



## LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

Sankofa is an African word that literally means, “It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot.” Sankofa teaches that it is good to reach back and gather the best from our past. This year our devotional looks back to the Hebrew Testament to reflect on our lives and the meaning of this Season.

Each week you will read a scripture, a brief reflection, and two questions. The first is a

“Sankofa question” designed to help you look back at your life. The second invites you to think about how you want to move forward, living more fully in this Advent Season. We invite you to ponder these questions in solitude, with a friend, or in a small group. Franciscan monk Richard Rohr said: “God comes to us disguised as our lives.” As you reflect on your own life, may you also encounter the One who came, and continues to come today.

Biblical texts are from *The Message*, unless otherwise noted.



O come, thou Wisdom from on high,  
and order all things, far and nigh;  
to us the path of knowledge show,  
And cause us in her ways to go.  
Rejoice!  
Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee,  
O Israel.

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel  
Stanza 3, Henry Sloane Coffin*



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WATCH

CLEAR

TRUST

TRIBE



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## WEEK ONE: **WATCH**

*“Watch for this: The time is coming”—God’s Decree—‘when I will keep the promise I made to the families of Israel and Judah. When that time comes, I will make a fresh and true shoot sprout from the David-Tree.’”* Jeremiah 33:14

**Watch** for this small thing—a mere shoot—as it springs from the David Tree. This Advent there will be small, but important things happening. Some shoots grow into large branches if they are tended. If we do not watch closely, we miss them.

There is more than one way to **watch** for the small but significant shoots in our lives. Sometimes slowing down is required, or perhaps a new spiritual practice could be engaged. Other times another set of eyes helps you to see what you could not see yourself. Look for small shoots this Advent.

### QUESTIONS

- When did something that seemed quite small grow into a larger and more significant presence in your life?
- In what area of your life is a small shoot most likely to sprout this Advent?



## WEEK TWO: **CLEAR**

*Look! I’m sending my messenger on ahead to clear the way for me.* Malachi 3:1

In these very last pages of the Hebrew Testament, an invitation comes to look for the one who will **clear** the way for the Messiah. John the Baptist is considered to be this one who prepared the way for Jesus. He was loud and controversial, the opposite of a small subtle shoot. He cleared the way with a chainsaw, not a weed trimmer.

John spoke as truthfully as he could to the people around him, regardless of the consequences. This **cleared the way** for a new Truth on earth. Speak the truth this Advent.

### QUESTIONS

- Has there been a time when someone spoke truthfully to you? Did it clear the way to fuller life?
- What is the most truthful or honest thing you could say this Advent?



## WEEK THREE: **TRUST**

*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might.* Isaiah 12:2 (NRSV)

**Trusting** and not being afraid was no easier back in Biblical times than today. They had lions, foreign enemies, and famine. We have recession, global warming, and a variety of monsters in our closets.

The value in looking back is we often see that we made it through times that were once very fearful for us. The Israelites recounted their history often, perhaps as a way of helping them with their current fears. Step into your fears this Advent and **trust** in God’s strength.

### QUESTIONS

- What is something you once feared but do no longer?
- What spiritual practice most helps you to trust and “be not afraid?”



## WEEK FOUR: **TRIBE**

*Throw beams of light from your dazzling throne, so Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh can see where they are going.* Psalm 80:1

Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh were **tribes** in Northern Israel in need of direction. We, too, live in **tribes**—families, church communities, states and countries. We, too, need beams of light to guide us.

We face decisions more personal as well. If anything, the questions increase this time of year. Many of them are small—this gift or that one? Even small decisions can be echoes of larger things (see Week One.) Sometimes God’s beams of light shine through our tribes. Use your **tribe** to help make a decision this Advent.

### QUESTIONS

- How have the tribes from your earlier years formed you?
- What tribe that you are a part of needs “beams of light” this Advent?