



THE HEAVENS DECLARE



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2020

AN INTRODUCTION

TO ADVENT

The four weeks leading up to Christmas Day are called Advent, from the Latin *Adventus*, which means “coming” or “arrival.” During this time we wait and prepare for the arrival of Jesus. The invitation of Advent is to slow down and thoughtfully reflect on our great need for a savior, and the joyful mystery of God sending his son, the Messiah, to be with us—an act of great love.

We welcome the season of Advent after a particularly challenging year. A global pandemic has disrupted our routines and caused much grief; the deep injustices of racism have become increasingly visible in our country; and recent national elections led to severe divisions amongst us. All of this coexists with our own personal trials, disappointments, and joys.

What a year it has been. *And the good news of the Advent season is that in the midst of all that is broken, God comes near.* This mysterious truth finds us again and again, offering a true thrill of hope in the midst of our weariness.

This year Christmas will look different for all of us. It will likely involve more time at home and fewer parties and events. Many of

our normal traditions will be disrupted. The weekly practices in this Advent booklet and the Bethany Community Church Advent Box were created with this in mind. They are an invitation for you and your household to experience the presence of God in a real way this season. Our prayer is that amidst the disappointments you are likely to feel at times, there will also be a rich opportunity to begin new traditions, connect with those we love, and become people who break into the world with hope just as Christ has done.

May this book be a blessing to you as we anticipate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.





WEEK ONE: NOVEMBER 29

THE MYSTERY OF HOPE



The theme for the first week of Advent is the *Mystery of Hope*. In the Spanish language, the verb “to hope” is **esperar**, which also means, “to wait.” In Spanish, hoping and waiting are the same word. This is very similar to how the Bible talks about hoping and waiting. Consider Romans 8:25 which says, “But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Advent is about waiting and hoping.



For many of us, this year we’ve been doing a lot of waiting: waiting for a vaccine, waiting for things to return to “normal,” waiting to go back to our schools, waiting for biblical justice and equality to be a reality for all people. As Advent begins, we turn our attention to the birth of Jesus Christ; we prepare to welcome an infant savior into our broken world.

The beginning of Matthew’s gospel offers a picture of waiting and hoping in the form of a genealogy, the list of all 41 families from

Abraham to Jesus. This long list of generations highlights the faithfulness of God in the midst of our waiting. Even though our world seems overwhelming and hopeless at times, God is there, working a way forward for all humanity. *This is the Mystery of Hope.*

This week, we practice hoping as we wait. We will do that by creating an Advent Wreath to use in the coming weeks symbolizing hope as we look ahead to Christmas and the celebration of Christ's birth.



SUPPLIES FOR THIS PRACTICE

Wooden circle, five candles, one candle holder, and collected pieces of nature.

READ

Read **Matthew 1:1-17**. What names do you recognize? What do you notice or wonder about this list? Why do you think Matthew includes this genealogy in the beginning of his story about Jesus?

ASSEMBLE

Remove the wooden tree stump slice, the five candles, and the gold candle holder from the box. Set the wood slice on a flat surface. Place one tea candle in the candle holder and place the candle holder in the middle of the wood. Arrange the other four tealight candles around the center candle.

GATHER

Bundle up and take a walk around your neighborhood, as a household or on your own! As you do so, collect small pieces of nature (greenery, pinecones, etc.) to arrange around the candles of your Advent wreath.

For thousands of years, people have been using greenery to decorate their homes. In ancient Egypt, people decorated their homes with palm branches. In Rome, it was common for evergreen branches to be used in beautifying homes. At Christmas, many of us decorate a tree in our home. These pieces of greenery are reminders of new life, new growth, and hope!

As you walk and gather, consider the simple question: *what are you hoping for this Advent season?*

REFLECT

When you return home, add the greenery to your Advent wreath and light the first candle, the candle of “hope.”

After lighting the candle, share out loud with one another or reflect in a journal on that question, *what are you hoping for this Advent season?* If you’re doing this practice on your own, write this hope down somewhere so you can return to it regularly and pray for God’s guidance as you seek to live into that hope in the coming month. If you’re sharing your hopes as a household, write them down so that you can be praying for one another throughout Advent.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of hope, we thank you for sending Jesus. As we read that long list of names from Matthew, help us to be mindful of how you were

working through each of those people, even if they did not know it at the time. Help us to trust that as we wait and hope, you are also working through us. As we prepare to welcome Jesus into our midst this Advent season, may we pay attention to the true source of hope and become people who embody that hope to the world! Amen.

