

Advent Devotional

PREPARE HIM ROOM

2020



WHAT IS ADVENT?

In Latin, advent means “coming” or “arrival.” Advent is the season in which the Church looks forward to the coming of Christ. During this time, we remember the miraculous birth of Jesus and the Old Testament promises that foretold his arrival. We also anticipate and look forward with hope to the return of Christ. As believers, we live between the first coming of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus. Advent is a joyful time to rejoice in the presence of God. Advent is also full of the expectation and anticipation of Christ’s return.

This season set aside time to draw closer to God with gratitude for the self-giving love that finds its expression in the Son of God. Each week you’ll be guided through scripture passages that invite you to reflect on your own journey as you prepare room in your heart for the Savior.

Week 1 The Before Time

Week 2 The In-Between Time

Week 3 The Incarnation

Week 4 The Greatest Commandment

THE IN-BETWEEN TIME

Week Two

December 6 - December 12



December 6 | Day 8

The In-Between Time

Romans 8:22-25

The Future Glory

²² For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. ²⁴ We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. ²⁵ But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

Revelation 22:12-13

Jesus Is Coming

¹² "Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

We currently live in the in-between times. We are between two events. To be between two things means to be near both at the same time. It's like when a high school

senior is accepted to college. He or she is still a senior in high school, but the acceptance letter has changed something in their life. There's a subtle shift between the present and future. The student is about to cross over into life as a college freshman. There's a sense of hope and anticipation of what life will be like when they finally walk onto campus as a freshman.

We live in the space between two events. We live between 2 arrivals. Two-thousand years ago, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem. His life, death, and resurrection changed the world. The story didn't end there though. The Son of God promised to return in glory with judgment and salvation for all of creation. Not only do humans suffer under the consequences of sin, but all creation is also weighed down by death and decay.

In Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he points out that all creation is groaning as if it's going through labor pains. The discomfort of sin is felt throughout all creation. Waiting for birth is another in-between time. The good news is that delivery and liberation are coming. Advent recognizes that we endure the present conditions of our life, the pain and sin of what it means to be human, all the while living with hope for the future where we will fully be adopted as children of God, not limited by our physical bodies. In this in-between time, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, a sign that there is more to come.

The eager hope and expectation of believers is not an empty time of waiting. Instead, Paul sees it as a time of energetic expectation, looking forward to a new creation where new life fills the whole world.

PRAY AND REFLECT

Have you ever felt the energetic expectation that Paul writes about? Pray that the Holy Spirit will sustain you with energy during the coming weeks as you look forward to Christ's birth.

December 7 | Day 9

The Drama of Life

Luke 1:26-38

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you

are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

On some level we all enjoy drama. If we didn't enjoy drama, we wouldn't pay money to watch a play about the Secretary of the Treasury. If we didn't enjoy drama we wouldn't spend three hours watching a movie about a boat sinking. If we didn't enjoy the highs and lows of dramatic events we wouldn't create brackets for March Madness. Life itself is dramatic. We have ups and downs and twists and turns in our own stories that make our lives significant. Drama gives us a story to tell.

None of us are immune from the drama of life. With all its twists and turns, Covid-19 has provided more than

enough drama. The drama of Covid-19 is far from over as we live in the in-between time of waiting for a vaccine. While the separation and stay at home order make life feel mundane and boring, there's drama all around us. More importantly, there's drama in us as God works through us chipping away at the parts of us that we need to let go.

The drama of life is present in Scripture too. Today, we read about Mary's response to the astonishing news that she would bear the Messiah. Did Mary pause when the angel delivered his news? Did she pause to consider everything the angel just shared with her? For one precious moment, the fate of the world was held in the hands of a teenage girl. Jesus was born of Mary, which means all of the humanity of the Savior came from a teenage girl. If you've ever known a teenage girl or been a teenage girl, then you know how dramatic God's plan truly was.

