

The Lord is With You!
An Advent Devotional From Luke 1

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Introduction

Happy Advent!

Advent is a season on the church calendar designed specifically to make us slow down and build anticipation for Christmas. In Advent, we are called to join ancient Israel in the anticipation they felt as they waited centuries for their greatest hope to be fulfilled; their God had promised he would be with them! We also identify with Mary, a young girl who received a big promise. It was through her that God would join his people. Her Son, Jesus, was going to be *Immanuel*, God with us!

We, too, are waiting and longing for Jesus' return into this world to be its King and to be God with us for people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Advent's call to reflection and prayer is meant to build anticipation in our hearts for that return.

Unfortunately, the retail calendar reflects something different as we get busy, focused not on Jesus and his First *or* Second Coming, but on those things that are placed right in front our of faces.

It is our hope that this little guide will, combined with prayer, an Advent wreath, and a little discipline, provide you and your family an opportunity to slow down and experience God with us!

The Staff of
Redeemer Christian
Church

First Sunday of Advent Luke 1:1-25

Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.

Luke 1:12-15a

God created humankind to reflect his glory back to him and toward his creation. Like any mirror, humanity works best when the Person they are reflecting is nearby. After God created his earth and put the first Man, Adam, and the first Woman, Eve in his creation to image him, he didn't step out of creation. He spent time walking and talking with his image bearers. He related to them like an old friend, walking with them in the cool of the day (Ge 3:8).

But the Man and the Woman sinned against God, believing they could rule his creation in his place instead of as his ambassadors. Humanity's relationship with God was fractured and the Man and the Woman were sent out of the Garden where they had lived with God (Ge 3:24). God was not willing to leave his people without any hope; however, and promised that he would restore their friendship through a child given through a woman (Ge 3:14-15).

To remind his people that he would not stay away forever, God instructed them to build a tabernacle (think about the fanciest tent you've ever seen and add a lot of gold!) where he

would reside with his people. God didn't come out of his tabernacle, though, and the only people allowed to enter his home were priests, (all from the Hebrew tribe of Levi) who were charged with taking care of his home, offering sacrifices, and burning incense. God was near and among his people, but not with them.

The priests made their sacrifices and burned their incense, day after day for a millennia. They went beyond God's house in a tent to a grand temple, until one day, an elderly, childless priest got the coveted, once-in-a-lifetime job of entering the temple, going almost to the Holy of Holies and burning incense.¹ This priest, Zechariah, was likely excited for the opportunity. Perhaps he had waited years for this honor! But he was not prepared for what happened next. His lot had not been drawn by accident; God intended to give Zechariah big news through one of his angels, Gabriel. Zechariah and his barren wife, Elizabeth were going to have a boy! Not just any boy either; this boy, whose name was to be called John, had a very special mission. His job was to tell people that God's isolation from his people was coming to an end. God was going to be with them (Mt 2:3-4)!

Zechariah was skeptical and instead of responding in worship and excitement, anticipating what God was going to do, he responded with disbelief and, as a result of not receiving God's good news, was made mute. But God was still faithful to what he promised to do and before long, Elizabeth was pregnant with a son named John.

Monday

Exodus 3:1-12

What was Moses' response to God telling him to go back to Egypt and confront Pharaoh?

What reason did God give Moses for confidence?

Tuesday

Judges 6:33-40

What was God asking Gideon to do?

Why do you think Gideon kept testing God?

Why was Gideon afraid of God's anger?

Was it right for him to test God?

Wednesday

Isaiah 6:1-8

Did Isaiah believe he was worthy to be sent by God? Was he correct?

What was done to Isaiah so that he could carry out his mission?

What do you think was the significance of the angel and the coal?

Thursday

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Why did Jeremiah tell God he wasn't qualified?

Does God accept his reason? What does God do to Jeremiah?

If you're young, what does this mean for you? What if you're not quite so young anymore?

Friday

Acts 9:1-19

What was Saul doing to the disciples of the Lord?

Why do you think Jesus called a man like this?

