



Week 1: Hope

The Prophet's Candle –



This is a depiction of the theological virtue of Hope circa 1500 in Italy. The phoenix, which dies in flames and then rises again from the ashes, represents the resurrection of Christ.

Song reflecting the theme of the 1st week: “O Holy Night”

Day 1: *Protoevangelium*

Genesis 3:15

Light is most apparent in the darkest moments. When all seems lost in the dark, even the smallest light can bring comfort. Perhaps the darkest moment in history occurred when Adam and Eve took the fruit and introduced the world to the curse of sin. Life in the Garden of Eden was full of joy and perfect fellowship with God. Now humanity is thrown out of that perfect fellowship and promised a life of suffering and death. In the moment of their suffering, God provides humanity with hope, however. That is why this verse is called the *protoevangelium* or “first good news.” God does not let his people sit in their suffering. At the darkest moment, humanity is given a great hope. Eve will have a child who will crush the serpent’s head. While she did not know it at that time, that child would be born of a virgin in a stable in Bethlehem. The serpent would indeed strike his heel by trying to crucify him. At the moment of Christ’s death, he achieved the greatest victory over the serpent. Christ is our hope now, and even though they didn’t know him yet, he was the hope of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve knew that God would once again restore humanity. During the season of Advent, we remember the waiting and hope for a savior while we also hope for the return of Christ and the renewal of all creation.

“Christ completely renewed all things, both taking up the battle against our enemy and crushing him who at the beginning had led us captive in Adam, trampling on his head, as you find in Genesis.” -Irenaeus, Against Heresies

Day 2: Israel's Hope

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The time of exile often seemed miserably hopeless for the nation of Israel. Not only had the people fallen into idolatry and moral decay, but because of their sinfulness, they lost the ability to rule themselves. Their cities were destroyed, and they were often removed from their homeland and forced to live in completely foreign places. Israel had lost their religious identity in their sinfulness, but their captors sought to strip them of their identity to their homeland. The prophets warned Israel of the consequences of sin, but they also prophesied hope. One of the most powerful pictures of this hope comes from the metaphor of the dry bones being restored to life. The bones, signifying Israel had been dead for a long time, hence, they are dry. God displays the power to revive the bones, however. Just as God revives the bones without any hope of life, he will also revive Israel. This prophecy shows the power of God to restore life to Israel. Nothing is beyond the restoration of God. Israel is given a hope that they will once again be restored. Even in the darkest of times, God promises hope to his people. Advent is a time when we reflect on the darkness of the world and long for the future coming of Christ when he will restore all of creation.

"It is a prerogative of God to raise the dead." -Ambrose, On the Holy Spirit.

Day 3: The Virtue of Hope

Romans 8:24-25

Just as Paul writes, we do not hope for the things we have already seen. Hope is directed to the future and is founded on promises of things that we have heard will come to pass but have not yet seen come to pass. Christian hope looks forward to the future of God's promises. Hope is more than just thoughts of desire or wishful thinking, though. Hope allows us to carry on our day to day lives in the world despite whatever may come to pass. Hope moves us to face the uncertainty of the future with the knowledge that whatever the future holds, it will hold the coming of Christ. Hope, then, allows us to have freedom, even if that freedom is limited by the confines of a disciplined life following Christ. Hope looks to the future coming of Christ and realizes that no human action can stop God and the coming return of Christ. The season of Advent is a season of hope. During the time of Israel in the Old Testament, they hoped for the coming Messiah who would redeem humanity. Now we hope for the return of the Messiah who will resurrect humanity and renew all of Creation. So, our hope should direct us to act in light of this return. We manifest the life of Kingdom citizens and seek to draw others into this life while at the same time never fearing that our hope in the perfect kingdom that Christ promises will be dashed.