Mary was a nobody. She wasn't important before this point. No one was anticipating what was about to happen to her. No one was searching for this unknown young woman. To be honest, they would have been anticipating more from Joseph since he was a direct descendant of Israel's greatest king. Everyone was on the lookout for someone from David's lineage. Someone who would come from a man of the house of David, not a woman. Yet the angel addresses Mary as the favored one, not Joseph.

Mary said yes to taking a slight detour. Her life up to this point was scripted and planned. She was betrothed to Joseph. Her family had made plans for her future. Carrying the Savior of the world wasn't in her plan. Mary was a nobody who became a somebody because she said yes to God's plan. God looks at our hearts, not our outward appearances. Mary was just an ordinary girl, but God knew her heart. God could have chosen someone famous, someone important, or someone wealthy to bring his Son into the world. Instead, God chose an unknown young woman who was willing to be his servant.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Think of some of the most dramatic moments of your life. What happened? Is this an event of the past or are you still living in the midst of the drama? What did you learn about yourself through these dramatic events?

In the in-between time of Advent and Covid-19, are you willing to say yes to God changing your plans for the future?

Are you willing to be God's servant, like Mary, even if you don't have all the details?

Confusion and Confirmation

Matthew 2:1-12

The Magi Visit the Messiah

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Have you ever participated in a scavenger hunt? What about a scavenger hunt that takes years to complete? The Magi participated in the strangest scavenger hunt ever. They saw the rising star and assumed that the new king would be born in Jerusalem, the capital city. What greeted them when they arrived in Jerusalem wasn't confirmation that they got it right. Instead, they were met with confusion. They quickly learned they weren't quite at the right place. The Magi arrived at their supposed destination only to realize the hunt wasn't over. They were between where they came from and where they needed to be to worship the King of the Jews.

They traveled a great distance without fully understanding all the clues. The Magi didn't know about the prophecy from Micah 5:2

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one

who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

They had limited knowledge of where exactly the newborn king would be, yet they were willing to take that first step towards finding out. They were willing to say, “We don’t know.”

The Magi arrived in the city and caused enough confusion that the King summoned them to a secret meeting. Herod was greatly disturbed and confused as well. News of another king didn’t sit well with the current king. King Herod’s questions didn’t stop the Magi from continuing with their scavenger hunt. The Magi’s end goal was to worship the newborn king and until they did that, their journey wasn’t over. They received direction from the most unlikely of resources - the confused king himself. It’s when the Magi leave Jerusalem, that the star once again appears and guides their journey. The Magi continued on their journey and arrived at the house with Mary and Jesus. There, they presented the child with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The Magi didn’t have the complete picture when they began their journey. They worked through their confusion and kept moving forward to receive confirmation that they were on the right track. Often, standing in-between two places can be confusing. One option is to give up and go backward. Another option is to push through and move forward. When the Magi found the star again, they were overjoyed. In other words, their joy couldn’t be contained.

Their journey is a reminder to us that in the midst of confusion and loss of control, we can move forward one step at a time even if we don't have all the details for the future. We can keep searching and moving forward, one step at a time. If we don't give up, we will arrive at the feet of Jesus where we can worship with overwhelming joy.

PRAY AND REFLECT

Have you ever been so confused about God's plan for your life that you abandoned your search for God's presence? Pray for God to provide clear clues, like the star, for you to follow.

December 9 | Day 11

Now and Not Yet

Matthew 6:7-13

Prayer

⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from the evil one.

Luke 17:20-21

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

²⁰ Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, ²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

John 18:36

Jesus Before Pilate

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

1 Corinthians 15:24-28

²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put

under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."

Revelation 11:15

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."

As followers of Christ we proclaim, "our God reigns." When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he instructed them to pray for God's kingdom to come to earth. God's kingdom is a future hope and promise, as well as a present reality. The Kingdom of God is both now and not yet. We live in the space between inauguration of the kingdom and fulfillment of the kingdom in the last days. The kingdom will fully come into being when Christ returns. With the establishment of the Kingdom of God, a new heaven and new earth will be created that will last forever.

