

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

2026

ReconcilingWorks
LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION



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HOPE

Mark 13:24-37

Reflection

There are moments when the world feels as though it is coming apart. The news is overwhelming. The needs of our neighbors are urgent. The promises of justice and equality seem fragile, and the future can feel uncertain. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the sun growing dark, the moon withholding its light, and the stars falling from heaven. These are not gentle images for the beginning of Advent. They are unsettling, disruptive, and impossible to ignore.

And perhaps that is exactly where hope begins. Jesus does not ask the disciples to pretend that everything is fine. Instead, Jesus calls them to remain awake, to pay attention, and to recognize that even in the midst of disruption, God is near. For many LGBTQIA+ people, particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color, the call to remain watchful is not an abstract spiritual practice. It is part of navigating a world where racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other systems of oppression intersect. A Black transgender woman does not experience racism and transphobia as two neatly separated realities. They are intertwined, shaping her experiences of safety, employment, housing, healthcare, and community. An LGBTQIA+ immigrant may face overlapping barriers related to language, race, citizenship, and identity. These experiences remind us that the work of justice cannot be divided into isolated concerns.

And yet, even in these realities, hope persists. Hope lives in communities that refuse to abandon one another. It lives in the courage of LGBTQIA+ people of color who have long organized, advocated, created, and cared for their communities. It lives in congregations willing to examine not only who is welcomed through their doors, but also whose voices are heard, whose leadership is trusted, and whose lives are protected. Jesus tells the disciples to learn from the fig tree. Even before summer arrives, the tender branches and emerging leaves announce that something new is growing.

Hope often begins in those small signs of transformation. A congregation recognizing racial inequities in its leadership. A young person hearing their identity affirmed in worship. A community standing alongside neighbors experiencing discrimination. A difficult conversation that opens the door to deeper understanding. None of these actions solves every injustice. But each can be a tender branch, pointing toward the world God is bringing into being.

Advent hope is not passive optimism. It is the courage to remain awake to suffering without surrendering our belief in transformation. We are not asked to know when God's promises will be fulfilled. We are asked to be faithful in the waiting.

Hope calls us to stay awake, pay attention, and participate in the transformation of the world.

HOPE

Prayer of Blessing

God of persistent hope,

May you awaken our hearts to the possibility of a world transformed.

May we have the courage to see injustice without turning away, and the humility to recognize the ways we participate in systems that cause harm.

May LGBTQIA+ people, especially those experiencing the intersecting realities of racism and discrimination, find communities of safety, dignity, and belonging.

May our hope be more than words.

May it become courage in our conversations, compassion in our relationships, and justice in our actions.

And may we remain awake to the signs of your love growing among us.

Amen.

Action

1. Pay attention. This week, seek out a story, article, book, or reflection created by an LGBTQIA+ person of color. Listen to their experiences, paying particular attention to how race, gender, sexuality, and other identities intersect.
2. Examine your community. Consider whose voices shape the decisions in your congregation. Who is represented in leadership? Whose experiences may be missing? Identify one concrete opportunity to broaden participation and shared leadership.
3. Practice active hope. Choose one organization led by LGBTQIA+ people of color and support its work through a financial gift, volunteering, or sharing its resources.



PEACE

Mark 1:1-8

Reflection

Peace is a beautiful word. We hear it in worship, exchange it with our neighbors, and sing about it throughout Advent. But what does peace actually require of us?

In the opening verses of Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist appears in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance and calling people to prepare the way of the Lord. John does not begin his ministry in a place of comfort or power. He stands in the wilderness, beyond the familiar centers of religious and political authority, calling people toward something new. His message is not simply to feel differently. It is to live differently. Repentance asks us to recognize where we have gone astray, turn toward God, and allow our lives to be transformed.