We believe that our bodies also will overcome corruption and death. For the time being this is a hope, because it is not yet present, but it is a future certainty. -Cyril of Alexandria, Explanation of the Letter to the Romans

Day 4: Hope in Jesus

Isaiah 9:6-7

While Israel hoped for the end of their exile and the restoration of their land, God also promised a future king who would usher in a time of peace. The world was and continues to be ravaged by the effects of sin. Around the world, people face suffering and death. Something Israel and we continue to long for an end to and a sobering reminder of the devastation of sin. We long for a peace that can only be brought about through the destruction of sin and eternal reign for Christ. While Israel did not know who their savior was and at times misunderstood the purpose of the Messiah, they had hope that God would send one who would free all people from the reign of sin and death. God never intends to leave his people in darkness. He provides salvation to his people. The season of Advent is a reminder of this promise. God the Son chose to come down as a human baby, knowing that our greatest need was freedom from sin, he experienced life as we do, and died a death that we deserve. In that death, Jesus satisfied God's wrath towards sin, he overcame the forces of darkness and provided a path to salvation. He is the only perfect king, for Israel and us.

“The one new King of the new ages, Jesus Christ carried on his shoulder both the power and the excellence of his new glory, even his cross; so that, according to our former prophecy, he might thenceforth reign from the tree as Lord.” - Tertullian, Against Marcion

Day 5: Hope in The Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:20-22

The Resurrection of Christ is the greatest moment in history. Christ not only declares his power over death, he also affirms the goodness of creation and promises the future restoration of creation. He promises a world free from sin and its devastating consequences. The thought and fear of death are ever-present. Death is not natural. Only through the power of God is the power of death overcome. Christ comes, lives the life we never could, dies the death we deserve, and then defeats death with a reminder that he will one day restore all things to the way they were meant to be. Because of Christ's resurrection, we look forward to a coming age when we may live in a world in perfect harmony with God. When the world around us is freed from the devastation of sin. When our fragile bodies are no longer fragile. We hope for a time when we can serve God and live in the glory of his universal reign. Paul calls for us to look forward to this future reign. To have hope in it. . The season of Advent is a reminder of the hope we have for this future resurrection. When all seems lost, be reminded of the resurrection of Christ. God ultimately restores what is lost.

“Man indeed brought death to himself and to the Son of Man. But the Son of Man, by dying and rising again, brought life to man.” -Augustin, To Honoratus

Week 2: Faith

The Bethlehem Candle



This is an artistic depiction of the theological virtue of faith from Italy, circa 1500. The dog, known for its loyalty and faithfulness, is a common representation of faith.

Song reflecting the theme of the 2nd week: “O Come All Ye Faithful”

Day 1: Ruth’s Faith

Ruth 1:16-17

Ruth and Naomi experienced one of the worst situations they could face in their time. With their husbands dead, and no prospects for a new husband, they were almost guaranteed to experience abject poverty. Ruth’s commitment to Naomi not only shows a virtuous level of loyalty but also great faith in the Lord’s providence. Ruth exemplified a faith that relied on God’s providence. The only hope that Naomi and Ruth had to escape poverty was to find a marriage that would free them from the life of abandonment that widows often found themselves in. Ruth needed a kinsman redeemer to escape from her almost guarantee of abandonment by society. God provided that redeemer. Ruth’s faith ultimately ends up saving her and her mother-in-law. Her marriage to Boaz redeems her life and the life of Naomi. Not only that, but God uses Ruth’s faith to bring about the ultimate redeemer of humanity. Ruth will become one of the ancestors of Christ. Ruth’s story foreshadows the coming of Christ. Just as Ruth and Naomi needed a redeemer to lift them up, humanity does too. Ruth looked forward to the redeemer who would free her and Naomi, and her faith ultimately leads to the birth of the Redeemer of all humanity.

“Ruth, a foreigner, did not leave Naomi’s side. See how much merit there is in standing by the deserted in solace. From her seed, Christ is born.” -Jerome, Letter 39