Jesus intimately knew about the reign of God. Jesus, as the Son of God, knows what heaven is like. In God's kingdom we enjoy righteousness, justice, peace, freedom from sin, and a restored relationship with God. In God's kingdom, everything that is evil and sinful will be eliminated. Humanity will rejoice in a new creation where

everything that was broken will be made whole. Jesus instructed his followers to pray for the fullness of God's reign to arrive in the future, all the while praying for God's will to be accomplished now. Although the full release of the kingdom is coming, Jesus is present with us, visible in and through the Church. We have a part to play in the coming Kingdom of God.

In several parables, Jesus described the coming kingdom as something we need to keep a lookout for and stay awake for so we don't sleep through the invitation. This requires perseverance and watchfulness on our part. Our inheritance is coming. Don't give up. Keep praying for the coming reign of God.

In acknowledging that there is a kingdom, we acknowledge that there is a king. Jesus is the king of kings, lord of lords. To Christ alone we give our worship and praise. This season, practice perseverance and don't give up on the coming Kingdom of God.

PRAY AND REFLECT

Pray through the Lord's Prayer, pausing to reflect on each line. Let each line of the Lord's Prayer wash over you as you pray for God's will to take root in your heart.

December 10 | Day 12

Exiled and Called Home

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

A Letter to the Exiles

¹ This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

⁴ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

1 Peter 1:1-2, 6-7

¹ This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am writing to God’s chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia,

Asia, and Bithynia. ² God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

May God give you more and more grace and peace.

⁶ So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while.

⁷ These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold – though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

Prophets, like Jeremiah, were commanded by God to preach messages of repentance to generations of Jews. Time and time again God's people chose evil practices. They ignored justice and turned their backs on God, embracing idol worship. As a consequence, the people of Judah were carried off into exile by Babylon. Unable to return to their homes, the people of Judah suddenly found themselves exiled to a foreign nation. They lost their homes, families, freedoms, and place of worship. Instead of instructing them to fight against their captors, the Lord instructs them to thrive and flourish in this new land. They are to start small by building houses for protection and gardens for nourishment. The people are not to decrease in number, but instead are instructed to grow their families.

Life in exile is possible, even good, if the people pray for the peace and prosperity of the city they now find themselves in.

In the New Testament, Peter wrote to a different group of exiles. After the ascension of Jesus, the church exploded and carried the good news of the gospel to surrounding nations. Countless numbers of Gentiles and Jews embraced the gospel and became followers of Jesus. As new Christians put away their old way of living and started living by following Jesus' example, they found themselves out of place with their contemporary culture. They no longer fit in. This new community longed for the fulfillment of a promise and a home they had never seen before.

Peter calls this community of believers temporary residents or foreigners. This is not their final destination; it's only the space in-between now and their final forever. For those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ, this is a temporary living situation. We, like the Jews in Babylon, can't go back to living the same way we did before we knew Jesus. Our faith compels us to live counter culturally, which means we are exiles living in a world that doesn't quite feel like home anymore.

Peter is realistic about the trials and suffering we will face as Christians. He doesn't paper over the difficulty of living as exiles in our own cities and homes. However, he notes that the trials aren't pointless. The trials refine and

purify our faith, burning away unnecessary parts that distract us from God. In Peter's words, "there is wonderful joy ahead." In the meantime, cling to the living hope we have in Jesus Christ; pray for the peace and prosperity of the place you find yourself.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Have you ever compromised your beliefs in order to fit in with those around you?

What did you give up in order to fit in? At the time, did you recognize that you were living contrary to your beliefs? Why or why not?

Can you pinpoint a time in your life when you learned a valuable lesson through suffering and trials? What lesson did you learn, and how did that change your life? Take a moment to thank God for this valuable lesson.

December 11 | Day 13

Sabbath

Take a break to rest in God's presence and worship the Lord.

December 12 | Day 14

Silence & Stillness

In the midst of a busy holiday season, set aside time today to be silent and still before the Lord. Remove your devices and any distractions. Find a place where you can be alone, even if just for a few minutes.