

ADVENT 2020

Bible Study



“The angel said to her, “Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!” (Luke 1:30-33)

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN AROUND PEOPLE WHO RADIATE JOY?

The sense of delight permeates their very being, their expressions, and even their words. Joy sparkles in their eyes. Joy saturates their voice. Glimpses of joy appear in their posture, the way they carry themselves. Joy is a hard emotion to hide. I can't help but think God designed it this way.

The expressions of joy, rejoicing, merriment, and more are found more than 400 times throughout the Bible. As children of God, we're called and created to be joyful.

Our God is a God of joy. God rejoices in creation. From the very beginning, God scanned what he had made and declared its goodness. The Psalms remind us that God's creation enters into the joy of its Creator. The sunrise and the sunset shout for joy. Even the meadows and valleys join in the chorus. The trees of the forest sing for joy while the rivers clap their hands.

IF CREATION CELEBRATES IN GOD'S JOY, HOW MUCH MORE SHOULD WE?

We are meant to radiate joy everywhere we go. As God's children, we have joy not in spite of our circumstances but because of them. We are drenched in the grace and mercies of God. Joy is a facet of the fruit of God's Spirit meant to flourish within us. Yet the weeks leading up to Christmas are often filled with lists and lines, to-dos and to-don'ts. And, **if we're not careful, a season meant to bring the greatest joy, can steal our joy.** For sure, in light of the pandemic landscape we find ourselves in, the circumstances that we might be struggling and suffering under might stifle or take away our joy.

Yet, despite all we are navigating, Advent beckons us to slow down and prepare for the arrival of the Christ child.

Through this bible study series, we have an opportunity to pause and journey on an *ADVENT-URE* as we spark joy in the midst of uncertainty. Over the next four weeks, we're going to slow to a stroll as we meander through Luke's opening chapters that detail the birth of Christ.

Come along as we unwrap the wonder of Advent this December. We'll spend an 1.5 hours each week as we explore the greatest gift of all: Christ — the hope of all peoples.

THE INVITATION!

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming." The Latin derived the word from the Greek word *parousia*, which is used when describing the Second Coming of Christ. The purpose of Advent is two-fold. The first is a celebration of the initial arrival of Christ; the second is an anticipation of Christ's return. Advent gently reminds us of the "now" and "not yet" that comes with being people of faith.

- Advent reminds us of the importance of waiting.
- Advent whispers our need for a Savior.
- Advent teaches us God's timing is always better than our own.

Whether you're new to celebrating Advent or you've observed Advent for many years, I encourage you to nurture a sense of awe and anticipation in your life for Christ. From the events surrounding His miracle-studded arrival to His unforgettable life, death, and resurrection, those who encountered Jesus were Christ taken back with a profound sense of wonder.

As you prayerfully consider and reflect on the following weeks' devotional:

- Ask God to open your eyes to Him and His handiwork even more.
- Ask God to reveal more of His truth, character, & presence in your life.
- Prepare to be astonished by the work God is doing in and all around you during this season of waiting.

ADVENT — WEEK 1

WORSHIP

“Go Tell it on The Mountain” by Branches. Spend time in worship and reflection.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help me to hear your voice.
Touch me once again.
Give me the courage to be your beloved.
Give me courage to choose joy.
I need you now this Christmas.
Be born in me again today.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

[By Bonnie Gray, from “Why it Takes Courage to Choose Joy”]

DISCUSSION

- (1) Are there areas of your life that you are afraid to open up to the light? If so, what can you do this Advent to prepare to let God in?
- (2) This year, what aspects of faith have you found liberating and what have you found constricting? What can you do this Advent to make your circle more welcoming?

READING

Luke 1:26-38 (GNT)

The Birth of Jesus Is Announced

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. **27** He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. **28** The angel came to her and said, “Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!”

29 Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. **30** The angel said to her, “Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. **31** You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the

Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, **33** and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!”

34 Mary said to the angel, “I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?”

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God.

36 Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old.

37 For there is nothing that God cannot do.”

38 “I am the Lord's servant,” said Mary; “may it happen to me as you have said.” And the angel left her.

REFLECTION

(1) Read Luke 1:26-38. What stood out to you about this section of Mary's story?

(2) In the last 30 days, what has caught you most off-guard in your life? Why is it so unexpected?

(3) Where is God most daring you to trust Him right now?

(4) What doubts are strangling or holding you back at the moment? Which of God's promises speak specifically into your doubts?

(5) **Dive Deeper:** Read John 1:1-8, 14-17; 20-46. What does this story reveal about our expectations and God's response?

BE STILL *Image: The Ancient of Days, William Blake*



PRAYER

Lord, giver of life, creator of light, give us courage to turn to you with hope and trust. As we await the birth of your son, Jesus Christ, may the renewing Spirit teach us to trust your purposes of love, and to allow the new birth which will set us free. Amen.