Day 2: Micah's Faith

Micah 5:2

Israel's prophets lived lives marked by great faith. The prophets were chosen by God to give the word of God directly to the people of Israel. The prophets were usually surrounded by a steep moral decline. Their neighbors and countrymen abandoned God and sunk into depravity. The messages of coming judgment that God gave to the prophets at times further isolated them from other people. The prophet Micah had the particularly difficult job of declaring God's judgment to the leaders and false prophets of Judah who were leading the people to destruction. Micah offers scathing rebukes of the leaders and false prophets and prophesies that God will judge Judah and bring about the kingdom's destruction. However, after each message of judgment, Micah presents a message of hope. God's goal is not ultimately destruction, but for redemption. God will restore Israel. God will use the small town of Bethlehem to bring about the Messiah who will rule righteously over all of Israel. Unlike the false prophets who took payment to make false prophecies, Micah relies on his faith in God for declaring the message of God. Micah faithfully declares the message of judgment, but in his words is a hope that God will ultimately bring a redeemer and a redemption. Micah's faith is in the realization that God will act for the benefit of his people, and though God will bring judgment, he will ultimately bring redemption.

"To prove that he was God, Christ worked many miracles . . . Of these miracles the very first was the marvelous manner of his birth." -Augustine, City of God

Day 3: The Virtue of Faith

Hebrews 11

The virtue of faith is the root of Christianity. Just as the many patriarchs follow God in faith, we follow God, experience salvation, and join the church at the starting point of faith. Christian faith is a type of knowledge that God is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. Faith involves a certain trust when our vision is blurry, or when we can not see at all. Through faith, we trust that God's promises will come to pass. We trust that the things of God that we hear of will eventually also be seen. However, many people have faith in other things that do not result in salvation. Faith is active and must work in tandem with love. Faith is more than just knowledge or assent. Faith is the root of our action. Faith results in action and the actions that result from our faith show what we love. By faith, the Old Testament patriarchs did great things for God and were saved but their faith was directed toward God. Their faith was joined by a love for God. During the season of Advent, we are called to have faith. The Patriarchs had faith that they would receive salvation and acted on their faith. Now, after the coming of Christ, we have faith that our salvation has been accomplished and that Christ will come again. Based on that faith we perform acts of love that demonstrate our love for God. We share the gospel, we feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and defend the oppressed. The faith that the season of Advent calls us to display is a picture of our love for God and the future Kingdom to come.

"Faith, it is clear, works righteousness." -John Chrysostom, On the Epistle to the Hebrews

Day 4: Mary's Faith

Luke 1:38

Without a doubt, the message that Mary receives requires a lot of faith to believe. The angel comes to Mary and tells her that she is going to become pregnant even though she is still a virgin. Not only is Mary's acceptance that she will become pregnant as a virgin an outstanding display of faith, but she displays tremendous faith in her acceptance of the role as the mother of Jesus. Mary's faith leads her to accept that she is not her own, God is Lord of her life. God has chosen to use her to bring about his plan of redemption, and she humbly accepts her role and literally offers her body up to the service of God. In addition, Mary's acceptance of her role most likely led her into a life of ostracization and ridicule. To become pregnant outside of marriage in her day often meant being pushed to the lowest castes of society, especially since she was already engaged to Joseph. The moment that Mary accepts her role as the mother of Christ she accepts the pain that will come with pregnancy and childbirth as well as the pain that comes from being ridiculed and ostracized by her own community. However, she bears her pain because of her faith in God. In Luke 1:46-55, Mary praises the Lord. She rejoices in the fact that God has chosen her as part of his plan of redemption. For Mary, the trials that arise from her miraculous and seemingly scandalous pregnancy are nothing compared to the greatness of God. Her faith is in God and his ultimate plan to redeem humanity and her trials are worth it.

"She did not deny the faith, she did not refuse the duty, but she conformed her will." -Ambrose, Exposition on Luke

Day 5: Saved Through Faith

Ephesians 2:8

"Salvation by grace through faith" is a phrase we repeat so often without thought that we can sometimes forget how glorious the implications for that phrase are. God's grace is a truly magnificent gift. The weight of our sin is so great that there is no one work or amount of work that we can do to earn salvation from the punishment we deserve. Even if it were possible, to try to earn salvation is an exhausting path filled with despair and an always lingering doubt that our good works still may never be enough to outweigh all of the bad works we have committed. We are truly unable to save ourselves. But God acts on our behalf, he redeems us, he raises us up, and he frees us to walk a path that follows his righteousness. God is not content to leave us to our own devices. Faith in God's grace is a reliance on the fact that God actually has redeemed us. We place our faith in the fact that the Word took on flesh, was born, grew up, died the death that we deserved, was resurrected, ascended back to his place on the throne in heaven, and will one day return to set up his kingdom in the New Earth. The faith we have in Christ's coming through Advent is a faith that he has done what needed to be done to raise us up to freedom and new life with him. Because of the grace of God, we are free to fully participate with God. Such participation has been God's goal from before creation.