LEAN IN

Each day this week, dive a little deeper into the Mystery of Hope found in Matthew 1:1-17 with the Global Monastery's daily devotional and prayer.

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YouTube: [youtube.com/bethanycommunitychurch](https://www.youtube.com/bethanycommunitychurch)

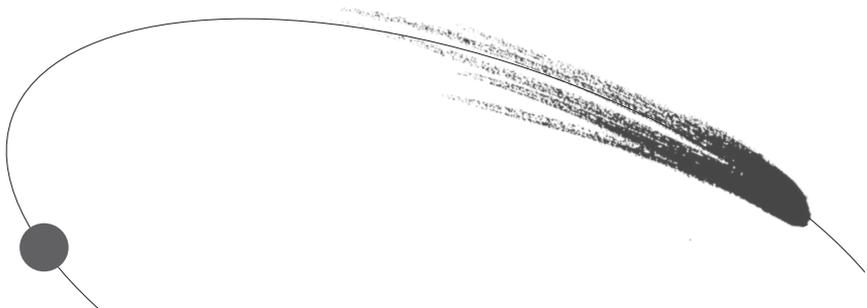


WEEK TWO: DECEMBER 6

THE MYSTERY OF JOY

This week we celebrate the Mystery of Joy. The word “joy” is used all throughout scripture to describe the experience of people who continually live in relationship with God, learning to trust more and more that God is the source of purpose and hope. **Joy is the antidote to despair.** Joy is what we experience as we learn to live in the reality of God’s pervasive goodness.

The Mystery of Joy is central to the Christmas story. Jesus came into the world so that we might know his love and goodness in real time. As we’ll see in this week’s reading and practice, true joy is experienced when we surrender ourselves to the care of God and open ourselves up to be used by God.



SUPPLIES FOR THIS PRACTICE

Small pieces of red and green paper, a pen, jar ornament with potpourri, water, and a small stovetop pot. *Optional: fresh cranberries or an orange peel.*

CREATE THE SPACE

Retrieve the jar of potpourri from your Advent box. Put four-six cups of water into the stovetop pot and pour the contents of the jar into the water. Keep the stove on low heat to maintain a simmer. Enjoy the Christmas scent as you continue with this practice!

Start this practice by lighting two candles on your Advent wreath, one to represent the *Mystery of Hope* and the second to represent this week's theme, the *Mystery of Joy*.

READ

Read **Matthew 1:18-25** and **Luke 1:46-49**.



REFLECT

Mary and Joseph are young, poor, and newly married. Even so, God mysteriously chooses them to be the parents of Jesus. Mary and Joseph faithfully respond “yes” to God’s calling and, as a result, experience great joy.

This time of year we see the word “joy” everywhere. Popular culture tends to associate joy with gifts, parties, and good food. These things are not inherently bad or wrong, but notice how this differs from the joy Mary and Joseph experienced. The source of their joy had everything to do with making themselves available to be used by God in order that the world might know the person and love of Jesus Christ.



Consider what it would look like to pursue joy this Advent season by offering yourself in service to God. Where might God be inviting you to faithfully embody love towards your neighbor with your time, creativity, and/or money? How might your “yes” to this calling cause Christmas to look different than in years past?



BRAINSTORM

Using the small pieces of red and green paper, brainstorm some ways you and your household might daily be an expression of God’s love for others. Write one loving act on each piece of paper. Below are some ideas to consider:

- Write a few Christmas cards and send them to folks living in a local elderly community.
- Call a friend or relative you haven’t spoken to in awhile. Ask “How are you?” and take time to listen.
- Make a donation to a local organization helping the unhoused in our community. Consider supporting BCC’s local mission partners, The Aurora Commons.
- Pick up canned goods and/or baby supplies and drop them at your neighborhood food bank.
- Buy a gift from a local small business or a black-owned company.
- Color paper placemats with Christmas designs and drop them off at a senior center.
- Preschool hack: have your child draw a picture of how they could serve instead of writing it.



REFLECT

Once you have written an idea on each piece of paper, put the red and green strips into the jar ornament. Hang the jar ornament on your Christmas tree. If you do not have a tree, hang it somewhere you will easily see it.