For communities of faith, this invitation is especially important as we consider the intersection of LGBTQIA+ justice and anti-racism. We cannot claim to be communities of peace while ignoring the systems that cause harm to our neighbors. We cannot celebrate LGBTQIA+ inclusion while overlooking the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people of color. And we cannot commit ourselves to racial equity without recognizing how racism intersects with gender identity, sexual orientation, economic inequality, and other experiences of marginalization.

True peace requires more than the absence of conflict. It requires the presence of justice. Consider the difference between being welcomed and experiencing belonging. A congregation may proudly proclaim that everyone is welcome. Yet an LGBTQIA+ person of color entering that community may still encounter assumptions about their identity, limited representation in leadership, or a reluctance to discuss racism. The welcome may be sincere, but the work of peace remains unfinished.

John's call to prepare the way reminds us that transformation requires intentional effort. Sometimes that means examining traditions we have never questioned. Sometimes it means listening to experiences that challenge our assumptions. Sometimes it means acknowledging harm, offering an apology, and changing our behavior. And sometimes preparing the way means giving up power so that others have the opportunity to lead. This work can be uncomfortable. It can reveal places where our communities have fallen short of the love we proclaim. But repentance is not simply about guilt or shame. It is about possibility. God invites us to recognize that the way things have always been is not necessarily the way things must remain.

For Reconciling in Christ communities, preparing the way for peace means continuing to live into our public commitments to LGBTQIA+ inclusion and anti-racism. These commitments are not destinations we reach once and for all. They are practices that shape our shared life, our relationships, and our witness in the world. The wilderness may be unfamiliar, but it is also a place where God is doing something new. Peace begins when we are willing to change what harms our neighbors and create the conditions where everyone can flourish.

PEACE

Prayer of Blessing

God of transforming peace,

May your Spirit lead us beyond the comfort of familiar paths.

May we recognize the places where our silence has allowed injustice to continue, and may we have the courage to choose another way.

May those who have experienced rejection, racism, and discrimination find communities where their dignity is honored and their gifts are celebrated.

May our repentance lead to meaningful change, our listening lead to deeper understanding, and our commitments lead to action.

Bless us with a peace rooted in justice, sustained by compassion, and shared by all your beloved children.
Amen.

Action

1. Reflect on your welcome. Read your congregation's welcome statement. How does it explicitly name LGBTQIA+ people and a commitment to anti-racism? Consider how these commitments are visible beyond the words themselves.
2. Listen and learn. Invite your congregation's leadership to explore a resource created by Black, Indigenous, or other LGBTQIA+ leaders of color. Discuss what your community might need to change in response.
3. Prepare the way. Identify one policy, practice, or tradition in your congregation that may unintentionally create barriers to full participation. Begin a conversation about how it could become more equitable and inclusive.



JOY

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Reflection

There is a particular kind of joy that comes from being truly seen. Not simply noticed or acknowledged, but recognized for the fullness of who we are. It is the joy of hearing someone pronounce your name correctly. The joy of having your pronouns respected without explanation. The joy of seeing your culture, your family, your history, and your identity reflected in the life of your faith community.

It is the joy of discovering that you do not need to leave part of yourself at the door in order to belong. In John's Gospel, we encounter John the Baptist, a witness sent to testify to the light. John is clear about his role. He is not the light himself, but he has been called to point toward it. When questioned about his identity and authority, John refuses to become something he is not. He knows who he is, and he understands the purpose of his witness. There is something deeply meaningful about that clarity.

For many LGBTQIA+ people, particularly those who also experience racism, the journey toward living authentically can be complicated by expectations imposed by families, institutions, cultures, and communities of faith. Some have been told that their identities are incompatible with their faith. Others have experienced pressure to minimize aspects of their racial or cultural identity to fit into predominantly white LGBTQIA+ spaces. Still others have been asked to set aside their LGBTQIA+ identity to remain connected to cultural or religious communities. These pressures can create the painful expectation that belonging requires becoming less of ourselves. But the light of Christ does not ask us to erase the beautiful complexity of our humanity.

