester with them?

Strength. December can be a busy month. What kinds of routines do you need in place in order to take care of your body? You could plan a weekly walk with a friend, monitor your alcohol intake at holiday parties, or commit to an extra-early bedtime at least three times each week. Check in with your body and see how you need to care for yourself.

Isaiah chapter 40 talks about the kind of anticipation we've been reflecting on. The text reads:

A voice of one calling:

"In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.

Gather up your reflections for a moment and give thanks to the God who teaches us to prepare our lives for receiving him wholeheartedly.

ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2022: PART 3

STAYING PRESENT

Heart. Think about the past twenty-four hours. Can you identify a moment of connection with someone you love? Give thanks for that moment and enjoy the memory of it. If it's difficult to think of one, consider reaching out to someone — write a letter, make a call, set up a time to see one another.

Soul. The third week of Advent focuses on Mary and her joy. Consider these opening lines from Mary's song in Luke 1:

My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.

Open yourself to the Spirit and ask: How does my soul glorify the Lord right now? How does my spirit rejoice in my savior? Where have I noticed the way "he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant" in my life?

Mind. As activity increases throughout this month, distractions also begin to pile up in our minds. Give yourself the gift of focus for a moment, right now. Identify a word or phrase — perhaps something like "peace" or "goodness and mercy" or even the name "Jesus." Hold that word or phrase in your mind, allowing yourself the rest that comes with deep focus.

Strength. Take a moment to feel your body. Focus on your toes, then the strength of your legs, up into your torso, through your arms and neck, and finishing with your head. God made us incarnate, with bodies, and he gave Jesus a body too. Give thanks for your body. Treat it kindly today.

Consider once more Mary's words from Luke 1.

Gather up your reflections for a moment and give thanks to our God who is mindful of his humble people, even in the midst of his glory.

ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2022: PART 4

LETTING GO

Heart. As Christmas Day approaches, we're faced with stark reality. Not every task will get done, and expectations can run high. What ordinary moments of connection with others will nourish you in the coming days?

Soul. As we approach the celebration of the birth of Jesus, meditate for a short time on his incarnation. Consider each element of this sentence from John 1 and give thanks to God: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Mind. Winter break may have begun for some, and for others the holiday reprieve is small to nonexistent. Whatever your circumstances, think about your work and bless it. Think about your room, your office, the hallways, your books, your texts, your computer, your phone — and offer a blessing upon it all. Christ came to offer peace — the angels sing, “on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” Peace be to your workplace, today and evermore.

Strength. As Christmas approaches, give yourself the gift of rest. Even if it seems like your task list must be completed by a certain hour, the fact is: there is grace. Cross a few things off your list, even if they are undone. Turn in early tonight or take ten minutes to lie down this afternoon — even if you don't sleep, there are benefits to resting your body.

Consider these additional words from John 1:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Gather up your reflections for a moment and give thanks to the God who gives light and life, now and forever.

ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2022: PART 5

EMBRACING A NEW YEAR

Heart. As you look back over the past year and into the new, think about your relationships. What habits would you like to continue? What might you like to begin this January?

Soul. Think through your spiritual journey over the past calendar year, or even just thinking from the beginning of fall semester. What peaks and valleys come to mind? What kinds of practices will draw you closer to God in the coming year?

Mind. January can offer an opportunity for a soft reset in work and school rhythms. What has worked well for you in your profession over the past quarter? Where do you wish to invest more energy or resources? Consider what you might add and what you might take away as you pursue your vocation.

Strength. Magazines will be proclaiming the season of “new year, new you” — free yourself from these messages and embrace something sustainable. What habits help you to feel energized and strong? What can you incorporate reasonably into your life? Small steps can reap big rewards when it comes to health.

In Luke 2, the shepherds hear the good news of Jesus’s birth from the angels and then are struck with inspiration:

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

Gather up your reflections for a moment and give thanks to the God who reveals his good news and invites us to explore it in the coming year.