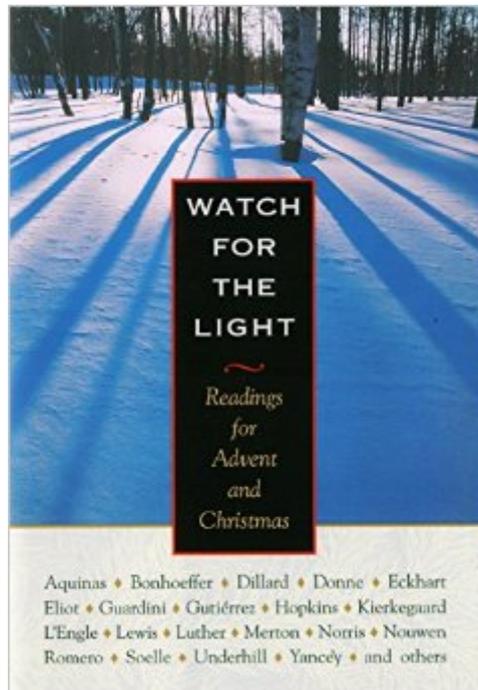


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Watch For The Light: Readings For Advent And Christmas



Synopsis

Though Christians the world over make yearly preparations for Lent, there's a conspicuous lack of good books for that other great spiritual season: Advent. All the same, this four-week period leading up to Christmas is making a comeback as growing numbers reject shopping-mall frenzy and examine the deeper meaning of the season. Ecumenical in scope, these fifty devotions invite the reader to contemplate the great themes of Christmas and the significance that the coming of Jesus has for each of us — not only during Advent, but every day. Whether dipped into at leisure or used on a daily basis, *Watch for the Light* gives the phrase "holiday preparations" a new depth and meaning. Includes writings by Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt, Sylvia Plath, J. B. Phillips, Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, Henri Nouwen, Bernard of Clairvaux, Kathleen Norris, Meister Eckhart, St. Thomas Aquinas, Karl Rahner, Isaac Penington, Madeleine L'Engle, Alfred Delp, Loretta Ross-Gotta, William Stringfellow, J. Heinrich Arnold, Edith Stein, Philip Britts, Jane Kenyon, John Howard Yoder, Emmy Arnold, Karl Barth, Oscar Romero, William Willimon, Johann Christoph Arnold, Gail Godwin, Leonardo Boff, G. M. Hopkins, Evelyn Underhill, Dorothy Day, Brennan Manning, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Romano Guardini, Annie Dillard, Martin Luther, St. John Chrysostom, Giovanni Papini, Dorothee Soelle, C. S. Lewis, Gustavo Guti rrez, Philip Yancey, J. T. Clement, Thomas Merton, Eberhard Arnold, Ernesto Cardenal, T. S. Eliot, John Donne, Gian Carlo Menotti and J rgen Moltmann.

Book Information

Hardcover: 344 pages

Publisher: Plough Publishing House (September 22, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 087486917X

ISBN-13: 978-0874869170

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1 x 7.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (121 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #60,655 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Holidays > Christmas #101 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Worship & Devotion > Meditations #199 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Worship & Devotion > Meditations

Customer Reviews

This eclectic collection of longer-than-usual daily readings for Advent through the Feast of the Epiphany succeeds in helping its readers more deeply appreciate the Christmas season. The selections are recent and ancient, ecumenical and even secular, with excerpts from Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther, T.S. Eliot, Thomas Merton, and Anne Dillard, to name a few. In various essays, for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer explores the existential meaning of Advent, Kathleen Norris contemplates what the Annunciation reveals about spiritual virginity, and John Howard Yoder considers the Incarnation as a kind of revolution. Don't expect a string of Hallmark sentiments, however. The overall tone of the book is rather hard-edged, emphasizing the poverty, paradoxes, and perplexities of the Nativity. Like a clear winter night, it's spiritually bracing stuff, biting and full of mystery.

I will admit it. I am not, generally, enamored with devotional guides. Their simple message often leaves me wanting. That was not the case with this book, which I received as a gift. Perhaps it was the year. I work for a large retail chain. Two days before Thanksgiving, I found myself loathing the "Christmas Music" being played in the store to create a seasonal buying mood. In past years Advent was a time for me to contemplate Christ's birth. This past year it turned into a time of contrasting emotions. Eager to reunite with my family, the store's frenzy left me frazzled and indifferent. I lost sight, frankly, of the reason for the season. For that reason, this book was exactly what I needed. This anthology contained a daily essay from some of the best spiritual writers. Each daily reading gave me a fresh outlook on the true meaning of the holiday season.

This is a great devotional book, and I am not usually one that finds devotionals set up like this very interesting. It is set up to have a reading each day during Advent, Christmas and through to Epiphany, and the readings are all written by people like C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Kathleen Norris, Annie Dillard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, etc. This is no, "What was the innkeeper thinking" sort of advent reading book. It is thoughtful and insightful and has a lot to say that ties into the preparative nature of advent, that is the preparation for the messiah's return. The writings vary in length and type from scholarly writings to musings to poetry or introspection. The readings are meaty enough, too, that you could certainly read them this year and again next year and they'll still be good.

I really shouldn't write a review yet, because I haven't finished the book. I'm doing so in hopes that people will buy the book in time to use it this year. This is an excellent book of essays, a few poems,

and some sermons. There are some very "heavy hitters" in the mix--check out the table of contents. I have only read through December 2 so far, but it has been a very rewarding journey just a few steps down the path. I particularly love the piece by Karl Rahner (1904-1984), a German Jesuit and theologian. It is very cutting edge theology for its time and even for today, and it reads beautifully and powerfully. Henri Nouwen is also excellent, along with Sylvia Plath's poem. Well, maybe I'll amend this review when I'm finished, but I suspect it will only be to give the book even greater praise. Do yourself a favor and read this book. You'll never look at Advent, Christmas, or most importantly, your faith, the same way again.

I wonder as I wander through the pages of this book, how it is that the editors came to choose at least three selections I'd previously read, and having once read, returned to for spiritual nourishment. I felt as if this book had been compiled for me. Gail Godwin's essay on genealogy and grace moved me so much at the time I first read it in one of her novels, that I found myself going back to it over again. Kathleen Norris's writing on The Annunciation compels one to ponder the incomprehensible and embrace the mystery of the holiness of the season. Annie Dillard's description of the Church of the Nativity is rich in detail and provokes consideration of today's Bethlehem. These three readings could fill a season of wonder, but there are enough to cover the time from November 24th to January 7th. From Sylvia Plath to St. Thomas Aquinas, there is enough diversity to please a wide range of preferences. This reader considers it somewhat of a miracle itself that so much could be packed into such a small volume. For readers and thinkers yearning to see beyond the seasonal excesses, I recommend you "Watch for the Light."

This extraordinarily rich collection of writings, mostly excerpted from larger works, offers stimulating meditations for each day of the Advent and Christmas seasons. The fifty writers include familiar names ranging from Thomas Aquinas to Henri Nouwen, Bernard of Clairvaux to Dorothy Day, John Chrysostom to C.S. Lewis, Martin Luther to Annie Dillard, T. S. Eliot to Kathleen Norris, as well as others less well-known. Nouwen shows how the fear of waiting can lead to hostile "first strike" approaches. Imprisoned, Alfred Delp calls for a "shocked awakening" from our false securities, that our hearts may be open to God's words of promise. Oscar Romero reminds us "Without poverty of spirit there can be no abundance of God." This is a veritable library in one small volume.

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