"Do not rely on your own efforts but on the grace of Christ . . . Therefore it is not a matter of arrogance here but faith when we celebrate: We are accepted! This is not pride but devotion." -Ambrose, On the Sacraments

Week 3: Joy

The Shepherds' Candle



This is a late 15th-century depiction of the announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds.

Song reflecting the theme of the 3rd week: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Day 1: Israel's Joy

Exodus 15:1-3

In the hour of their greatest need, Israel is saved. After enduring years of slavery, Israel is freed from the grip of Egypt. When Pharaoh changes his mind, however, Israel is placed in seemingly the most hopeless of situations. With Pharaoh on one side and the Red Sea on the other, Israel is trapped and defenseless before a powerful army. Israel truly cannot save themselves. It is in that moment, when Israel fears that the end has come, that God steps in. He does the miraculous. He blocks Pharaoh's path and opens the Red Sea so that Israel can escape. At this moment it becomes clear that God truly is the savior of Israel. In that moment, Israel finds their joy in the eternal God who will never leave them. No other earthly thing can provide the salvation or joy that Israel received at that moment. Israel's joy comes from the fact that God has chosen to redeem them and save them so that he can use them for his purposes. God is their provider and will come in their time of need. Ultimately, their joy looks to the future. At the perfect time, in humanity's greatest need, God acts. The Son of Man becomes a man. He bears the burden we could never bear on our own, and he saves us. The joy of Israel is our joy. Just as Israel was saved in their time of need, God saves us in our time of need through the sending of his Son. When we look back on the salvation that Jesus provides we can rejoice, knowing that God has rescued us and will one day renew all of creation when we can rejoice with him.

“[Our sins] have been . . . sunk and obliterated in the sea, when were set free by the bath of holy grace.” -Augustine, Sermon 363

Day 2: The Psalmist's Joy

Psalm 16

The abundant life offered by God is reason enough to rejoice. In moments of despair, God sustains us. As the creator of the universe, God continues to sustain his creation. He continues to act within creation moving all of history to the moment of renewal. The Psalmist recognizes this. God does not rejoice in death. God delights in life and is the source of life. God's desire for his people is that they be in his presence, and as the psalmist points out, that is where abundant joy is found. Joy is found in God because God is the provider of life. He created life, he preserves our life, and he saves our life. The moment that the Son of God becomes human is a moment for rejoicing because God has come to save the lives of those he has created. In Advent, we rejoice in the fact that God has given new life to those who believe in him. Just as the Psalmist looked forward to the new life in the presence of God, we look forward to that coming resurrection when God will renew all of creation and bring us into the everlasting joy of his presence.

“What in any case are my goods if not what I have been given by you? And how can the one by whom every good is given be in need of any good?” -Augustine, Sermon 331

Day 3: Finding Joy

Philippians 4:4-7

The pursuit of joy is not a pursuit of the feeling of happiness. Joy is found through delighting and remaining content in the life and hope that Christ provides. Christians are called to find joy in the graciousness of the Lord. Because of Christ's life and work, Christians do not need to fear any loss or darkness in this life. Christians need not fear that anything can overcome them. We can rejoice in the fact that despite any suffering we may face in the world, our true hope for salvation and life is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians ought to be the happiest people in the world. Christians do not need to fear that anything can end the reign of Christ or pluck them from the hand of God. Christians look toward the future resurrection and life under the reign of Christ. Christ shows us that joy is found in what is eternal. All things may fade away, but Christ and his church will never fade away.