Each morning this week, remove one strip of paper from the jar. Make an effort to perform this act of love at some point during your day. Pay attention to how you feel after participating in these loving acts. Take some time to journal or talk with your household about your experience of joy through faithful love of others.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of joy, we thank you for becoming human on our behalf. We thank you for the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph which paved the way for the good news of this season. Help us to trust that joy is not to be found in the busyness or the noise of Christmas, but in You. As we live more fully into that truth, may we faithfully embody the same love and care you have shown us to others. In doing so, may we know true, abiding, and mysterious joy. Amen.

LEAN IN

Each day this week, dive a little deeper into the Mystery of Joy found in Matthew 1:18-25 with the Global Monastery's daily devotional and prayer.

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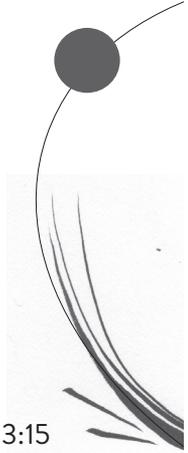
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WEEK THREE: DECEMBER 13

THE MYSTERY OF PEACE



This week we reflect on the Mystery of Peace. In Colossians 3:15 we read Paul’s instruction to “**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.**” In our world today, it’s easy for our hearts to be ruled by fear, anxiety, or discouragement. These postures take greater root in our hearts as we face our human frailty and lack-of-control in this life. If we had to choose a word to describe the year 2020, we would likely choose something like *discord*, *sickness*, or *injustice*. Chances are good we would not choose *peace*.

Yet, it is precisely in the midst of these difficult circumstances that Christ enters our world as a child who is “the Prince of Peace.” As we’ll see in this week’s reading, the Mystery of Peace has nothing to do with our circumstances and everything to do with Christ who always is *Immanuel*, *God with us*.



SUPPLIES FOR THIS PRACTICE

Glow-in-the-dark stars and adhesive stickers

CREATE THE SPACE

Start this practice by lighting three candles on your Advent wreath: one to represent the Mystery of Hope, the second to represent the Mystery of Joy, and a third to represent this week's theme, the Mystery of Peace.

READ

Read Isaiah 9:6-7 and Matthew 2:1-4.



REFLECT

Take a moment and consider Herod's response to the birth of Christ. Unlike the wise men who follow the star, Matthew tells us Herod "was frightened and all of Jerusalem with him."

Herod's fearful response to the birth of Christ is rooted in his human longing for peace. Herod believes that if he can maintain control and power, then all will be well in his mind and heart. Throughout Herod's lifetime he would take extreme measures to maintain his power. Herod built great military fortresses and executed anyone he feared would challenge his reign, including his own family. Herod died a lonely and paranoid man. He took every human measure to maintain peace and yet at the end of his life, he knew no peace.

True peace comes from Christ alone. The mystery of this peace is that we do not achieve it through controlling our circumstances as Herod attempted, but rather through surrendering to Jesus. This can be a difficult and scary thing to do. The good news is that

we surrender to the one who holds all authority (Isaiah 9:6) and uses that power to bring about our ultimate good.

SURRENDER

Take a moment and consider the fears, heartache, and disappointment you've carried with you through 2020.

If you're with a family or housemates, share your responses with one another. Or, consider speaking these things aloud to a friend or writing them down in a journal on your own.