Our identities and experiences are not competing pieces of who we are. They are interconnected parts of the people we have become. And joy can flourish when that wholeness is honored. John's witness reminds us that our calling is not to control the light, but to recognize and testify to it. For communities of faith, this means learning to recognize God's presence in people whose experiences may be different from our own.

It means celebrating LGBTQIA+ people of color not only when they share stories of struggle, but also when they share their creativity, leadership, wisdom, relationships, and joy. It means recognizing that joy is not simply the reward that comes after justice has been achieved. Joy is also part of how communities sustain themselves in the ongoing work of liberation. We see this in chosen families gathering around a table. In worship that honors different languages and cultures. In LGBTQIA+ young people discovering mentors who reflect their experiences. In celebrations where people can dance, sing, laugh, and live openly without fear. These moments matter.

JOY

They remind us that the work of inclusion is not only about confronting what is wrong. It is also about nurturing what is beautiful, life-giving, and possible. As we light the third candle of Advent, we are invited to consider how our communities bear witness to the light.

Are we making room for the joy of others? Are we recognizing the gifts of people whose stories have too often been overlooked? Are we creating communities where people are not merely tolerated, but celebrated? Joy grows when we recognize the light of God in one another and create space for every person to flourish.

Prayer of Blessing

God of abundant joy,

May your light shine in every place where someone has been told they do not belong.

May those who have hidden parts of themselves find the freedom to live fully and authentically.

May we celebrate the beautiful diversity of your creation, honoring the many identities, cultures, experiences, and gifts that enrich our communities.

May our joy be courageous enough to resist injustice, generous enough to make room for others, and expansive enough to hold both celebration and sorrow.

And may we become faithful witnesses to your light, recognizing your presence in every beloved child of God.

Amen.

Action

1. Celebrate the fullness of identity. Seek out music, art, poetry, or storytelling created by LGBTQIA+ people of color. Share something you discover with your congregation, giving appropriate credit and supporting the creator when possible.
2. Make joy visible. Consider whose stories and experiences are represented in your congregation's worship, educational materials, artwork, and celebrations. Identify one opportunity to expand that representation.
3. Practice celebration. Reach out to someone whose gifts have made a difference in your community. Thank them specifically for who they are and what they contribute, without expecting them to take on additional work.



LOVE

Luke 1:26-38

Reflection

Sometimes love begins with an interruption. An unexpected conversation. A moment of vulnerability. An invitation that changes how we understand ourselves and the world around us. In Luke's Gospel, the angel Gabriel visits Mary with extraordinary news.

She will bear a child, and that child will be called the Son of the Most High. Mary is understandably troubled. She asks questions. She seeks understanding. And eventually, she responds with openness to God's call. Mary's response is remarkable, not because she has every answer, but because she is willing to participate in a future she cannot yet fully imagine.

It is important to remember who Mary is in this story. She is a young Jewish woman living under Roman imperial rule. She does not hold political power or occupy a position of privilege. Her circumstances make the angel's announcement both extraordinary and deeply consequential. And yet, it is to Mary that Gabriel comes. God's transforming love enters the world through someone the powerful might easily overlook.

This is a powerful reminder for communities seeking to live more fully into God's call to justice. Throughout history, people pushed to the margins have been leaders in movements for liberation, compassion, and social transformation. Black and Brown LGBTQIA+ people have played essential roles in movements for LGBTQIA+ rights, racial justice, and community care. Yet their contributions have not always been recognized or celebrated.

Their stories remind us that the work of justice is not simply about inviting marginalized people into spaces others have already created. It is also about recognizing the wisdom, leadership, and vision that already exist within marginalized communities. Love asks us to make room for those gifts. And making room requires more than kind intentions.