Zechariah was made mute. What happened to Saul? What might be the significance of Saul's experience?

Saturday

This week, we saw God call many people to do hard things for him.

Why do you think they were nervous or afraid?

What comfort does God give us when he asks us to do hard things for him?

Second Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:26-38

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Luke 1:30-33

How would you react if an angel showed up at your house? If you're anything like Mary, then you would probably be very afraid. Angels in the Old Testament occasionally brought good news to people, but very often they brought judgment. Perhaps the first thought to race through Mary's mind was "What have I done to anger God?" But rather than tell Mary about all that she had done wrong, the angel Gabriel (the same angel who appeared to Zechariah in the Temple) said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Lk 1:28)

Mary received God's unmerited favor, his grace, and the evidence of that favor was that God was with her. He was far away in the Temple in Jerusalem. He was ruling from Caesar's palace in Rome. He wasn't even confined to his own throne in heaven. God was with this teenage, virgin girl, living in the backwoods part of the remotest portions of the Roman Empire. God was going to enter into history, not in the center of power, but rather at the edges of the known world.

Mary didn't need to be afraid of this angel. She didn't need to fear the world. She needn't fear God's wrath. Not because God wasn't awesome and terrifying, but because he had chosen her specifically to be a recipient of his grace.

In C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lucy, a small child, asks if the great Lion-king Aslan is safe. Mr. Beaver exclaims, "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."² God is powerful and almighty. He judges sin and will restore his creation. He wages war against enemies and secures peace. But he is good and he had invited Mary to be an integral part of his promise to Eve. God was going to be with her because through her, his Son would be born, ready to crush the snake who had lied to Eve in the garden.

You might be thinking, "That's great for Mary! But how is that good news for me?" This boy, who was to be named Jesus, wasn't just going to stay at home with his mother Mary. He was going to be a King over all of his people, sitting on the throne of his earthly ancestor David, in a way no mere mortal could; forever and without end, bringing peace, justice, and reconciliation with God himself. Mary was told "God is with you", but Jesus was to be the long-prophesied *Immanuel* - God with us (Is 7:14, Mt 1:23).³

What is the proper response to this good news that God is with us? Is it disbelief, like Zechariah? Or worship and openness to the movement of God, like Mary, who says, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me

according to your word” (Lk 1:38)? As you go through this Advent season, may worship and celebration accompany the anticipation that builds as we get closer to Christmas!

Monday

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Did God pick the biggest or strongest son of Jesse to be the future king?

Why or why not? What is the reason God gives?

David was not yet king, but what does the Bible say happened to him? Why might this be significant?

Tuesday

2 Samuel 7:1-16

What does David want to do for God? Does God let him do this thing?

What does God promise to do for David?

What might this have to do with Jesus?

Wednesday

Jeremiah 29:4-14

What is going to happen to God’s people?

How does God want them to respond?

What does he promise he will do for them?

Does he come through? (Ezra 1:1-4, 2:1-2)

Friday

Micah 5:1-5

Micah's prophecy comes at a time of war for Israel, but he prophesies a coming rescue.

What are the similarities between this prophecy and Jesus?

Mary was familiar with Micah. How do you think this book affected her?

Saturday

God has made his people a lot of promises.

Given what we looked at last week, why can his people trust that he will come through on his promises?

What does this mean for you as a Christian? What has God promised us?

Third Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-56

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his
servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call
me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for
me,
and holy is his name.*

Luke 1:46-48

What is the best piece of news you ever received? Could you keep it to yourself? How long did it take before you spilled the beans? If you're like me, not sharing good news is the hardest thing in the world. You get giddy and can't keep a straight face. You rush home to share with your family or call mom immediately. Whenever I found out my wife was pregnant, I told everyone I met!

Mary was the same way. Mary's worshipful response could not be contained. She wanted somebody to celebrate with and who better than her cousin, Elizabeth, who also had received good news concerning her son, John and also was miraculously pregnant. Elizabeth had been barren and was now far beyond her childbearing years. So, Mary traveled to Judah to visit Elizabeth who was by now six months pregnant.