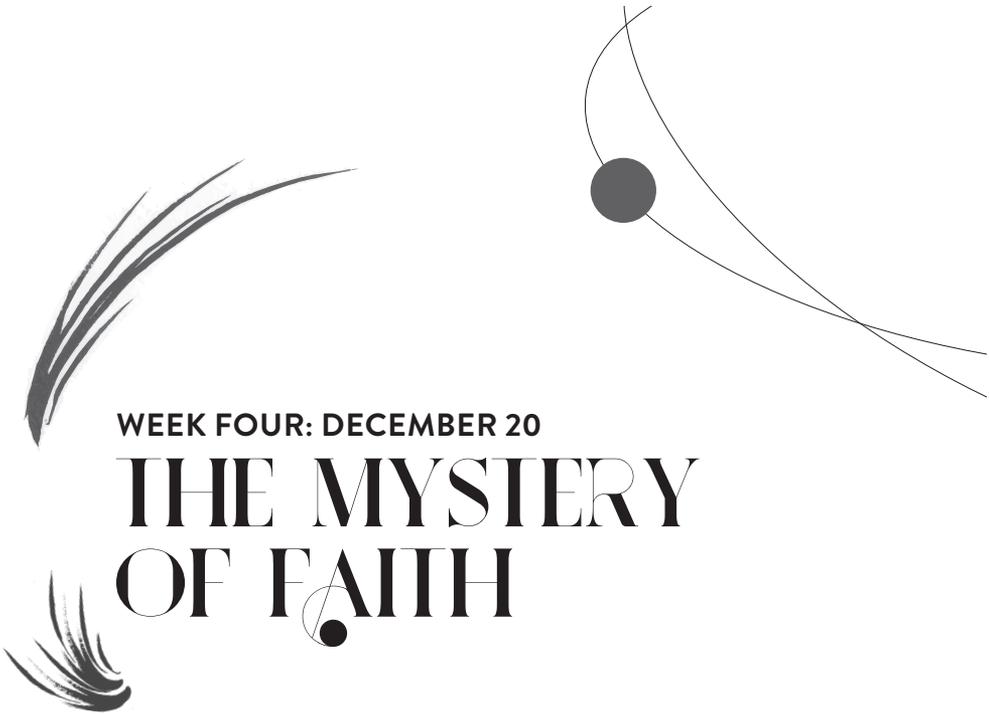
FOLLOW THE STARS

Retrieve the glow-in-the-dark stars from your Advent box. Matthew tells us the wise men see the star and choose to go after Jesus, submitting their lives to the infant king. Their action is very different from Herod who attempts to take control.

These stars represent our invitation to relinquish control and, like the wise men, to submit instead to Christ. Remove the included adhesives and attach one to the back of each star. Place the stars throughout your home, ideally in spaces where you'll see them shining in the dark! As you go about Advent, allow these stars to be a reminder of God's coming near to us in the person of Christ and inviting us not to fear and control, but to surrender and peace!

CLOSING PRAYER

God of peace, we surrender our need for control to you. We surrender our disappointment and our fears. Help us to remember that regardless of what we face today, you are a God who uses your power to come near to us. You arranged the stars in the sky; even the universe bends to your will. Surely your power and love, big enough to



WEEK FOUR: DECEMBER 20

THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

This week we reflect on the Mystery of Faith. The word “faith” can be an intimidating notion. Oftentimes in our discouragement we wonder if we have enough of it. We long for more of it.

When we look at scripture, we find that faith is less about having everything figured out; rather it’s about following the quiet voice of God in the unknown. **Faith involves taking one step at a time** and learning to trust that God is leading us even if we cannot see the entire map. In the Christmas story, we see such faith on powerful display.



SUPPLIES FOR THIS PRACTICE

Large container, small container, and lid

CREATE THE SPACE

Start this practice by lighting four candles on your Advent wreath: one to represent the Mystery of Hope, the second to represent the Mystery of Joy, the third to represent the Mystery of Peace, and a fourth for this week's theme, the Mystery of Faith.

READ

Read [Matthew 2:7-9](#).



CONSIDER

Take a moment to consider the journey of the wise men. Some scholars suggest they were following this astronomical wonder for as many as two years! What would it be like to keep going day-after-day without full knowledge of exactly where they were headed? Consider a time when you had to keep going, by faith, without clear understanding of the destination. What was that experience like for you? If you'd like, share thoughts about this experience with one another in your household.

ASSEMBLE

Retrieve the small plastic container from your box. Fill it with water and place it inside the larger container. Fill the large plastic container with water so that the small container is floating in the center. Consider adding a few evergreen sprigs from your Christmas tree and/or berries or pieces of candy cane to the water in the larger container. If you have small kids, invite your child to come up with some small holiday items to put inside! Carefully place the container in the freezer. Allow the container to freeze overnight.

REFLECT

Now we must wait for the creation to freeze. By following the instructions, you may or may not have realized that you were creating a beautiful ice candle-holder. Once frozen, remove the large container from the freezer and extract the small container. This should create a small opening in the ice circle. Light a candle, place it inside the small opening, and set it outside on a porch or walkway. You made something *by faith*, and once the wait is over it will be an offering of light to people who pass by.

