

# ADVENT ONE

## Rome: A Place of Longing (Hope)



**We begin our Advent journey toward Bethlehem and the manger with a decree from Rome. Needing more money to build the Roman Empire, Caesar Augustus demands a census so that all who lived under his reign could “contribute” to his expansion of power. Whether we are a fan of those in power or not, our lives and stories are often shaped by that which is out of our immediate control. This was true in the moment of the Roman decree that would turn into the story of hope for the world. On this first week of Advent, we ask ourselves whether we are placing our hope in the empires of the world, or in the liberating through-line of God’s presence. What are we longing for this Advent, and how does it call us to act with hope?**

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved.*

*— from Romans 8: 18-25 NRSVUE*

**What I’m longing for, deep in my spirit:**

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# A PRAYER FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

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Holy and Living God, we pray for the renewal of our world.

Too often, we let fear or complacency prevent us from  
calling out the injustices of our time.

Give us courage for action, even in the midst of our longing.

Call us to a “census of hope.”

Call us to our senses

so that we may see, hear, know,  
the power of your presence with us, Emmanuel.

We pray this in the name of your Son,  
Jesus, the Christ, the Hope of Our Lives. **Amen.**

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Click this link or scan the QR code below  
to go to a short video of the scripture  
and visualization of our journey.  
(<https://youtu.be/V5itLioUr1U>)



# Monday: Our Modern Empire

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Read Luke 2: 1-3. The Advent story begins with an aerial shot of Rome, where Caesar has enacted new legislation that impacts everyone living under his rule. What does it look like to hold onto hope in our present-day power structures, when it can feel like we have so little power over the situations of our lives?

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# Tuesday: A Brief Census

Take stock of where you are now on your own journey through life. How does your body feel? How are you spending your free time? What was the last difficult conversation you had? Spend a few moments reflecting on where you've been, where you are, and where you hope to be at the end of this season.

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## Wednesday: Roman Roads

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Ancient Roman roads are fascinating to read about: they were carefully engineered for longevity and stability. Some of them, like the Appian Way, are still in use today! What time-honored traditions are most important to you this time of year? What practices or values do you hope to preserve for the future?

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## Thursday: Waiting for the World to Change

Read Romans 8: 18-25. What hopeful promise keeps you going when the "sufferings of our present time" seem insurmountable? Rather than one big supernatural event, what small but beautiful moments along the way could you name as a "revelation of God's glory?" Rather than big systemic change, can you see God's glory in the kindness of neighbors or strangers?

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# Friday: Courage vs. Complacency

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When we find ourselves “stuck” in a time of waiting for change, we can be tempted to believe that what we do as individuals doesn’t matter. What does it look like to actively work towards justice and healing for the world despite being aware of limitations and realities beyond our control?

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# Saturday: Looking to Jerusalem

We have looked through a wide-angle lens this week at power and the structures that shape our world. We have considered how to hold onto hope in the midst of suffering. How is hope related to or different from peace? Are “hope” and “peace” just feelings we experience if we’re lucky, or does it take effort?

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