Prayers for Advent

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE 2025

First Presbyterian Church of Hastings

Welcoming All. Living Love. Transforming Lives.

Prayers for Advent

Each day during Advent place an item in a box and say a prayer.
Bring the box to church to add to our collection.

1. Books (K-5th)
2. Books (6th-YA)
3. Board Games
4. Sports Ball
5. Gift Wrap
6. Shampoo & Conditioner
7. Granola Bars
8. Trash Bags (13 & 33 gallon)
9. Bar Soap
10. Cereal
11. Ibuprofen/Tylenol
12. Deodorant
13. Liquid Body Wash
14. Cough Drops
15. Household Cleaner
16. PB/Cheese Crackers
17. PineSol
18. Razors (Men's & Women's)
19. Spaghetti & Sauce
20. Toilet Cleaner
21. Toilet Paper
22. Mac & Cheese
23. Blanket (Twin)
24. Shaving Cream
25. Pancake Mix

Prayers for Advent

Dear Church Family, this year, once again, we are encouraging our friends and members to partake in a holy Advent through daily prayer and via a commitment to serve others. This year's devotional focuses on the things we are hoping to provide for others as well as the grace God provides for us. Here you'll find a prayer for each day of Advent as well as a list of items that are needed by some of our vital ministry partners. Each day during the season, we invite you to take a moment, light a candle, recite a prayer, and place one of the items in a box in your home. Think of it as a "reverse Advent calendar." You may bring the items to church during regular office hours and place them in the parlor. This year's items will go to benefit the following agencies: Hastings Public School Food Pantries, Catholic Social Services, Crossroads Homeless Shelter, and Toys for Tots. This Advent, may we prepare to encounter the God who meets us in our need by preparing us to meet others in their need.

Week 1: Luke 2:9-14

"Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,[a] the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'"

Week 1: "Look Up" by Damen Jensen-Heitmann

Do you think ancient shepherds got to take a lot of breaks? My understanding is that they didn't have barns or pens. They didn't put the sheep out to pasture; they took them, meaning they were with them watching and tending all day and all night. It seems to me that this is the sort of life that a person could get lost in pretty easily. The sheep need tending all the time. It would be tough to be an ancient shepherd and see anything other than sheep. Sheep in the morning. Sheep in the evening. Sheep in the night as well. Do you think ancient shepherds ever really saw anything other than sheep?

It is easy for us to get lost in our own lives. We wake up in the morning, put our heads down, and work our way through the day. Get the kids ready. Get to work. Run an errand. Make a call. Get dinner ready. Get to the activity. Get to bed. Get to sleep. Wake up and do it all again until all that we see are ourselves and the sheep in our lives. We convince ourselves that we are too busy to stop and look around. So busy, in fact, that when we are offered an invitation to marvel at something wonderful, we don't see it as an opportunity but rather as an inconvenience.

But these shepherds stop. They raise their heads. They look around. This year, during Advent, let's stop and look around. Otherwise, we'll miss the wondrous things happening in our fields.

November 30: Prayer by Damen Jensen-Heitmann

Gracious God, the stories in the bible have taught us about the faith of our ancestors. They have given us the words of your holy prophets. They have revealed to us the gift of Jesus. Those sacred stories have taught us who we are. They have been a lamp for our feet and a light for your path. May the stories we provide for others help to illuminate their lives. May their hearts be opened to the world around them. May their minds be strengthened with knowledge. May their horizons expand beyond their imaginations. Amen.

Item: Books (K-5th Grade) for Toys for Tots

Prayers for Advent

December 1: Prayer by Kathy Amyot

"Do not be afraid." The shepherds looked up into a night that had been ordinary—perhaps even dreary—just moments before. Suddenly, light broke in, and fear gave way to wonder. Glory appeared where they least expected it, and everything changed. When we look up, we remember we are not alone, even in dark or uncertain times. Children do this naturally: they look up in wonder, trusting something good is coming. Books invite us to do the same—turn the page, lean in, stay curious. Stories shape us; they teach us how to hope, how to hold sorrow and joy together, how to recognize goodness when it comes near. This Advent, may we look up from our routines and our worries. May we notice the light breaking in—softly, steadily, surely. Amen.

