

Advent 2021 at calvarychurch



Advent is a season of preparing for Jesus' coming – celebrating "God with us," Emanuel coming to Earth. Coming to bring about our salvation and the redemption of God's creation! We look forward as well to when Christ comes back – to fully and finally restore all of creation and bring His kingdom completely to Earth.

What if this season also carries an invitation for us to come... to come one step closer to God. To come one step closer to His healing, His redemption, His plan for our lives, His peace. This Advent, will you join us in going on a journey toward Christ – Going to the one who came for us?

To go through this devotional you will have two devotions each week. These devotions are meant to be done as a family or alongside friends. Try to carve out two times each week to pause, come together, and participate in the devotions. Basically, share this journey with someone!

For families doing this devotional with children, it will help you to read the "For Kids" section before doing the devotion together just so that you can explain to your kids in your own way what the lesson for that week is. My prayer is that each person working through this devotion would be able to make a least one step closer to God and recognize Him entering into your life as well. Feel free to make this time your own! You know your family/ friends best!

Morgan Ginn
Pastor to Students

WEEK ONE—Mary / "Unplanned"

WEEK TWO-Joseph / "Unprepared"

WEEK THREE—Wise Men / "Unexpected"

WEEK FOUR—The Glory of Christmas / "Unlikely"

CHRISTMAS WEEK—Shepherd / "Unaware"



- How Mary came: Mary came to the birth of Christ because she had to! She was the one giving birth – at this point there was no turning back. Her situation dictated that she be present at the birth of Christ.
- o Real life connection: Some of us are stuck in situations outside of our control like Mary being present at the birth of the Messiah...her showing up to meet Jesus wasn't a choice it was happening! And it was happening through her. The invitation Christ might have for you is not yet to change your circumstances, but to be present to you through your circumstances in a whole new way! What circumstances are you currently in that you would like to change?
- o Practical Challenge/Encouragement: Expect. Spend this week not praying for things to change...but asking God to help you recognize his Presence through your circumstances. Look for God and how He's showing up. Ask for God's presence! Look for Him! Expect Him! Share with others how you are seeing His presence in your 'stuck' situations.
- o For kids, talk through these questions:
 - What do you think Mary felt like traveling a bunch of miles to give birth in a stable?
 - What normally lives in a stable?
 - How do you feel close to God?
 - How do you know God loves you?

"Unplanned"

- "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." Proverbs 16:9
- How God comes: He comes as the one guiding our steps. When all of our plans seem up in the air or to be leading to nowhere, God is establishing a path for us better than we could have mapped out. What have you been trying to plan on your own? And have you been planning God out of your days? By filling up the agenda with all that we need to do and want to do, space, time, and attention quickly go to all the aspects of life calling for our attention. Following Christ involves a willingness to accept some sense of life unplanned unplanned and willing to follow God's lead and nudges...unplanned, leaving room for God to show up in daily ways or use us in daily situations. From the big plans to the little, do you have a willingness to set aside your plans and openly accept what is unplanned from God? It's in these unplanned events and encounters that God shows up with encouragement, connection, unplanned gifts and encounters, and a reminder we need to hear
- Practical challenge: Leave time unplanned. This Advent, don't let your calendars and attention be filled up to the max leading up to Christmas to the point where you're celebrating the New Year (and not because it's a new year, but because it means Christmas season has ended)! Be on the lookout for God showing up in unplanned ways through new people, times of rest, and moments of talking to Him. Seek God's plans together and pray for each person that they would be a part of God's kingdom coming and His will being done.
- For Kids: You can do a blindfold challenge where kids get to be blindfolded and guided through a maze or from one side of the room to the other. The key is that you will give instructions to get them there. Then explain to your kids that just like when they couldn't see, you guided them, when we aren't sure what's happening in life, God guides us. He's like the voice guiding us when we can't see.