But Mary's news wasn't like other good news. Her pregnancy wasn't like any other pregnancy. The child she carried in her womb was the promised Savior, a testimony to God's

faithful mercy to Israel “from generation to generation.”

Jesus had been eagerly expected by Israel and Mary had graciously been chosen by God to deliver him into this world for his first coming, his *advent*. Her excitement should give us a clue about how Christians today should think about Jesus’ second coming. Does the thought of Jesus’ return bring anxiety? Or does it cause you to break out into song? For Mary, Jesus’ arrival causes her soul to magnify the Lord and rejoice in God her Savior” (Lk 1:46). Likewise, Christians should be exuberant that Jesus will return soon. The Bible says we live in the “last days” (Acts 2:17) or the “last hour” (1 John 1:18), but it doesn’t tell us how long that period is. Mary knew her Son was coming in nine months; we have been in eager anticipation for two thousand years. It can be easy for excitement to dim, or for us to become fearful. Yet the length of time does not change the ultimate reality. Like Israel had waited for four hundred years for the Messiah, and Mary waited nine months for Jesus, we wait knowing that God has been faithful to Israel and to Mary and he will be faithful to us.

May we join Mary in worship even before the promise is fulfilled!

Monday

Isaiah 9:1-7

What did God promise Israel?

Isaiah was written about 800 years before Jesus was born. Would you have been willing to wait that long for a promise to come true?

Tuesday

John 14:1-7

What does Jesus say he is doing?

Why is that a comfort for the disciples?

How does Jesus tell the disciples they can go where he is going?

Wednesday

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

What does Paul say Christians are doing when they take communion?

Why do you think it is important to remember that Jesus is coming back when we take communion?

Thursday

2 Peter 3:1-13

When does Peter say the Lord (Jesus) will return?

Peter is warning the church about a specific type of person and attitude. What is that attitude?

What is the payoff for patiently waiting for Jesus' return?

Friday

Revelation 21:1-8

What do you think is the best part of this prophecy about the very end of time?

How is Jesus' first coming a sample of what is going to happen here at his second coming?

Saturday

Mary was able to see the promise of the Savior coming to Israel after the nation had waited centuries. What an honor!

How exciting was Jesus' first coming for those involved?

How will Jesus' second coming compare to his first coming? Will it be worth the wait?

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:57-80

*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets
from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us.*

Luke 1:68-71

Do you remember Zechariah from the first week of Advent? He hadn't been able to speak since he had spouted disbelief at God's promise. Unlike Mary, he hadn't trusted God's ability to fulfill his promise. But God's promise wasn't contingent on Zechariah's belief or disbelief. God was going to do what he said he was going to do no matter what.

What did change, was his ability to enjoy God's promise. For nine months, Zechariah was deaf and mute, unable to complain or to celebrate. His mouth and ears were sealed, and Zechariah was able only to dwell on God's promise.

When was the last time you were away from Wi-Fi or cell service for a prolonged period, unable to hear all the cares of the world posted on social media or coming from the 24-hour news cycle? What was the effect this had on your soul? My guess is that at first, you nervously reached for your phone, only to be disappointed to see "No Service" instead of reception bars. But after a while, did you breathe a little easier? If all you did during that

time of care and concern was to mediate on the Word of God, how much easier would it be to take believe God's promises to you?

Zechariah was forced to think about what God told him through the Angel Gabriel for nine months and when the day of John's birth finally arrived, by scratching out on a tablet John's name in accordance with the promise of God, Zechariah showed that the promise had worked his way into his soul. Immediately, Zechariah regained his speech and instead of the disbelief that had characterized him prior to John's conception, he was so moved to worship God that those around him were in turn shaken and amazed (Lk 1:64-66). As Matthew Henry, the Puritan theologian puts it, "Our tongue is most *our glory* when it is employed for *God's glory*."⁴

When you hear God's promises to his people - that he will rescue them from sin, reconcile them to himself, and one day return as King - do you believe him? Or do you scoff? Your answer won't change whether or not God does the work he has set out to do through the life, death, resurrection, and coming return of his Son; however it does shape whether your voice praises God and impacts your neighbors, family, and friends or is just another complaining voice in a room full of complaining voices.