Item: Books (6th-Young Adult) for Toys for Tots

December 2: Junior High

Dear God, thank you for sending our savior, Jesus the Christ. We admit that sometimes we are selfish. We ask for your help to be more selfless. We are grateful for your blessings. We ask you to watch over others who need your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Item: Board Games (All Ages) for Toys for Tots

December 3: Prayer by Curtis Reimer

Dear Lord above, we look up to you with praise and gratitude for all you do for us. In our world, sports bring many people together. Teammates come together to form a lasting bond to achieve a goal. Fans unite, despite different backgrounds, to support their favorite teams. Lord, you are the coach of the ultimate team, your church. In this wonderful Christmas season, lead us to all work together, regardless of our personal beliefs, to achieve the greatest victory of loving you and loving each other. Amen

Item: Sports Ball for Toys for Tots

December 4: Prayer by Melissa Davis

Good, Gracious, and Heavenly Father, as we are wrapping gifts this holiday season, may we be reminded that every good thing in life arrives wrapped in something: sometimes in joy, sometimes in challenge, sometimes in paper bright with beauty, and sometimes in layers that are hard to open. Teach us how to unwrap each day with patience, and help us see the blessings hidden beneath the ordinary. Let us not judge the gift by its covering but look deeper for your presence within. May we offer our own lives as gifts to others, wrapped not in perfection, but in sincerity, kindness, and love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Item: Gift Wrap for Toys for Tots

December 5: Prayer by Senior High

Dear Heavenly and Gracious God, we come here to ask for forgiveness for judging people based on how they carry themselves. Not everyone has regular access to basic hygiene supplies like shampoo and conditioner. This can affect their relationships and opportunities to find success. We thank you for giving us the opportunity to access these necessities, and we hope that what we provide may be a blessing to others. In your gracious and loving name we pray, amen.

Item: Shampoo & Conditioner for Catholic Social Services

December 6: Prayer by Richard Johnson

Dear Lord, thank you for the good news of Jesus's birth! Thank you for the gift of your Son and for the promise of hope that His birth symbolizes. Please strengthen our bodies, educate our minds, nourish our souls, and equip us to share the good news around the world. Lead us as we serve others and encourage them to look up, to be positive, and to share the joy of Jesus's coming. In your holy name we pray, amen.

Item: Granola Bars for Hastings Public Schools Food Pantry

Week 2: Luke 1:30-33, 38

"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her."

Week 2: "Found Favor" by Damen Jensen-Heitmann

"For you have found favor with God." Why? The text really doesn't give us any clues as to why Mary was chosen for her task. For some mysterious reason, God looks upon Mary and decides that she is the person to help bring the light of life into the world. She doesn't ask to be chosen. It does not seem to be something that she seeks. Mary is simply there, and God chooses her. Her response is equally simple and profound: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Mary may not seek out this calling, but she responds with grace and courage when it arrives.

None of us does anything to earn the calling that God places upon our lives. We may indicate our interest. We may offer our willingness, but in truth, God simply looks upon us and decides that we too are people who can bring the light of life into the world. We may not think we are up to the task. We may not believe we are the right person. But if you can put some soap in a box and offer it to someone in need, or if you can pray on their behalf, then when the call comes, you too can say, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord."

December 7: Heather Gosda

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the lessons we learn from Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth was a woman who thought she was unable to have children. But despite her age, she was given a child. Mary was engaged to Joseph when she was given the good news that she would give birth to God's son, Jesus. These women must have had so many emotions: fear, excitement, nervousness, uncertainty and joy. But the beauty, God, is that you were with them every step of their journeys just as you are with us. This Advent when we, like Elizabeth and Mary, are feeling either unease or pure enjoyment, help us remember that you are guiding all of us in our journeys. Help us to take in your comfort and love, knowing that you are standing with us no matter where we are on our paths. In your name we pray, amen.

