

# Holy Waiting in a Holy Universe: A Contemplative Advent Retreat

## **Making an Advent Wreath**

In winter time evergreen boughs were often brought into the home, representing life, the awaiting of spring, and the hope of resurrection. Advent Wreaths, like Christmas trees help us to focus our devotion on a materiality of the world. Start by gathering evergreen boughs from a nearby forest or neighborhood tree, try not to buy it. Form it into a circle and place it where you will be having your devotionals. Place four candles around the perimeter of wreath (traditionally three purple and one rose colored candles are used). My wreath is made of simple Red Cedar branches and a sprig of Holly.

## **Devotionals Guide**

Once you have your wreath set up in a quiet spot, on Sunday November 30 begin your first devotional by blessing the wreath, or opening the season with a prayer. Try to set aside about 30 minutes for each devotional. Each day follow the following steps:

1. Before starting the devotional, find **an object** that represents the element for that week. Hopefully one you have found while outside. (Week one is fire, so the candles will suffice).
2. Turn off cell phones and eliminate distractions, sit in front of your wreath and take three deep breaths.
3. Open with that week's prayer (or say your own).
4. Light candle(s) and place your found object in the center of the wreath.
5. Read the meditation slowly.
6. Read devotional scriptures slowly at least twice. Each day includes a scripture from the Bible on an element (Fire, Air, Water, and Earth) and one related to the coming of Christ.
7. After you have read the devotional scripture set **a timer** for 20 minutes and sit in silence contemplating the element for that week, the scriptures read and Christ. Let your mind settle into stillness and solitude.
8. Repeat!

## **Week One: Fire**

### **Advent Wreath Blessing**

O God, by whose Word all things are sanctified, pour out thy blessing upon this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from Thee abundant graces. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

### **Prayer**

Stir up, O Lord, Thy might, we pray thee and come;  
that, defended by Thee,  
we may deserve rescue from the dangers brought on by our errors,  
and being set free by Thee, work toward our salvation.  
Who lives and reigns,  
with God the Father,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

world without end.  
Amen.

(Light one candle.)

### **Meditation**

O living flame of love.  
O lamps of fire  
In whose splendors  
The deep caverns of feeling,  
Once obscure and blind,  
Now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,  
Both warmth and light to their Beloved.  
—*Saint John of the Cross*

### **Devotionals**

- Sunday: Exodus 3:2; John 1:1-5; Genesis 3:8-15
- Monday: Deuteronomy 5:4; Isaiah 52:7-10
- Tuesday: Luke 24:32; Isaiah 40:3-5
- Wednesday: Psalms 105:39; Isaiah 40:9-11
- Thursday: Isaiah 48:10; Gen. 15:1-6
- Friday: Proverbs 17:3; Jeremiah 33:14-16
- Saturday: Matthew 5:14-16; Psalms 89:1-4

During the first week of Advent focus on the element of fire. Light a bon fire, watch the stars. In what ways do fire, heat, flame occur in the scriptures as metaphors? In our lives?

### **Week Two: Air**

#### **Prayer**

Stir up, O Lord, Thy might, we pray thee and come;  
that, defended by Thee,  
we may deserve rescue from the dangers brought on by our errors,  
and being set free by Thee, work toward our salvation.  
Who lives and reigns,  
with God the Father,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
world without end.  
Amen.

(Light two candles and, on Sunday, place a found object related to the element of Air in center of wreath.)

### **Meditation**

Each breath is a sacrament,  
an affirmation of our connection with all other living things,

a renewal of our link with our ancestors  
and a contribution to generations yet to come.  
Our breath is a part of life's breath,  
the ocean of air that envelops Earth.  
Unique in the solar system,  
air is both the creator  
and the creation of life itself.  
–David Suzuki

### **Devotionals**

- Sunday: Genesis 1:1-2; Colossians 1:1-15; Isaiah 11:1-10
- Monday: Genesis 2:7; Zechariah 6:12-13
- Tuesday: Psalms 104:3-4; Micah 5:2-4
- Wednesday: Job 12:10; Malachi 3:1-6
- Thursday: Psalms 104: 29-30; John 1:1-8
- Friday: Acts 2:1-2; John 1:9-18
- Saturday: John 3:8; Mark 1:1-3

During the second week of Advent, spend time with the element of Air. Meditate, watch your breath, or watch the clouds. How does air, breath and wind come into our lives and the scriptures?