Where is God inviting you, like the wise men, to live by faith in this season? It can be tempting to try and imagine the end to which God offers this invitation. Oftentimes, we simply don't know. The Mystery of Faith is learning to trust that God holds the outcome, and we are invited to simply take the next step.

What is your next, faithful step? Take some time to personally share your answer with a friend or family member.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of faith, we long to have faith in your goodness and love, but sometimes our faith feels small compared to the challenges and questions that lie before us. Help us to not become discouraged, but to seek your wisdom and way and to take the next, faithful step as best we can discern it. Help us to trust that even when we misstep, your grace is an ever present companion on our journey. Thank you for Mary, Joseph, and the wisemen whose acts of faith continue to be a gift for all of us. Amen.

LEAN IN

Each day this week, dive a little deeper into the Mystery of Faith found in Matthew 2:7-9 with the Global Monastery's daily devotional and prayer.

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CHRISTMAS EVE

THE MYSTERY OF LOVE

Today, on Christmas Eve, we celebrate the profound mystery of God's love!

Perhaps there is no greater mystery than the goodness of an all-powerful king, who comes in a manger to give us life. This is what the love of God is like. When our need is the greatest, God comes close.

SUPPLIES FOR THIS PRACTICE

Postcards, stamps, and a pen.



CREATE THE SPACE

Start this practice by lighting all five candles on your Advent wreath: one to represent the *Mystery of Hope*, the second to represent the *Mystery of Joy*, the third to represent the *Mystery*

of Peace, a fourth for this week's theme, the Mystery of Faith, and a fifth—the center candle—for today, the Mystery of Love.

READ

Read **Matthew 2:9-12** and **Isaiah 62:6-12**.

*(If you have time, consider reading the Christmas story from **Luke 2:1-21**)*

CONSIDER

Throughout history, God has been working through circumstances and people to bring about this very moment where Jesus was born. Hundreds of years before this moment, the prophet Isaiah offered this beautiful promise to humanity:

“You will be sought after.”

In other words, you will not be left alone in your struggle, your sadness, your disappointment, or your grief. There is a savior coming for you! The same is true for us: Jesus our Savior has come. He is the embodiment of God's faithful love toward us, and we celebrate this night because He is here!

Take a moment and consider the past year. Who has embodied the faithful love of Christ to you? How, specifically, did you experience love through their word or action?

Also take a moment to reflect on who in your life, this Christmas, might need to experience the faithful love of Christ embodied towards them. Share these reflections with one another in your household.

REACH OUT

Retrieve the postcards and stamps from the box. Have each person in your household take a moment and write a letter to someone in their life, thanking them for the specific way they have been a lived expression of Christ's love towards you this year.

Feel free to keep it short and sweet:

- I'm thinking of you with gratitude this Christmas, specifically for the time you _____.
- I wanted to reach out and say "thanks" for when you _____. I really needed to hear that in the moment, and it meant a lot to me!

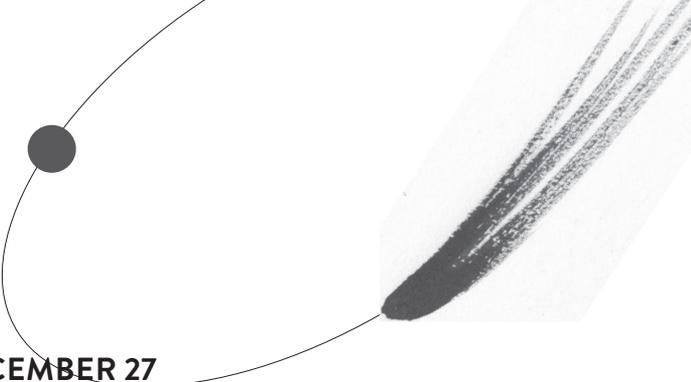
If you have extra postcards or paper, consider writing a note to someone in your life who might be in need of receiving love. Remember, simple can be powerful:

- You were on my mind. I know it's been a tough year and I just wanted to say I love you and you're not alone!

CLOSING PRAYER

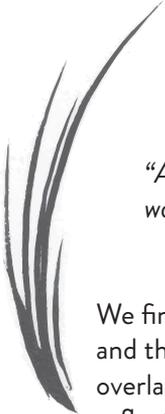
God of love, on this Christmas Eve in a year where so much has changed, we thank you that your love for us remains. Help us to receive that love for what it is, the very best gift of Christmas. Help us to move out towards the world giving that love in the same way you gave it for us. We love you. Amen.