ADVENT — WEEK 2

WORSHIP

“O Come All Ye Faithful” by Kings Kaleidoscope. Spend time in worship and reflection.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help me to hear your voice.
Touch me once again.
Give me the courage to be your beloved.
Give me courage to choose joy.
I need you now this Christmas.
Be born in me again today.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

[By Bonnie Gray, from “Why it Takes Courage to Choose Joy”]

DISCUSSION

- (1) Who are the people to whom you turn to when you need comfort or are in doubt?
- (2) Are there things that older people could helpfully do to support younger people on their faith journey?

READING

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son, and you will name him Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, **33** and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!"

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REFLECTION

(1) Re-read Luke 1:26-38. Describe Mary from what you read in this passage.

(2) When have you sensed that you were highly favoured by God?

(3) How is being highly favoured by God different from being highly favoured by the world's standards?

(4) How are you growing in grace?

(5) **Dive Deeper:** Look up other expressions of grace throughout the New Testament in Luke 4:22, Eph. 4:29, and, Col. 4:6. Through these passages, how do you see yourself as highly favoured?

BE STILL

Within each piece of creation,
within each person,
the hidden God waits to cause us
to laugh and surprise us with his glory.

Within each moment of time,
within each day and each hour,
the hidden God approaches us
to call our name and to give us his joy.

Within each human heart,
within our innermost being,
the hidden God touches us
to awaken to his love and his presence.

Everything is within Him,
Space and time,
The human being and the heart.
God calls us to open our eyes
and our hearts to Him and his will.

[Taken from: The Awesome Journey, by David Adam]

PRAYER

Lord of power, as you bless the poor and meek, and comfort those who weep and mourn, give us the Spirit to lead us into your ways of compassion and love, through making disciples of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

ADVENT — WEEK 3

WORSHIP

“Every Bell on Earth Will Ring” by The Oh Hellos. Spend time in worship and reflection.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help me to hear your voice.
Touch me once again.
Give me the courage to be your beloved.
Give me courage to choose joy.
I need you now this Christmas.
Be born in me again today.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

[By Bonnie Gray, from “Why it Takes Courage to Choose Joy”]

DISCUSSION

- (1) What is your testimony to what God has done in your life... in this season of pandemic... or even this last week?
- (2) Why do we find it difficult to share our testimonies? Who should we share our testimonies with?

READING

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37 For there is nothing that God cannot do."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said." And the angel left her.

REFLECTION

(1) Re-read Luke 1:26-38. Circle the word "servant." In your own words, define Mary's use of "servant" here.

(2) In what areas of your life are you struggling to declare that you are the Lord's servant, His especially dedicated one?

(3) Where are you struggling to serve God out of loyalty and love?

(4) In the areas where you have submitted willingly to God, how have you seen Him glorified?

(5) **Dive Deeper:** Look up other expressions where God's people are identified as slaves including Judges 2:8, Ps 35:1, and Isa 41:8-9; 44:21. What does it look like to live a life in full submission to God?

BE STILL *Image: Birth of Jesus, Master of Salzburg*



PRAYER

Lord, give us thankful hearts and renew in us the gift of the Holy Spirit, to make us ready to tell the good news of what you have done in our lives through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

ADVENT — WEEK 4

WORSHIP

“Away In A Manger” by Drew Holcomb and the Neighbours. Spend time in worship and reflection.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help me to hear your voice.
Touch me once again.
Give me the courage to be your beloved.
Give me courage to choose joy.
I need you now this Christmas.
Be born in me again today.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

[By Bonnie Gray, from “Why it Takes Courage to Choose Joy”]

DISCUSSION

- (1) What is your ‘slingshot’ — the thing about you that God is waiting to use?
- (2) Are there situations in which we need to be willing to be vulnerable, and not to use the tactics that everyone else uses?

READING

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REFLECTION

(1) Re-read Luke 1:26-38 one last time. As you reflect back on the last four weeks, what is the biggest takeaway about Mary's obedience?

(2) In what area of your life are you most struggling to trust God?

(3) How have you seen God use your areas of lack to reveal His power in your own life?

(4) When have you seen someone else's deficiency used to glorify God?

(5) **Dive Deeper:** Read 2 Corinthians 12:9 and 1 Peter 4:10 to reflect more on the truth that it's not about our ability but our availability.

BE STILL

Disturb us, O Lord,
When we are too pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, O Lord,
When with the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst for the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,

We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, O Lord,
To dare more boldly,
To venture on wilder seas,
Where storms will show Your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push back the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

This we ask in the name of our Captain,
Who is Jesus Christ.

[Prayer of Francis Drake, 1577]

PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, and lead us to the door which Jesus alone can hold open,
and which leads us to the Father's home, Amen.

Acknowledgements

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10938527651959459163&inf_contact_key=27f828d9437ceb7e4e53d90e65315f88
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The Awesome Journey, David Adam

A Feast for Advent, Delia Smith

The Art of Advent, Jane Williams