“This rejoicing is not separable from grief. . . It is possible to grieve for one's own sins but rejoice in Christ. . . For this is nothing if you have received a life worthy of rejoicing.” -John Chrysostom, Homily on the Philippians

Day 4: The Joy of Shepherds

Luke 2:8-20

Shepherding was not a frequently desired job among Israel. Shepherds were often among the lower castes of society. That God sends the message of Christ's birth to shepherds first is a statement that God has come to redeem all people. The joy of the shepherds comes from the fact that even they are included in the message of salvation. Even they are declared worthy to hear and partake in God's plan of redemption. Just as the message of Jesus's birth is declared among the unworthy. The salvation from Christ is offered to the unworthy. Advent reminds us that, in our lowly state, we long for an exalted Savior. Christ comes to bring joy to humanity within their despair. He comes to offer joy to those who do not deserve it. He comes to offer salvation to the ones who rejected him. Christ comes to bring joy to the shepherds.

"The shepherds did not keep silent about the hidden mysteries that they had come to know by divine influence. They told whomever they could." -Bede, Homilies on the Gospels

Day 5: Joy in Suffering

James 1:2-4

Finding joy in suffering is a common theme in the early church. The early church did not actively search out suffering, rather they earnestly practiced their faith, and suffering sought them out. The early church knew that they could find joy in their suffering because the mere fact that they had faith in Christ put a target on their back. The day to day lives of loving their neighbors, sharing the gospel, and corporate worship attracted persecution. The early church did not look to antagonize their persecutors but sought to love them and persuade them to believe the gospel. The early church rejoiced in suffering because they knew victory in this life is meaningless. They rejoiced in their suffering because their suffering was evidence that their hope was not in this world. The faith of the early church was in the saving power of Christ and the hope for his promised future return. Suffering produced endurance because they knew that the kind of faith that attracted persecution was a day to day living in hope of the resurrection. There is joy in suffering because suffering is a reminder that Christ will one day return to end all suffering and comfort those who suffered. In the anticipation of Advent, we long for the savior who will one day eliminate all suffering. We take joy in suffering because the faith that endures suffering is the faith that sees the fulfillment of all things when Christ returns.

"Suffering is a real bond, an encouragement to greater love, and the basis of godliness." John Chrysostom, Catena

Week 4: Peace

The Angel's Candle



This is an early Christian depiction of peace. The Chi Rho in the middle is a historical symbol of peace. On both sides are doves holding olive branches which represent peace.

Song reflecting the theme of week 4: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

Day 1: The Blessing of Peace

Numbers 6:22-27

In a world filled with chaos since the day Adam and Eve fell, we long for peace. We all desire peace and God desires peace for us. However, peace is something that we will never truly find until it is granted to us by God. Our sinful actions always lead to some sort of destruction or chaos. The disrupted order of the universe can only be corrected by God. So, we ask God to bring peace. In advent, we see the destruction that sin has wrought on the world and our failed attempts to correct that destruction, and we long for the only one who can correct the problem of sin and bring peace. We are unable to bring about true peace on our own, so we ask God to grant us with peace as only he can. Advent is a time of recognizing our own failures and longing for Christ who is the only one who can correct those failures. During Advent, we look forward to the time when Christ will finally bless all the world with peace.

"Where true peace is, there can be no lack of virtue." -Leo the Great, Sermon 26

Day 2: Peace in Israel

Leviticus 26:1-6

The instructions that God gives followed by the promise of peace are a reminder that peace only comes through living under the reign of God. The commands of God are ordered towards peace. Acting against the commands of God prevents peace because sin is inherently anti-peace. God grants peace when Israel follows his commands because his commands are inherently peaceful. The peace that is promised to Israel is a foreshadowing of the future kingdom of Peace. The return of Christ will usher in a new era of peace when humanity will be in harmony with one another and God. Advent looks forward to this day. When Christ became a human, peace comes to the world because he is the only one able to grant peace. We long for the day when God's reign is established over the earth and he grants eternal peace to his creation.

