

Advent Week One – Thursday, December 1

From Prophecy to Fulfillment

As we begin Advent in these weeks leading up to Christmas, we have the opportunity to turn to Scripture and see how God fulfilled prophecy about Jesus' birth that was first spoken through the prophet Isaiah in 700 B.C.

Let's hear from God's Word ~

Isaiah 9:6-7, TNIV

Reader One: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Reader Two: Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

John 1:1-3, 14, TNIV

Reader One: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Reader Two: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

When John wrote about "the word becoming flesh", he was talking about Jesus, who is the human expression of God. To see Jesus is to see God, and to know Jesus is to experience God's grace and truth. (The Word in Life Study Bible)

Was Jesus' birth a random event, just the birth of another baby boy? Of course, every birth is miraculous, and to be celebrated. Yet, Scripture tells us that for Jesus, his birth was foretold centuries before it happened! Jesus' life fulfilled prophecy and showed us God's incredible faithfulness and trustworthiness.

From our perspective in history, we see what Isaiah would not have lived long enough to see - Jesus the Messiah was born! We can know without a doubt that no matter what is going on in our lives, that if we know God, and have believed in his Son, Jesus Christ, He can be trusted to do what He says.

Advent Week Two – Thursday, December 8

From Ordinary to Extraordinary

How would you describe Advent? It's a question you sometimes hear at this time of year, and it's important to think about. For Frederick Buechner, preacher and theologian, Advent is "*...the time just before the Adventure begins, when everybody is leaning forward to hear what will happen even though they already know what will happen and what will not happen, when they listen hard for meaning, their meaning, and begin to hear, only faintly at first, the beating of unseen wings.*"

Let's hear from God's Word ~

Luke 1:26-38 - *The Birth of Jesus Foretold*

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

Reader Two: Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Reader One: "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 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 [a] the Son of God. Your cousin Elisabeth has also conceived a son, old as she is. Indeed, this is the sixth month for her, a woman who was called barren. For no promise of God can fail to be fulfilled." (J.B. Phillips Translation)

Reader Two: Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true." And then the angel left.

It's said that in Luke 1 we read about the beginning of God's love story with humanity. The scene between Gabriel, the angel, and Mary is incredible. So much is left unsaid, no doubt because describing an angelic visit isn't your everyday occurrence! We can only imagine how we might have reacted if it were us standing there, hearing these amazing and strange words.

Michael Card says that in Mary's response to the angel, "she is affirming that she is the slave of the Lord. She is surrendering her rights, her hopes and her dreams and her own body absolutely to him.... The message that has come to her through the angel is absolute and life-changing." (*Michael Card, Luke: The Gospel of Amazement*)

For us today, Advent continues to bring our imaginations to life, and thrills us with the depictions of all that happened before Jesus Christ came into the world. May it be, for us, as well as for the mother of Jesus, a life-changing experience!

Advent Week Three – Thursday, December 15

From Fear to Wonder

Have you ever been terrified? Or been visited by an angel? Today's Scripture tells us about some people who could say "yes" to both those questions!

Let's hear from God's Word ~

Luke 2:8-20, NLT

Reader One: That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. **They were terrified**, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people."

Reader Two: The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Reader One: Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

Reader Two: When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! **Let's see this wonderful thing that has happened**, which the Lord has told us about."

Reader One: They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.

Reader Two: All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

During Advent we are invited to spend time in reflection, to think a bit more intentionally about all it means to us, and to the world, that Jesus Christ was born. The shepherds' experience on the hillside was one of great fear, it says in Luke 2. The sudden appearance of an angel of the Lord, and many more angels beside, must have been incredible. Yet when the angels left the shepherds, Scripture tells us their fear was gone; in fact, they seemed excited to go to Bethlehem, to "see this wonderful thing that has happened"...namely, the Messiah's birth.

This year, as you go through Advent, try to put yourself in the place of those shepherds. Can you try to imagine what happened to them? Can you take the journey with them, from the hillside and the angels, to the manger and the baby? The very thing that may terrify you, or be too big for you, or seem impossible for you, may be the beginning of a journey to finding out what "wonderful thing has happened" in your life. Jesus came to bring that change to our lives, and he continues to change hearts everywhere, even today.

Advent Week Four – Thursday, December 22

From Slaves to Sons

Have you ever wondered why Jesus came to the world as a baby? Wouldn't his arrival as a King or some other kind of VIP have made a grander statement? Yet somehow the baby Jesus draws us, doesn't he? His very innocence compels us to come close and admire his newness, and marvel with those who were there that such a tiny child fulfilled so many years of waiting for the promise of the Messiah.

Let's hear from God's Word ~

Galatians 4:4-7, TNIV

Reader One: But when the time was right, God sent his Son, and a woman gave birth to him. His Son obeyed the Law, so he could set us free from the law, and we could become God's children.

Reader Two: Now that we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. And his Spirit tells us that God is our Father. You are no longer slaves. You are God's children, and you will be given what he has promised.

Reader One: But what has he promised? The prophet Isaiah foretold a time when "there won't be any more sadness for those who were suffering... [when] the people who are now living in darkness will see a great light. They are now living in a very dark land but a light will shine on them....Lord....You will increase their joy. They will show you how glad they are. They will be as glad as people are at harvest time." (Isaiah 9:1-3, NIRV)

Isaiah spoke of a time that would be ushered in when the Son of God, Jesus Christ, would live on earth and begin to radically change people's lives for good.

During this last week of Advent, just a few days before we celebrate Christ's birth, let's be mindful of all the reasons there are to be hopeful because of the baby Jesus, the one John describes as "...the Word became human and lived here on earth among us...full of unfailing love and faithfulness." (John 1:14)

It may be that the message of Christmas, the message of hope, is needed for than ever this year. Jesus' birth shows us God's deep and abiding love for us. God gave his love through Jesus so that the whole world could have hope. Is there a way you can be a beacon of that hope this year? As a child of God, given what He has promised, be filled with joy!