It requires examining how power operates in our congregations, organizations, and communities. It requires asking whose perspectives shape our decisions, whose experiences inform our ministries, and whose voices we may have failed to hear. It requires recognizing that LGBTQIA+ justice and anti-racism are not separate expressions of God's love. They are interconnected commitments to the dignity and flourishing of our neighbors.

Mary's story also reminds us that responding to God's call can involve uncertainty. We may not know exactly how to begin a difficult conversation about racism. We may worry about making mistakes as we learn to become more inclusive. We may feel overwhelmed by the size of the challenges before us. But faithful love does not require perfect understanding before taking the first step. It invites us to listen, learn, remain accountable, and continue growing.

LOVE

Mary's response to Gabriel is not the end of her story. It is the beginning of a journey that will require courage, resilience, trust, and community. The same is true for us.

When a congregation becomes Reconciling in Christ, it makes a public commitment to welcome, inclusion, celebration, and advocacy. But that commitment is not the completion of its journey. It is a beginning. A beginning that invites the community to discover new ways of sharing leadership, strengthening relationships, addressing inequities, and embodying God's love in the world.

As Christmas approaches, we remember that God's love is not distant or abstract. God's love becomes embodied. It enters the complexity of human life. It takes shape in relationships, communities, and acts of care. And it calls us to participate. Love becomes transformative when we move beyond what we proclaim and begin living it in ways that make dignity, equity, and belonging possible for all.

Prayer of Blessing

God of courageous love,

May we hear your invitation to participate in the new things you are bringing into the world.

May we have the courage of Mary to ask questions, to trust, and to respond faithfully even when the path ahead is uncertain.

May we recognize your presence in those whose voices have been overlooked, whose identities have been questioned, and whose dignity has been denied.

May our love be more than a promise.

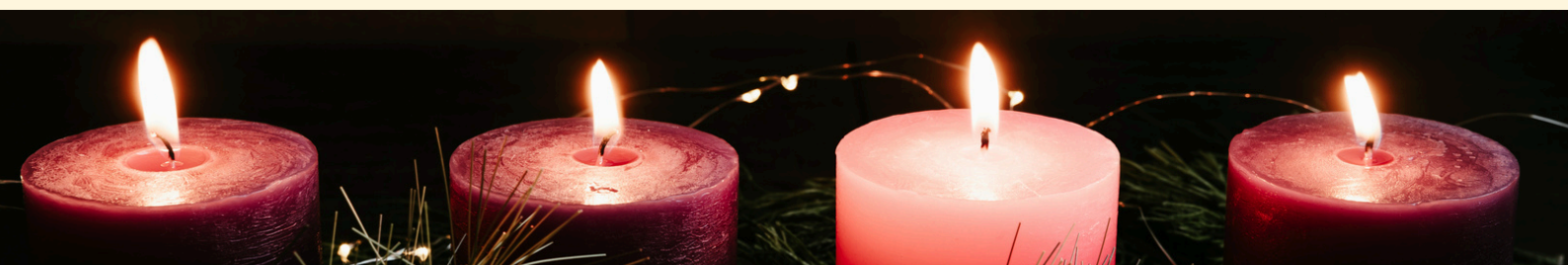
May it become welcome that is genuine, inclusion that is intentional, celebration that is joyful, and advocacy that is courageous.

And as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, may we remember that your love continues to be born wherever people choose compassion over fear, justice over indifference, and community over division.

Amen.

Action

1. Reflect on your commitments. Revisit the four public commitments of the Reconciling in Christ program. Identify one way your congregation has grown in its welcome of LGBTQIA+ people and its commitment to anti-racism, and one area where further growth is needed.
2. Make room for leadership. Consider whose perspectives are missing from leadership and decision-making in your congregation. Identify a concrete opportunity to remove barriers and support the leadership of people who have historically been excluded, without placing the burden of change solely on them.
3. Put love into action. As you prepare for Christmas, make a commitment to support an LGBTQIA+ or racial justice organization through financial giving, advocacy, or a sustained partnership. Invite others to participate.



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LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION



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