### **Week Three: Water**

#### **Prayer**

Incline Thine ear to our prayers,  
O Lord, we beseech Thee;  
and make bright the darkness of our minds by the grace of Thy visitation.  
Who lives and reigns,  
with God the Father,  
in the unity of the Holy Ghost,  
world without end.  
Amen.

(Light three candles and, on Sunday, place a found object related to the element of Water in center of wreath.)

#### **Meditation**

Leave me along with God  
as much as may be.  
as the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,  
make me an island, set apart,  
alone with you, God, holy to you.  
Then with the turning of the tide  
prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,  
the world that rushes in on me  
till the waters come again and fold me back to you.

–*Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne*

### **Devotionals**

- Sunday: John 7:38; John 1: 1; Luke 1:5-13
- Monday: Revelations 22:17; Luke 1:14-17
- Tuesday: Isaiah 55:1; Luke 1:18-25
- Wednesday: Isaiah 58:11; Luke 1:39-45
- Thursday: John 3:5; Luke 1:46-56
- Friday: Psalms 77:16-19; Luke 1:57-66
- Saturday: Psalms 63:1; Luke 1:67-80

During the third week of Advent spend time with the element of water. Be mindful of its use and the essential part it plays in life. How does water impact our lives? Where is it found in the scriptures?

### **Week Four: Earth**

#### **Prayer**

Stir up, O Lord, Thy might, we pray thee and come;  
that, defended by Thee,  
we may deserve rescue from the dangers brought on by our errors,  
and being set free by Thee, work toward our salvation.  
Who lives and reigns,  
with God the Father,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
world without end.  
Amen.

(Light four candles and, on Sunday, place a found object related to the element of Earth in center of wreath.)

#### **Meditation**

There is nothing in me that is not of earth,  
no split instant of separateness,  
no particle that disunites me from the surroundings.  
I am no less than the earth itself.  
The rivers run through my veins,  
the winds blow in and out with my breath,  
the soil makes my flesh,  
the sun's heat smolders inside me.  
A sickness or injury that befalls the earth befalls me.  
A fouled molecule that runs through the earth runs through me.  
Where the earth is cleansed and nourished, its purity infuses me.  
The life of the earth is my life. My eyes are the earth gazing at itself.  
–*Richard Nelson*

### **Devotionals**

- Sunday: WINTER SOLSTICE: Celtic Prayer\*; Exodus 3:5; Isaiah 7:10-14;
- Monday: Genesis 2:9; Luke 1:26-35
- Tuesday: Isaiah 55:12; Isaiah 9:2-7
- CHRISTMAS EVE: Celtic Prayer\*; John 6:35; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20,
- CHRISTMAS DAY: Matthew 2:1-2, Luke 2:21-35

During the fourth week of Advent, celebrate the coming return of the sun, the birth of the Son and his eventual return. Also spend some time with the element of earth and its counterparts in the scriptures.

**\*Celtic Prayer**

Deep peace of the running wave to you,  
 Of water flowing, rising and falling, sometimes advancing, sometimes receding.  
 May the stream of your life flow unimpeded!  
 Deep peace of the running wave to you!

Deep peace of the flowing air to you,  
 Which fans your face on a sultry day,  
 The air which you breathe deeply, rhythmically,  
 Which imparts to you energy, consciousness, life.  
 Deep peace of the flowing air to you!

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you, who herself unmoving,  
 Harbors the movements  
 And facilitates the life of the ten thousand creatures,  
 While resting contented, stable, tranquil.  
 Deep peace of the quiet earth to you!

Deep peace of the shining stars to you,  
 Which stay invisible till darkness falls  
 And disclose their pure and shining presence  
 Beaming down in compassion on our turning world.  
 Deep peace of the shining stars to you!  
 (Celtic Prayer, Adapted by Christine Valters Painter)