“If, however, peace among men be so sweet as procuring temporal safety, how much sweeter is that peace with God” - Augustine, Letter 189

Day 3: Seeking Peace

Romans 12:18

The Christian is called to pursue a life of peace. Often, the peaceful life is wrongly seen as a weak life of compromising on one's own beliefs. Rather the peaceful life exemplifies great strength and adherence to human flourishing. The peaceful life is a call to see to the flourishing of humanity. Peace calls for the promotion of life and the protection of every human to pursue God. Protection of peace means removing any disruption to chaos and disorder. Christianity is called to love their neighbors and be known for their love for those neighbors. They ought to fight for the protection of human life. Finally, they ought to declare that peace is only made possible through the perfect peacemaker, Jesus Christ.

“If someone blesses those who persecute him and does not harm those who do him harm, how will he attract hatred or revenge on himself?” -Theoderet of Cyr, Interpretation of the Letter to the Romans

Day 4: The Angels' Peace

Luke 2:14

The angels long for the redemption of creation and the coming peace of the reign of Christ. When Christ is born, it is a declaration that the destruction and chaos brought about by Satan are coming to an end. The destruction brought about by Satan will never have victory over the Kingdom of God. The angels delight in the salvation offered to humanity. The declaration of the angels signifies that the King of Heaven has come to earth. The only hope for cosmic peace has taken the initiative to reconcile humanity to himself and renew all of creation. Just as in the creation, God took the chaos and brought order, God will take the chaotic reality of sin and order creation toward eternal peace. In Advent, we recognize our part in the cosmic reality. The church is offered a place in the mission of God. The church declares the coming of Christ who will one day bring peace to all of creation and, alongside the angels, worships God as the only one who can bring peace to the earth.

“Because the King of heaven has taken unto himself the flesh of our earth, the angels from their heavenly heights no longer look down upon our infirmity. Now they are at peace with us, putting away the remembrance of the ancient discord. Now they honor us as friends, whom before they considered to be weak and despised.” -Gregory the Great, Homilies on the Gospels

Day 5: God is our Peace

Ephesians 2:11-22

The sin of Adam and Eve sets up a dividing wall between God and humanity. Humanity's sin is a rebellion against God that prevents us from ever having peace with him. In Christ, God steps in and breaks down the dividing wall between humanity and God. Christ brings about the unity of peace between God and humanity. Paul, recognizing the unity of Christ, also declares that unity between people comes through Christ. Under Christ, people of all nations and tribes are brought under one banner. God's reign is over peoples from diverse backgrounds and places. It is only through Christ that humanity can be reconciled to each other. The Advent season is a longing for the day when peoples are brought together in perfect harmony with God and each other. Advent calls us to recognize that the mission of the church is to declare that peace on earth can only come through Christ, who breaks down all barriers and unites the nations under his banner.

“Taking up the enmity that had come between us and God on account of sins, ‘slaying it in himself,’ as the apostle says (and sin is enmity), and becoming what we are, he joined the human to God again through himself” -Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius

Week 5: Christ

The Candle of Light and Purity



This is *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) by Francisco de Zurbarán circa 1636-1640.

Son reflecting the fifth week of Advent: “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”

Day 1: The Logos

John 1:1-5

John’s first goal in his gospel is to declare the divinity of Christ. The man Jesus is the Logos, which is Greek for Word. Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the special revelation to all of humanity about who God is, and his plans for redemption. The same God who created all things becomes a man so that he can renew the fallen creation. Jesus is not just a special man. He is the Word who took on flesh. In Christ, God makes the move to save all of humanity. God saves the very people who rebelled against him. God never intended to leave humanity on their own. Only God can overcome the power of death and sin. Only God can meet the requirements needed to satisfy God’s law. In the season of Advent, we recognize the fact that God never intended to leave humanity to their own devices. Knowing that humans are unable to save themselves, God takes the initiative to save the creatures who rebelled against him. In the darkness of the world, the darkness of sin, and the darkness of waiting. God is the light who guides humanity out of the chains of sin and back into perfect unity with him.

“The Word is a reality, not a sound, a Being, not a speech, God, not a nonentity.” -Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity

Day 2: Ecce Homo!

