

*Advent Devotional*

# PREPARE HIM ROOM

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2020



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# 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. This year’s theme, ‘prepare Him room,’ is a reference to the traditional Christmas hymn, *Joy to the World*. This 18th century hymn celebrates the second coming of Christ and reminds us to intentionally focus on Christ amidst the hustle of this season. Today, during advent, 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 BEFORE TIME

Week One

November 29 - December 5



*The Before Time*

Matthew 1:18-23

The Birth of Jesus Christ

<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

<sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Every one of us has moments that mark us. These are moments that have changed the direction of our lives. When you sift through your memories for these moments you may notice that your life is split into two parts - before this event and after this event. There's always a time before. Think back to the time before you got your license. Or before you moved to college. Before smartphones. Or



before heartache. Before the death of a loved one. Before the diagnosis. These before moments might be something we cherish or something we are glad to move on from.

Before and after. The after moments are opportunities for growth and transformation. In some way the path forward has changed, and we either embrace it or fight it. While there are personal moments that impact our individual lives, there are also major cultural shifts and events happening on the global stage that mark our lives; 2020 has been a year full of defining events. The arrival of COVID-19 brought with it stay at home orders, face masks, and a deadly diagnosis for vulnerable populations. The impact of COVID-19 can be felt in every corner of the world. It's rare that every nation is talking about and facing the same issue. Together.

We find ourselves in a culture shifting, world changing event. Advent is an opportunity to remember another culture shifting, world changing event - the birth of Jesus. Not only do we remember Jesus' birth, we remember the life he lived and why it was necessary that he came and took on flesh. In today's passage, we have two names for Jesus. Jesus and Immanuel. Jesus means "Yahweh saves" and describes what Jesus does. The second name, Immanuel, means "God with us" and describes who Jesus is. This season, we are reminded that no matter what before and after moments we face, God is with us. We are not alone.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Think of a turning point in your life. How would your life be different if this event had not happened? While we can't definitively know the answer, who would you be without this moment to mark you?

What are some before/after moments in your personal life that have helped you grow?

What are some before/after moments that have changed the world?

Who has been with you and supported you through your hardest before/after moments? Give thanks to God for that person.

*November 30 | Day 2*

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### *The Struggle Is Real*

Matthew 2:13-18

The Escape To Egypt

<sup>13</sup>When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

<sup>14</sup>So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup>where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

<sup>16</sup>When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. <sup>17</sup>Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup>“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

### Psalm 34:18

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

The Before Time has become a title to describe life before the pandemic of 2020. It describes life before we lost our schedules, our routines, and our security. Before businesses were shut down and jobs were lost. Before we lost our loved ones. As we begin this journey forward, it's important to acknowledge where we find ourselves in this cultural moment. This year, life looks different than it did a year ago. Maybe your table will be emptier than usual or have gaps where loved ones used to sit. Maybe your plans have been cancelled or postponed to an unknown date. Maybe you are angry about recent events and can't seem to let go. Maybe you don't feel that joyful sense of holiday spirit yet. Whatever you are feeling is valid.

For many worshipping communities, Blue Christmas worship services have become a way to acknowledge that

the struggles we face are real. Observed on the longest night of the year, this year on Monday December 21<sup>st</sup>, Blue Christmas services testify to the struggles of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. After Jesus was born, his family escaped to Egypt so that he would be spared the wrath of King Herod. Wrapped within the story of Jesus' birth is also the story of pain and loss.

*O Holy Night*, often sung close to Christmas Day, reminds us of the weariness that we might feel during this season.

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,  
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth;  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;  
Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices!  
O night divine! O night when Christ was born.

The world is weary. If you feel burdened and burnt out by everything happening in and around you, give yourself space today to be honest about your struggles. It might be hard to put on a cheerful smile this season, and that's ok. The thrill of hope is coming. A new day of rejoicing is dawning. This long night of darkness won't last forever.

## PRAY AND REFLECT

Think through the events of 2020. Be honest about your emotional wellbeing. Today, how do you feel? Are you weary? Where are you depleted? Turn those thoughts into honest prayers about where you emotionally find yourself.

*December 1 | Day 3*

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### *The Long Wait*

Psalm 13

<sup>1</sup>How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?

<sup>2</sup>How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day  
after day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

<sup>3</sup>Look on me and answer, Lord my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,

<sup>4</sup>and my enemy will say, I have overcome him."  
And my foes will rejoice when I fall.

<sup>5</sup>But I trust in your unfailing love;  
My heart rejoices in your salvation

‘I will sing the Lord’s praise,  
For he has been good to me.