Item: Trash Bags (13 or 33 gallon) for Crossroads

December 8: Prayer by Brian Johnson

Omniscient God, we are in wonder and awe of your almighty mystic power. The birth accounts of John and Jesus become beautiful, meaningful stories when the strange circumstances involving their families are known. Your angel Gabriel spoke to the aged Zechariah, of Elizabeth bearing John. Six months later Gabriel spoke to Mary with news of her bearing a child to be called the Son of the Most High. Zechariah was terrified; he could not believe such a miracle, even though he was a righteous man, a priest no less. His doubt caused him to be struck mute. Mary, on the other hand, was simply perplexed. Mary received this blessing from God by saying, "Here am I." Her heart was pure. This week we are fortunate to be reminded of Mary's pure heart by gathering soap. May the gift we give remind us of Mary's pure and hopeful heart.

Item: Bar Soap for Catholic Social Services

December 9: Prayer by Junior High

Heavenly Father, thank you for nourishing our hunger. We admit to you that sometimes we take things for granted. We thank you for giving us the opportunity to help others in need. We ask you to help us fill our food pantry to help feed students and their families in our community. Amen.

Item: Cereal for Hastings Public Schools Food Pantry

December 10: Prayer by Erica Brooks

Heavenly Father, what a privilege it is to worship a God who is equal parts power and love! Your plans for my life far exceed my desires and my imagination. But when life gets busy and expectations are high, I tend to lean on my own abilities and cling tightly to my plans. Help me to have the patience of Elizabeth, whose prayers went unanswered until the timing was right. Help me to have the faith of Mary, whose life was upended by your calling for her to be Jesus' mother. Just as pain medicine brings relief, faith in your perfect plan for my life relieves me of fear and anxiety. Help me to gratefully accept not only the gifts I have prayed for, but also the gifts I did not know I needed. Amen.

Item: Ibuprofen and/or Tylenol for Crossroads

December 11: Prayer by Confirmands

Dear God, we adore your loving ways. We appreciate your kindness. We confess that we often take deodorant for granted. We admit that we are quick to judge others based on how they present themselves. We thank you for the opportunity to help others. Thank you for deodorant and the way it makes us feel confident and fresh. We hope that those in need of this deodorant may soon feel confident and fresh as well!
Item: Deodorant (Men's & Women's) for Catholic Social Services

December 12: Prayer by Damen Jensen-Heitmann

The smallest things can make all the difference. One, maybe two, dollops of soap is more than enough to clean a body, renew a spirit, and offer someone a fresh start for the day. A reminder of the gift of your grace, O God, each and every time. Thank you, O God, for the small things that matter. For showers and soap. For simple meals and warm blankets. Thank you for the gift of your son and his renewing, cleansing grace. Amen.
Item: Liquid Body Wash for Hastings Public Schools Food Pantry

December 13: Prayer by Andy Barrows

Heavenly Father, like Mary, whom you favored, we come before you with humble hearts. You are the God who makes the impossible come to pass, bringing joy to the bereaved, wholeness to the broken, reward to the needy, and a savior to a damaged world. Thank you for your promises that do not fail. Help us to trust your plan, even when it is difficult to understand. Lord Jesus, guide us to walk in faith, to speak with courage, and to live as servants of your holy word. Strengthen us to be humble and obedient and full of wonder at the generosity of this world and this child, your priceless gifts to us. Amen.
Item: Cough Drops for Crossroads

Week 3: Matthew 2:1-2, 9-10

Prayers for Advent

"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,and have come to pay him homage.'

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy."

Week 3: "Delayed Joy" by Rose Koepp

The Magi are something of a mystery. Scripture doesn't give us their names or their stories, only that they were wise enough to notice something unusual in the sky and bold enough to follow it. They saw a star that did not fit their expectations, and they chose to leave home, cross unfamiliar lands, and pursue a promise they didn't fully understand.

Their journey wasn't quick or easy; it took time. Along the way they encountered danger in the form of a paranoid king. They had to rely on their instincts, their dreams, and one another. And still they kept going, carrying costly gifts for a child they had never met, trusting in what must have felt like ridiculous hope.

