

# ADVENT WEEK 3 — DAY 1

## WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO AS PLANNED

**Theme Verse:** *Matthew 1:18*

**Additional Reading:** Proverbs 16:9; Psalm 34:4–5; Isaiah 55:8–9

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Joseph had plans—good plans. He was preparing for marriage, working faithfully in his trade, building a future with Mary. Everything seemed clear and steady... until the unthinkable happened.

*“Mary... was found to be with child.”*

With those words, Joseph’s life shattered. From his perspective, Mary had betrayed him. The woman he loved was carrying a child that wasn’t his. In one moment, his dreams collapsed. His reputation was threatened. His heart was wounded. His future was unclear.

This is where Advent meets us: **in the moments life doesn’t go the way we expected.**

Joseph’s response reveals much about his character. Matthew describes him as “a just man”—but Joseph’s righteousness is not cold, rigid, or vengeful. He doesn’t lash out. He doesn’t shame Mary. He chooses mercy, even before he understands what God is doing.

His plan is to end the engagement quietly—to do the compassionate thing, even in heartbreak.

Here we discover the quiet strength of a man who trusts God more than his emotions, his assumptions, or his wounded pride.

And then God speaks.

In a dream, the angel tells Joseph:

**“Do not fear to take Mary as your wife.”**

Why?

Because what is happening is not betrayal—it’s miracle.

Not shame—salvation.

Not human failure—but divine grace.

Joseph’s world had fallen apart, but God was weaving salvation through the very thing Joseph feared. The path he never wanted to walk was the path God had chosen for his greatest calling.

This is often how God works.

We plan. We dream. We assume.

Then life takes a turn we didn’t expect—illness, conflict, loss, disappointment, interruption. And we think God is absent.

But Advent reminds us: **God is present in the interruptions.**

The unexpected pregnancy Joseph dreaded was the very means God used to bring Jesus into the world. What looked like chaos was actually redemption unfolding.

What if the place where your plans have collapsed is the place where God is quietly working?  
What if the disappointment you're facing is connected to something God is preparing?  
What if the story you would never have written is the story God will use most powerfully?

Joseph's part in the Christmas story begins where his plans end.  
Yours may too.

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## Reflection Questions

1. Where has life recently gone differently than you expected or hoped?
  2. How does Joseph's example challenge the way you respond to disappointment?
  3. What might God be doing in the place where your plans feel disrupted?
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## Prayer

Father, help me trust You when life doesn't go according to my plans. Give me Joseph's humility, patience, and mercy. Teach me to see Your hand even in the unexpected. Amen.

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# ADVENT WEEK 3 — DAY 2

## A RIGHTEOUS MAN OF MERCY

**Theme Verse:** *Matthew 1:19*

**Additional Reading:** Psalm 103:8–14; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:7

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### Devotional (≈480 words)

Matthew describes Joseph with a simple phrase that speaks volumes:

**“Joseph... being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame...”**

In that culture, Joseph had every legal right to expose Mary publicly. Doing so would have cleared his name, protected his reputation, and shifted the blame onto her. Most men would have done exactly that.

But Joseph does something astonishing:

**he chooses mercy over vindication.**

Before the angel appears...

Before Joseph knows the pregnancy is miraculous...

Before he understands the plan of God...

He decides to protect Mary quietly.

This tells us something profound about biblical righteousness.

Joseph’s righteousness is not harsh, self-protective, or punitive. It is compassionate, gentle, and slow to judge. He mirrors the heart of God who “is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”

Joseph shows us that true righteousness is not simply doing what is right—it is doing what is **lovingly right**.

This kind of righteousness is costly. Joseph knew people would talk. He knew assumptions would be made. He knew he might lose respect in the community. But he was more committed to honoring God than proving himself.

Before Joseph ever held Jesus in his arms, he reflected the character of the One Jesus would grow up to reveal.

This is the kind of righteousness Jesus blesses in the Sermon on the Mount—merciful, meek, peacemaking righteousness. It is the kind of righteousness that looks weak to the world but is strong in God’s eyes.

Think about the people in your life who have wounded you, disappointed you, or complicated your world. Your natural reflex may be self-protection, retaliation, withdrawing, or insisting on being right.

But the gospel calls us to something better.

Just as God covered Adam and Eve in their shame, Joseph covered Mary.

Just as Jesus restores sinners with compassion, Joseph treats Mary with gentleness.

Just as God’s mercy triumphs over judgment, Joseph chooses kindness over public justice.

Joseph’s quiet act of mercy prepares us for the Christ who will show ultimate mercy through the cross.

And this is the invitation of Advent:

**to reflect the mercy we have received.**

To respond to others with the compassion God has shown us.

To choose grace when we feel wronged.

To pursue love over self-justification.