Joseph

- o How Joseph came: Joseph came as a result of his choice of continued obedience. Joseph was put in a difficult situation that involved the need to trust God at His word and also trust his wifeto-be. From the point he found out, he had to make his choice would he stay with Mary or leave? Joseph came to the birth of Christ as an act of continued obedience as a choice to continue trusting God at his word and continue to stick with Mary. Even though he made his choice when he found out about Jesus not to leave Mary, he could have easily left at different points in their journey to the birth and thereafter. BUT he continued to choose to be obedient in the same way he chose to be obedient when he first found out.
- o Real life connection: Just like Joseph made a choice to obey God and stay with Mary, I imagine the difficulty of following through on that choice as it unfolded in Jesus' birth and life. Like Joseph, many of us have chosen to obey God in an area of our lives we said "yes" once...but God is inviting us to continue to say "yes" now. His invitation is one of continued obedience. Continue forgiving. Continue giving. Continue coming to Christ to get to know Him more. Continue practicing patience. Continue...
- o Practical challenge/encouragement: Continue. What do you need to remember to continue doing? What is God inviting you to continue in?
- o For Kids: Demonstrate this idea by having kids take a single step at a time. Give them the choice each step to go one way or another (for example, you can have fun with this and put a cookie one direction and yourself in the other direction. Each step ask your kid, "Do you want to come to me or the cookie?" You can keep a couple of cookies behind your back though so that if/when your kid makes it to you they get double the reward compared to what they would have gotten if they went straight for the cookie.) Explain that sometimes following Jesus is like this you will have choices to keep choosing what God wants or to choose what you want. But God blesses obedience! Just like your kid was rewarded with a bigger treat for choosing to come to you, share with your child that God blesses continued obedience.

"Unprepared"

- "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."
 1 Corinthians 2:9
- How God comes: God meets us when we are unprepared. Our temptation, many times, is to dress ourselves up before God to pray in our best way of speaking, to act as best we can. But just like Jesus came into a world unprepared for Him and filled with chaos and brokenness, God was prepared with a plan that would redeem all of His creation. This plan involved the sending of His son, Jesus Christ, to die on our behalf and conquer death so that our sins would be paid for and our lives restored. In the same way God wants to meet with you to encounter you, AS YOU ARE! He wants to meet with you when you are unprepared because He took the work upon Himself to prepare a way for you to be known, saved, and redeemed. Can you come to God as you are with all the good and bad, nothing prepared...just you?
- Practical challenge: Uninterrupted prayer or journaling. In college I remember taking a creative writing class and to help us with our writing, each week we had to write for 10 minutes uninterrupted. Without pausing to think through what's next or filter out what we initially thing, we grew more used to freely writing without cutting ourselves off. Try praying or journaling for 10 minutes uninterrupted and without filtering yourself. Begin to practice full transparency with God leaving your 'preparedness' in the past!
- For Kids: Review the story of God and why Jesus came. Work on helping your kids know the basics of why Jesus came and where He fits in the bigger picture. You can draw a picture together with symbols your kids understand to work on remembering the bigger picture.

Wise Men

- O How the wise men came: The wise men came bringing gifts. I don't know what image they had in their mind as a king-to-be and I wonder how Jesus compared to that idea, but I do know that they expected a king and came bearing gifts!
- o Real life connection: God has come to us with an offer for life real, full, good life! He has come to us offering redemption, giving the gift of life restored...what was dead and broken freely fixed and healed. While Christ freely offers us life, the cost to Him was His own life. While we cannot pay the price of our salvation because it cost God the life of His son, shouldn't our response to such a costly gift be to offer what we can in return? To offer our lives back to God? To offer our gifts for His service? To offer our resources for His kingdom? To offer our hearts for Him to mold? To offer Him our lives all of it! For Him to do what He wants with?
- o Practical challenge: Offer. What in your life remains unoffered to God? What gifts are sitting unused? What resources could be building the kingdom? What attitudes, past experiences, or situations have you yet to fully offer back to God to make new?
- o For Kids: Give your kids a chance to offer something to God! You can give them the chance to offer one of their toys or articles of clothing for donation. Or you can let them use one of their gifts to create something to worship God (a drawing, a 'song,' etc). You can even give them money during the week to hand in as an offering on Sunday. Be creative and have fun thinking of ways each person in the family can offer something back to God.

"Unexpected"

- "While we wait for the blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Titus 2:13
- How unexpected was it that the fullness of God with all of His power, glory, and beauty, would arrive on Earth in the humble form of a baby and in an even more humble setting of a manger that animals would normally eat out of! What an unexpected way to save the world! And His coming was a full embodiment of peace, joy, love unexpected. Peace to an unexpecting chaotic world. Joy to unexpecting people with stress, challenges, and the ups and downs of live. And Love to those who would never expect to be loved as deeply and fully as Jesus Christ came to offer love. This season, His grace pours out in so many ways and meets us in many unexpected and unexplainable ways like the power of peace felt on the still winter night.
- Practical challenge: Between peace, joy, and love, what does your soul most need? Ask the Father who gives good gifts and desires to offer His grace to you. Ask for peace and be ready for it in unexpected ways! Same with joy and love.
- For Kids: Think of one way you can love someone who isn't expecting it this season. Maybe you'll bake cookies for a grandparent, or perhaps you'll go to a soup kitchen as a family. Maybe loving someone unexpectedly means being on the lookout during the day for who needs kindness and then acting on it. Your challenge as a family is to offer a Random Act of Kindness to someone least expecting it!