Recently, many of us in the Midwest caught a glimpse of the northern lights, colors we rarely see dancing across our sky. Imagine deciding in that moment, *this must be calling me to something*, and setting off into the night. It sounds excessive... yet this is essentially what the Magi did. They followed the unfamiliar light, trusting that the Divine was up to something worth seeking.

Sometimes joy comes to us slowly. Sometimes the season feels dim or our path feels uncertain. Advent reminds us that God works through long journeys, delayed anticipation, and quiet persistence. If we keep following the light, however faint it appears, we may find ourselves, like the Magi, overwhelmed with joy.

What light is calling you toward hope this season?

December 14: Prayer by Chris Wray

Lord, we thank you for your eternal patience with us. There is so much going on in our lives, especially right now, and we are too easily distracted and overwhelmed. We travel and we cook and we socialize and we celebrate. And with all the joy of the Christmas season, sometimes it feels like we just don't have enough time for everything. Sometimes it feels like we just don't have enough time for you. Today we are donating household cleaners. We pray these products will bring health, cleanliness, and expediency to those in need and that we are all able to be a little bit more like the Magi. Help us devote ourselves to seeking you. Amen.

Item: Household Cleaner for Catholic Social Services

December 15: Prayer by Jenni Welsch

Any journey we take involves trust – in the world around us, in ourselves, and in God; it is our faith that supports this trust, that keeps us going even when the journey gets long or takes us to unexpected, perhaps even unwanted places. Sometimes it can feel as if the world does not have a place for us, or we may find ourselves doubting our abilities to navigate challenges and hard times. But we know that God has been beside us on all roads leading to this time and place, and God will not abandon us, even if the journey seemingly goes astray. Like the magi, we must persevere and lift up our eyes to the sky. Because there we will see reflections of our hope, our faith, and our God, who loves us at all times, both abundant and bleak. May God bring us blessings of peace and comfort this Advent season. May we find our path and our place in this world to bring those same blessings to others as often as we can. May we see those bright shining stars in the night sky and know that despite distance and obstacles, we can trust God, now and always. Amen.

Item: Peanut Butter and/or Cheese Snack Crackers for HPS

December 16: Prayer by Chris Wray

Dear God, you led the wise men to Jesus. When they saw Jesus, they rejoiced and offered him their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Thank you for leading us to Jesus. Thank you for teaching us to give and share with our neighbors and community. Today's item is PineSol. It has been requested for cleaning. A warm, clean place to live is a gift we can help to give others. We are happy to give to our neighbors in Hastings. We are blessed to give food and hygiene items to our students, warm blankets for people who need them, and other items to keep the people in our community safe and comfortable. Thank you for teaching us the joy that comes with giving to others during the Advent season. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Item: PineSol for Crossroads

December 17: Prayer from Book of Worship

God, it is not easy for us to wait for you. Our world worships the power that acts quickly through force. It is difficult for us to wait for the power of your rule, which comes slowly through love. While we claim to desire peace and justice, we often take part in war, hatred, and injustice. We leave little room for you to act in our lives. This Advent, show us how to clear a path for your love. Come to us in your Christ, and reveal your reign on earth. Amen.

Item: Razors (Men's & Women's) for Multiple Agencies

December 18: Prayer by Byron Jensen

Dear God, spaghetti sauce and the Magi are from different origins—one culinary, one scriptural. They both, however, embody the importance of tradition and the act of giving. The Magi's offerings symbolize the giving of gifts with deep significance, and their flight to their homeland protected Jesus and his family. Likewise, cooking and sharing a homemade meal of spaghetti with a special sauce is an act of giving and a way to show that we care for others by sticking together. May we continue following your teachings and find meaning through our own determined efforts to make this a better world. Amen.

Item: Spaghetti & Sauce for Multiple Agencies

December 19: Prayer by Rose Koepp

God of compassion, you care for our most ordinary, everyday needs. Today we pray for all those in our community who struggle to access basic necessities: items that bring comfort, dignity, and health. As we offer something as simple as toilet paper, remind us that small gifts can make a big difference. Bless those who will receive these items. May they feel seen, valued, and supported. And bless us as we give, that we may grow in gratitude, generosity, and awareness of the quiet burdens others carry. May we be instruments of your tenderness in the world. Amen

Item: Toilet Paper for Multiple Agencies

December 20: Prayer by The Senior High Youth

God, thank you for giving us light in our lives like the star of Bethlehem gave to the three wise travelers. Sometimes we are led astray by worldly things in our life, and we forget to look back to you for guidance. We thank you, Lord, for giving us all we need in life through your teachings and blessings. We pray that you help us stick through tough times in our life by looking to you for guidance. Amen.