Monday

Exodus 15:1-21

God has just rescued Israel from Pharaoh. What is Moses' first reaction? Is he alone?

Why do you think his worship is so contagious?

Moses' sister Miriam (Mary is derived from Miriam!) also breaks out in worship. Is she alone?

Tuesday

2 Samuel 6:14-23

Was David's worship contagious?

Did everyone get involved?

How did David react? Did he stop worshipping God?

Wednesday

Nehemiah 8:13-18

God's people have just been able to rebuild Israel after their exile in Babylon. Why do you think reading the law caused them to celebrate with a feast?

What do you think is the significance of the people celebrating together?

Thursday

Luke 3:1-22

Zechariah's son, John the Baptist, grew up and preached to large crowds of people "good news" about Jesus.

What about John's ministry is different from Zechariah's?

What is similar?

In Luke 3:4, John takes a prophecy about God and applies it to Jesus. Why do you think this is "good news"?

Friday

Revelation 19:6-10

This passage is about Jesus' second coming and meeting with his bride, the church.

How do the people react to Jesus' second coming?

How loud was their worship?

Is our excitement that Jesus has made his first coming worthy of his second coming?

Saturday

This week, we've seen worship spill out from person to person to person, until crowds are honoring God.

Does your worship of God inspire others?

Does your worship ever bother people who don't love God (like Micah)?

Note that the Bible doesn't give us "one way" that we worship God. If our worship is uninspiring, where does the problem really lie?

Christmas Day

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2:1-7

The circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth seem unremarkable. A poor mother, possibly staying in the guest room of her in-laws' home, goes into labor and gives birth - like many poor mothers in her day - in a stable.⁵ Perhaps, this morning feels unremarkable to you - just another holiday to get through.

But what made the birth of this out-of-town Galilean peasant so important wasn't his family (a carpenter and a peasant woman!), its location (no royal palace for this infant), or the fact that it would adorn Christmas cards complete with some artistic liberty (the wise men won't show up for two years and the animals are more than likely out in the field). The birth of the vulnerable baby Jesus is important because, through this child, the

Kingdom of God is getting ready for a battle with the kingdoms of the world. Oppression and pain, sin and suffering, idolatry and avarice began their long fall on an otherwise quiet night in Bethlehem⁶ because Jesus is literally *Immanuel*, God with us!

This momentous occasion may be shockingly humble in human terms, but where God walks, worship cannot help but happen. An angelic host fills the cracks as the wall between heaven and earth begins to splinter and invites not Roman Caesars or Syrian Governors, but shepherds in the field to join them in adoration of this new-born King.

As you sit on the floor or around a table this Christmas, you might not feel important or special. The holiday “magic” might not have satisfied you the way Christmas specials promised it would. This may be just another Christmas. Yet, the Good News Mary heard and the shepherds celebrated is true for you in the ordinary times of your life. God is with you! He has come to tear down the walls between heaven and earth through his Son Jesus and you have been invited to celebrate with his people and his angels!

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- ¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 54.
- ² C S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 146.
- ³ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1020.
- ⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1826.
- ⁵ Paul H. Wright, "The Birthplace of Jesus and the Journeys of His First Visitors," in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel and Kristopher A. Lyle, Lexham Geographic Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Mt 2:1–Lk 2:20.
- ⁶ N T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, [2nd ed. (London: SPCK, ©2004), 23.

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The Lord is With You!

The angel Gabriel gave these words to Mary along with some very good but fearsome news. She was going to have a baby! Not just any baby, but a king whose reign would not end and who would deliver God's people.

This devotional guide is designed for you to use this Advent season as you, your family, or Community Group grows expectant for the celebration of Jesus' coming, culminating in Christmas.

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