### Philippians 1:6

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

How much longer will this go on? In the last nine months, have you had that thought? How much longer will this pandemic go on? How much longer will we have to physically stay apart? How much longer will disunity rule in our communities? We, like the psalmist, cry out to God with a desire for answers. Writing from a place of anxiety, you can feel the urgency of the author.

Few people enjoy the process of waiting for answers. Whether it’s waiting for test results or waiting for a reply to our email, we are impatient. The Advent hymn, *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*, reminds us that Jesus’ arrival was something centuries of faithful followers had waited for and expected for a long time.

Come thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel’s strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;

Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.

Often our anxieties and fears keep us from trusting in God's timing. In this season, are you holding onto your anxieties? There is another option. Trusting God. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul reminds his readers that he is confident in God's timing. Paul's confidence isn't based on his circumstances, but rather in the character and action of God. God is going to finish what he started. Don't let your anxiety and fears lead you to give up just because the wait is longer than you expected.

Psalm 13 is a comfort, even if answers aren't readily available. The psalmist turns and remembers the past with clearer eyes to view the ways God has continued to act throughout history. Like the psalmist, let your prayer be to trust in God's unfailing love and rejoice in God's salvation.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

What anxious thoughts have you had today or in the past week?

What sorrow is weighing down your heart?

On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you in God following through until the day when Christ returns?

What truth from scripture can you meditate on to boost your confidence in God?

## *December 2 | Day 4*

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### *Disorientation To Reorientation*

Genesis 1:1, 1:26, 1:27, 1:31, 2:17

In the beginning God...said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

<sup>45</sup> So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

The story of creation is one of chaos and order. Orientation and then disorientation. Out of chaos, God speaks creation into being and declares it to be very good. The pinnacle of the creation story is humanity made in the



image and likeness of God. God breathed life into their lungs, and they came alive. As creations of God, our worth and dignity comes from our creator. We are image bearers of God.

The idyllic scene in the Garden of Eden is shattered by what comes next. Humanity rebelled against their Creator. In doing so, they declared to God that they knew what was good, and it wasn't what God declared good. Humanity went from order and orientation in their relationship with God to chaos and disorientation.

Adam and Eve didn't experience an immediate physical death when they ate from the tree. They experienced a spiritual separation from God, one that could only be bridged by God Himself. Christ came into the world as a human to do what humanity could not. Christ reoriented humanity into a right relationship with its Creator. During this season, we anticipate Christ's return when the whole world will be created anew.

## PRAY AND REFLECT

What areas of your life feel chaotic? In what areas of your life do you feel disoriented or pointed in the wrong direction? Turn your answers into a prayer for God to reorient you to Himself.

## *December 3 | Day 5*

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### *Life In The Rearview*

Exodus 16:1-5

Manna and Quail

<sup>1</sup>The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

<sup>4</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

John 6:30-35

<sup>30</sup> So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup> Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my

Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

<sup>34</sup> "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

The Israelites were God's chosen people. They wandered in the desert for 40 years before claiming the promise that God had for them. Those 40 years offered many chances for the Israelites to complain. Mostly against Moses and Aaron, but really against God. If we are not careful, complaining and grumbling can become our default nature. The Israelites lived life in the rearview mirror, always judging their past circumstances as better than the future hope that God was offering them.

We might not be all that different from the Israelites. We spend time looking at the past with longing and wish we could return to simpler times. A lot of us are attached to something or maybe a lot of somethings. It takes a big change or a loss for us to recognize what we are attached to. In Egypt, the Israelites were enslaved, controlled, and limited in their advancement. They were so attached to one way of living that they had a hard time adjusting to a different way of living. Covid-19 has changed our way of life. What part of your life pre-Covid are you attached to?

Wandering in the desert revealed many of the things the Israelites were attached to that were not their relationship with God. Jesus called himself the bread of life. In Jesus we have life and sustenance. He told his followers that anyone who came to Him would not be hungry and anyone who believed in Him would not be thirsty. Within this description is an invitation to come to Jesus for nourishment. However, we can't find our way to Jesus if we insist on living life by looking backwards.

As we anticipate the birth of Jesus, prepare room in your lives by detaching from the things that keep you from looking forward to what's next.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

What about your life in The Before Time are you still attached to?

What losses are you clinging to that keep you from looking forward and anticipating what God has planned next?

What ways is God providing for your needs that might not be what you expected?

*December 4 | Day 6*

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*Sabbath*

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

*December 5 | Day 7*

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*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 distractions. Find a place where you can be alone, even if just for a few minutes.