John 19:5

When Pilate brings Jesus out among the people to mock him, he declares “Behold the Man!” The early church noted the importance of this phrase in the Latin *Ecce Homo*. In the moment of Christ’s humiliation, in a statement meant to mock Jesus, Pilate makes an unknowingly profound Christological statement: the person Jesus Christ is in fact truly man. God could have avoided becoming human. He could have saved humanity from afar. Instead, God decides to step into the darkness of the world. He enters into the muck and mire, lives among the death and disease, and experiences everything just as we do. Then, he offers himself up to be mocked, tortured, and ultimately crucified. Advent reminds us of the longing for Christ to come to his creation. We long for a savior who can understand us and who can relate to us. We long for a savior who can take the punishment that we deserve. We long for the return of the savior who defeated death and promises to resurrect us just like he was resurrected.

“Just as in Adam, Satan subdued the whole human race demonstrating its subjection to sin, so now Satan is vanquished by humanity. For the one who was truly God and without sin was still also human. And just as all of humanity was condemned under the sentence of sin through one man, the first Adam, in the same way, the blessing of justification by Christ is extended to all through one man, the second Adam.” -Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of John

Day 3: Christ the Light

John 8:12

The season of Advent is a reminder that sin cast darkness over the world. Lost and aimless, humanity has failed to live the life they ought to and is unable to save themselves. We long for a guide out of the darkness of the world. As the light of the world, Christ steps in to lead humanity out of the darkness. The salvation that Christ offers is the only way for humanity to escape the darkness. Additionally, as the only perfect human, Christ stands out as a model of how humans ought to live. Christ lived a life that honored God and fled temptation. Humanity can look to Christ and see what their purpose in life is. Humanity is meant to glorify God and seek after him. Humanity is also called to love their neighbor and pray for their enemies. During the season of Advent, we look for the light who will guide us to salvation and shows us the way to live.

“Let us put away the darkness so that we may draw near to the Light and may then become perfect Light, the children of perfect Light.” -Gregory of Nazianzus On the Holy Lights

Day 4: Christ the Pure Lamb

John 1:29-36

Christ is often called the perfect Lamb of God. This designation is a reminder of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. The punishment for sin is death. In order to atone for their sins, the Israelites had to bring a spotless lamb for the sacrifice. Humanity needed a substitute for the death that they deserved. The lamb was never enough to cover all the sins of the Israelites, however. Christ stands in as the perfect substitute for the sins of humanity. Christ lived the perfect life, then took our place by dying the death that humanity deserved. Christ became the perfect spotless lamb that can atone for all the sins of every person. No longer does humanity have to live in fear that their sins will not be atoned for. Humanity does not have to try to earn their salvation. Advent recognizes that the coming of Christ frees humanity to live the life that they ought to. During Advent, we long for the salvation and freedom from the bondage of sin and death that Christ provides.

“The Lamb that took away the sins of the world brought to naught the lion that had brought sins into the world. It was the Lamb that restored us by the offering of his flesh and blood, so that we would not perish.” -Bede, Homilies on the Gospels

Day 5: Christ the Resurrection

John 11:25-26

Christ’s death is not the end. Christ is resurrected and because of his resurrection, we can be sure of our future resurrection. When Christ declares that he is the resurrection, he declares that he is the example of the future resurrection. He is the first human to be resurrected and receive a glorified body. He proves that he has the power to overcome death. As Paul says, if Christ is not resurrected, we have no hope. If Christ is not resurrected, then death truly is the end. We have no hope of life beyond death. However, Christ was resurrected, and we do have hope. The season of Advent is a reminder that we have hope for salvation from the bonds of sin and death. Through our faith in Christ’s death and resurrection, we receive the grace of God that saves us from our sin and the power of death and brings an expectation for future resurrection. We can rejoice in the fact that, because of Christ, we will one day be raised to live a new life in fully resurrected bodies in a fully renewed creation under the peaceful reign of God.

“I am the voice of life that wakens the dead. I am the good odor that takes away the foul odor. I am the voice of joy that takes away sorrow and grief. . . I am the comfort of those who are in grief. Those who belong to me are given joy by me. I am the joy of the whole world. I gladden all my friends and rejoice with them. I am the bread of life.” -Athanasius, Homily on the Resurrection of Lazarus.