Item: Toilet Cleaner for Multiple Agencies

Week 4: John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Week 4: "Carry the Light" by Greg Allen-Pickett

As we reach the final days of Advent, we stand on the threshold of Christmas with hearts full of waiting and hands full of the gifts we have gathered through our Reverse Advent Calendar. All month long, we have been practicing what it means to "carry the light," not in grand, dramatic gestures, but in small, steady acts of love. A can of soup, a warm blanket, a toy for a child, a box of cereal. Each item serves as a reminder that light is not only something we receive from Christ, but something we are called to bear into the world.

John's Gospel tells us that this light is not fragile or fleeting. It is not threatened by the world's darkness. Christ's light is persistent, radiant, and resilient. And when we carry it through our generosity, our compassion, our listening, and our showing up, it shines through us in ways we may never fully see.

As Christmas draws near, remember this: you are a bearer of Christ's light. When you share what you have, when you offer encouragement, when you choose kindness over cynicism, when you make space for someone who is weary, you are participating in the very work God began "in the beginning."

Tonight, tomorrow, and in all the days to come, may the light of Christ shine in you and through you: steady, hopeful, and undiminished.

December 21: Prayer by George White

May we carry the light of Christ to those who doubt. Today we pray for the skeptics and the unbelievers. Let their ears be opened to the Word, and let their hearts and minds be receptive to the celebration of the coming of the Christ child. May they be open to the gift of light, hope, love, joy, and peace that Christ brings to the world. Amen.

Item: Mac & Cheese for Hastings Public Schools Food Pantry

December 22: Prayer by Jennifer Boeve

A dark room feels limitless: does it extend a few feet or several miles? A dark room feels directionless: we search for a light switch hoping there's one there. A dark room feels dangerous: we suspect we could be hurt by what we can't see. Our lives can feel pretty dark. Our loved one is sick. Our neighbor is starving. Our child is depressed. Our hearts resent someone we once found easy to love. A light doesn't change what's in the room; it just illuminates what's there. Jesus' light may not change our circumstances, but it illuminates the grace and truth that are always present. Compelling us to draw near, it reveals even more truth the closer we get. Christ opens our hearts to see that it's never as dark as it seems. Gracious God, helps us to be living lights of your grace and truth, reminding ourselves and our world that your light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Item: Blankets for Crossroads

December 23: Prayer from Book of Common Worship

God of grace, your eternal Word took flesh among us when Mary placed her life at the service of your will. Prepare our hearts for this coming again; keep us steadfast in hope and faithful in service, that we may receive the coming of his kingdom for the sake of Jesus Christ, the ruler of all, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Item: Shaving Cream for Multiple Agencies

December 24: Prayer by Greg Allen-Pickett

On this Christmas Eve, as we prepare to welcome the Light of the World, we offer this simple gift of pancake mix for families in our community. Just as breakfast nourishes a new day, may your light nourish hope in every home. May Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, shine through our giving, our loving, and our worship. As candles glow and carols rise on Christmas Eve, shine your light into our hearts so that we may carry it into the world. Amen.

Item: Pancake Mix for Hasting Public Schools Food Pantry

Christmas With First Presbyterian

Cozy Christmas
2:00PM

A service of caroling and rejoicing is held at College View. Chancel Choir and Pastors hold a service for residents and their family members.

A Family Christmas
5:30PM

A lively service held in the sanctuary features traditional hymns, organ, a child-friendly message, and singing by candlelight.

Traditional Service
7:30PM

Held in the sanctuary, this service contains traditional hymns, music by the choir, and singing by candle light.

Holy Night
11:00PM

A contemplative service is held in the sanctuary to greet the newborn child with simple music and prayer.