The Glory of Christmas

- O How Jesus came: Read Luke 1-2 this week as a family. Read about how Jesus came! If you want to read more you can look at John 1 and Matthew 1:18-2:23. As you read this week, just create space to ask questions, explore the story, and share what you notice, wonder, and think about these stories.
- o Practical challenge: The challenge is easy this week read the Bible as a family and talk about it as a family! This is such a simple way to grow spiritually as a family and disciple kids and teens.
- o For Kids: Draw each character and something that you notice about them. You can use the final page of this devotional to do so!

"Unlikely"

- For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6
- Throughout Scripture God seems to have joy for calling upon the most unlikely people to accomplish His purposes. From a virgin girl who was neither rich nor influential to be the mother of Jesus Christ, to disciples adept at fishing to be the leaders of the ministry of Jesus after He left. Not to mention Saul who was renamed Paul who went from killing those in the early church to leading the early church.
- Practical Challenge: For today's Advent devotional time, let the 'unlikely' in your family or group lead the kids, or someone who hasn't led a devotional yet. Focus on who God is and how He has been towards you. If you are doing devotions not as a family unit, begin to look for God showing up through unlikely people and places this week. And be willing to share God's love this Advent in unlikely ways and to unlikely people! Go out of your comfort zone intentionally to unlikely places and people!
- For Kids: Give kids some time to help them make their own 'lesson' to teach the family. Help them as they need and enjoy learning from their perspective.

Shepherd

- o How the shepherds came: The shepherds came humbly. It's funny how, of all the people God could have invited to the birth of Christ, He chose the 'lowly' of society. The shepherds! Rather than announcing arrival to kings and leaders or nations, he chose the shepherds. I imagine their coming to Christ at His birth as a humble coming. They weren't the highest ranking of society and they wouldn't typically be the ones given exclusive news to be shared. But, God chose the humble shepherds. And I imagine this humility defining their attitude and approach to meeting Jesus.
- o Real life connection: God was willing to humble Himself and enter into humanity to take on the punishment for sin for our sake. Philippians 2 describes this humility that God "made himself nothing"...that He "humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross!" God was willing to go to this extent to make it possible for us to be saved and redeemed. The opposite of this humility is pride. What a destructive attitude pride is! It has the capacity to decimate relationships. It has the capacity to mar our faith if left to grow. This week, our challenge is to examine ourselves for where we have let pride lead rather than humility and repent from having a prideful heart! James says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God" (James 4:6-7).
- o Practical challenge/encouragement: Examine & Repent. Take time to reflect on your life, attitude, heart, etc. asking the question, "Where or how am I being prideful?" Ask forgiveness for those areas and ask for God's spirit to empower you to have a humble heart instead. Seek to intentionally take on an attitude of humility. Ask, as well, how you can be humble this week and try to live it out.
- o For Kids: It's really fun to hear compliments about ourselves and try to do what we can to hear more praise and compliments from answering questions in class to using our gifts God gave us to shine! This week, though, our focus is on humility, which is considering others before yourselves. To practice this, instead of trying to get compliments and praise, be the one to give praise to other people. Tell a friend that they did a good job! Recognize and tell others when you see something good in them from an attitude to an action. Instead of trying to get praise, focus on giving it!

"Unaware"

- "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." Luke 2:15
- Even with the description the Shepherds received, I can't imagine that they had a full understanding of what all Jesus being born would mean what He would do with His life and the work he would accomplish on the cross. I think it's safe to say they were at least somewhat unaware of the fullness of the good news of who Jesus was. Often times, we, too, can be unaware of all God is doing all that He is providing, guiding us in, helping us with, etc. Like a young child unaware of all that Mom and Dad do to raise them, many of us have the same unawareness when it comes to recognizing and celebrating all God has done.
- Practical challenge As a family or group of friends, make a board of all the things God does in your life. For example, He provides you with food and water each day. Work together as a family or group of friends to see how big you can make your list celebrating who God is and what He has done for you. Make up a song to celebrate God! It doesn't have to be pretty or perfect but write out what words you might say in worship to celebrate God. This week's challenge is to practice being aware of who God is and all He does for you!
- For Kids: Each kid should receive a stack of paper slips or note cards to write on each one something that God has done or is doing for them. You can make it fun by giving them a time limit and racing to see who can come up with the most the quickest. Make sure you do take time to share them with each other and put them on a board or somewhere where everyone can see them. If you want to take it to the next level, hold a full blown 'celebration' of who God is and give each person a chance to contribute something (i.e. make food, write a song, draw pictures, etc).



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