Joseph teaches us that the path of mercy is the path of Christ.

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## Reflection Questions

1. What situation or relationship is asking you to choose mercy instead of self-defense?
  2. How does Joseph redefine what it means to be “righteous”?
  3. Where is God inviting you to reflect His compassion this Advent?
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## Prayer

Merciful Father, make me righteous like Joseph—quick to show compassion, slow to anger, and eager to protect rather than shame. Shape my heart to reflect Yours. Amen.

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# ADVENT WEEK 3 — DAY 3

## DO NOT FEAR

**Theme Verse:** *Matthew 1:20*

**Additional Reading:** Isaiah 41:10; Joshua 1:9; John 14:27

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Fear is the quiet battle underneath Joseph's story.

Fear of shame.

Fear of reputation ruined.

Fear of what others would think.

Fear of stepping into something he did not choose and could not control.

Matthew tells us Joseph “considered these things”—agonizing over what to do, turning the situation over and over in his mind. And it is right there, in the middle of his fear and confusion, that God breaks in.

**“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife...”**

God doesn't begin by explaining the plan.

He begins by addressing Joseph's heart.

Fear is often the biggest barrier to obedience.

We fear taking the next step because we can't see the whole path.

We fear trusting God because we're afraid of what obedience will cost.

We fear surrender because surrender feels like losing control.

But every significant moment of faith in Scripture begins the same way—with a call to *“Do not fear.”*

Do not fear, Moses.

Do not fear, Joshua.

Do not fear, Mary.

Do not fear, shepherds.

Do not fear, disciples.

And now: **Do not fear, Joseph.**

Why? Because the situation Joseph dreads is actually the place God is working most powerfully.

God reveals that Mary's child is conceived by the Holy Spirit. The thing Joseph feared most—Mary's pregnancy—was not a disaster but the miracle of the ages. The very circumstance causing Joseph anxiety is the means by which God will bring the Savior into the world.

How often do we assume God is absent when things feel chaotic, confusing, or overwhelming? Yet Advent reminds us that God may be closest in the places we fear most.

Joseph is called not to understand the plan, but to trust the Planner. He doesn't get all the answers—he gets reassurance of God's presence. He doesn't get clarity about the future—he gets a command to obey today.

And he does.

Joseph wakes up from the dream and obeys immediately.

Courage is not the absence of fear; courage is obedience in the presence of fear.

Where is fear holding you back?

Where is God inviting you to trust Him instead of your own understanding?

Where might the thing that scares you be the place God is working?

Advent invites us to hear the same voice Joseph heard:

**Do not fear. God is with you.**

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## Reflection Questions

1. What fear is currently shaping your decisions or limiting your obedience?
  2. How does God's message to Joseph speak into your own fears?
  3. What step of faith might God be calling you to take this week?
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## Prayer

God of peace, speak into my fears as You spoke to Joseph. Give me courage to obey even when I don't see the full picture. Remind me that You are with me. Amen.

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# ADVENT WEEK 3 — DAY 4

## THE SAVIOR WE ACTUALLY NEED

**Theme Verse:** *Matthew 1:21*

**Additional Reading:** Luke 19:10; Titus 3:3–7; Hebrews 9:26–28

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The angel gives Joseph the child's name:

**“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**

Joseph expected a king—Israel expected a liberator—Rome expected nothing.

But no one expected this:

**a Savior whose mission was not political rescue, not economic uplift, not national victory, but the forgiveness of sins.**

Jesus came to save His people *from their sins*—not from hardship, not from discomfort, not from foreign rule, not from circumstances, and not simply from sorrow. He came for our deepest problem: the rebellion inside us that separates us from God.

We tend to want a Savior who fixes our situations.

God sends a Savior who fixes **us**.

Sin is not just something we *do*—it's something we *are* apart from Christ. It twists good desires, distorts motives, damages relationships, disrupts peace, and destroys joy. Sin is the spiritual serpent that bites us all. And every temporary “solution” humanity devises—self-help, self-improvement, moral effort, avoidance, distraction—cannot heal the poison.

Only Jesus can.

The name “Jesus” (Yeshua) means “*The Lord saves*.”

Not “The Lord helps you save yourself.”

Not “The Lord makes your life easier.”

Not “The Lord improves your behavior.”

**The Lord saves.**

From sin's penalty (forgiveness).

From sin's power (transformation).

From sin's presence (future glory).

Joseph is told something tender and striking: Jesus will “save *His people* from their sins.” Before Jesus is even born, God calls sinners *His*—not because they are worthy, but because He is merciful.

This is the heart of Advent.

God does not wait for us to clean ourselves up.

He comes down into our mess, our brokenness, our guilt, our need.

He takes the venom of sin into His own body on the cross.

He rises to break its power.

He reigns to intercede for His people.  
And He will return to remove sin forever.