WEEK FIVE: DECEMBER 27

THE MYSTERY OF ENDINGS & BEGINNINGS



“At every turn in the road a new Illumining is needed to find the way and a new kindling is needed to follow the way.” John S. Dunne

We find ourselves in a liminal space this week between Christmas and the New Year. It is a week where endings and beginnings overlap. This overlapping moment provides a unique space to pause, reflect, process, let go, and look ahead. This week’s practice can be done in one sitting or over multiple days.

Note: the Global Monastery daily prayer time will correspond with the verses in these practices.



SUPPLIES FOR THIS PRACTICE

Advent wreath, your own journal/paper, and a pen.

CREATE THE SPACE

Start this practice by lighting all five candles on your Advent wreath: one to represent the *Mystery of Hope*, the second to represent the *Mystery of Joy*, the third to represent the *Mystery of Peace*, the fourth to represent the *Mystery of Faith*, and the fifth to represent the *Mystery of Love*.

REFLECT (MONDAY)

Read through Psalm 139:1-6. Ask God to search this past year of your life.

Beginning with January and moving forward until December, remember your experience of 2020. Write down any significant moments for you—great moments of joy, pain, confusion, or wonder—on a piece of paper or journal.

Now, with your mind full of all these memories, start to identify the moments you were aware of God being at work in your life. Designate these moments by highlighting them.

Next, identify the moments when God seemed absent or you were unaware of His work, by highlighting them with a different color, or marking them with a different shape.

As you look at your moments from 2020, what name or title sums up your experience of the year? Write this at the top of your page.

GRIEVE (TUESDAY)

Light your candles, and return to your 2020 moments. Circle

the ones that were sad or painful at the time or presently. Pay attention to your response as you read this list of experiences to God. You may also share these experiences with one another in your household.

Now begin to slowly read through Psalm 137. Notice what emotions must be fueling the Psalmist's words. How might you identify with the writer's feelings as you reflect on your own painful experiences this past year?

Unlike most Psalms, this one ends without resolution. As much as we desire this new year to put an end to all of our griefs, the reality is that some of our sorrows will continue with us into 2021. In light of this, take your 2020 moments that were sad or painful, and invite Jesus to meet you in your grief. You may want to imagine holding these sorrows before Jesus and entrusting them to his care—both those that are finished and those that continue. Pray with one another or own your own.

GIVE THANKS (WEDNESDAY)

Once more, begin by lighting your candles and returning to your list of 2020 moments. Look through your list and draw a square around each moment for which you have experienced gratitude. Just as you did with your painful moments, present your moments of gratitude to God and be aware of the emotions that come up for you in reading them to him. Take time to share these with one another in your household.

Slowly read through Psalm 138. Notice what emotions must be fueling the Psalmist's words. How might you identify with the writer's feelings as you reflect on your own moments of gratitude in 2020?

In light of this year, how would you like to express your gratitude to God? Allow space to respond in silence, in prayer, in movement, or any way that gives voice to your thankfulness.

LOOK AHEAD (THURSDAY)

Light your candles to represent 2020, and take one final look through your moments of the year. When you are ready, fold or crumple your paper, and blow out the candles as a representation of this year closing. Pause for a moment of silence to mark this ending.

Now that you have said goodbye to 2020, begin to look ahead to 2021. How do you feel about this new year? Do you feel hopeful? Maybe you feel scared or unsure? Can you trust that God holds this new year? Share your honest reflections, hopes, and fears with the Lord, using your journal as needed.

Take a moment to quiet down and listen for God. What is God's response to your reflections above? How is He inviting you to enter into 2021? What new things is He calling you to for this year? Share this with one another.

Close your time by lighting a different candle to represent this new year. Read through Psalm 139:23-24 as a prayer of trust to God, who holds you in His hands and guides your path.

Join us in the New Year on the Global Monastery for continued weekly and daily offerings to help center yourself on Christ in 2021. Follow @globalmonastery on Instagram, join the BCC Global Monastery group on Facebook, or text "daily" to 64600 to receive daily scriptures and prayers.





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