What do you most want Jesus to save you from today?  
Stress? Fear? Circumstances? Pain?  
Those are real needs—but deeper still is the need beneath them all:  
**a heart rescued and restored by the only One who can truly save.**

Joseph learned that the Messiah would not fit his expectations—but would exceed them. So will He for you.

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## Reflection Questions

1. What “saviors” are you tempted to turn to instead of Jesus—success, control, comfort, approval?
  2. How does knowing Jesus came to save you from *your sins* deepen your gratitude or humility?
  3. Where do you need His saving work most today?
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## Prayer

Jesus, thank You for coming to save me not just from hard circumstances but from my deepest problem—my sin. Rescue me, change me, and help me trust You fully. Amen.

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# ADVENT WEEK 3 — DAY 5

## GOD WITH US

**Theme Verse:** *Matthew 1:23*

**Additional Reading:** Isaiah 7:14; John 1:14; Hebrews 13:5–6

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The angel ends his message to Joseph with the greatest promise humanity has ever received:  
**“They shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).”**

With us—not above us or watching from a distance.  
With us—not occasionally, but continually.  
With us—not metaphorically, but personally.  
With us—not in judgment, but in grace.

The God who thundered at Sinai now sleeps in a manger.  
The God whose glory filled the temple now dwells in Mary’s arms.  
The God who cannot be contained by the heavens takes on lungs, and tears, and fingernails.

This is the miracle at the heart of Advent:  
**God has come near.**

Many religions teach humanity’s attempt to climb up to the divine.  
Christmas proclaims that God comes down to us.  
He comes as an infant before we could ever approach Him as King.

“God with us” means that Jesus enters the very places we prefer to hide—our fears, wounds, sins, and limitations. He takes on our humanity in full so that He can redeem it in full.

“God with us” means you are never alone.  
Not in suffering.  
Not in disappointment.  
Not in temptation.  
Not in grief.  
Not in uncertainty.  
Not in failure.

He is with you in every room, every season, every fear, every step.  
He is with you in the valley and on the mountaintop.  
He is with you when you feel His presence and when you cannot sense Him at all.

And “God with us” is more than comfort—it is covenant.  
Jesus comes not merely to feel what we feel but to accomplish what we cannot.  
He lives the righteous life we failed to live.  
He dies the atoning death we deserved to die.  
He rises to secure the eternal presence of God for His people.  
Then He promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Joseph hears this promise at the beginning of the Gospel.

The disciples hear it again at the end:

**“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

Advent begins and ends with the same truth:

The God who created the world has stepped into it—and He will not step out.

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## Reflection Questions

1. Which part of “God with us” do you need most today—comfort, courage, forgiveness, or companionship?
  2. Where is it hardest for you to believe God is truly with you?
  3. How does Jesus’ presence change the way you face your current challenges?
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## Prayer

Immanuel, thank You for coming near. Help me rest in Your presence today. Let Your nearness drive out fear, shame, and loneliness, and fill me with hope. Amen.

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# ADVENT WEEK 3 — FAMILY WEEKEND DEVOTIONAL

## TRUSTING GOD WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND

**Reading:** *Matthew 1:18–25*

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### Family Devotional (≈365 words)

Joseph's story shows us that sometimes God's plans surprise us. Joseph was planning a wedding, building a home, and imagining a life with Mary. But then everything changed. Mary was expecting a baby—and Joseph knew the child wasn't his.

Joseph must have felt scared, confused, and hurt. But even when he didn't understand, Joseph tried to do the right thing. And before he made a final decision, God sent an angel to explain what was happening. The angel told him something amazing:

**“Do not be afraid... what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”**

God was working in a way Joseph never expected. The baby Mary carried was the Savior God had promised for centuries! Even though Joseph couldn't see the whole picture, God was guiding every step.

This helps us understand something important:

**We can trust God even when we don't understand what He's doing.**

Sometimes things happen in our families that confuse us—plans change, people disappoint us, or something scary happens. We may feel a lot like Joseph did: unsure, afraid, or overwhelmed. But God sees everything. He knows exactly what we need. And He promises to be with us.

Joseph trusted God and obeyed—even though the path was hard. He chose faith instead of fear. And through Joseph's obedience, Jesus was welcomed into their home and protected as a child.

Your family can follow Joseph's example. You can choose to trust God together, even when life is confusing. Advent reminds us that God is always working for our good, even when we can't see it. He is with us—guiding, providing, and loving us every step of the way.

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### Family Discussion Questions

1. What part of Joseph's story stands out to you the most, and why?
  2. When have you felt confused or afraid, and how did God help you?
  3. How can our family show trust in God this week, even when things feel uncertain?
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## Family Prayer

Father, thank You for being with us even when we don't understand what You are doing. Help our family trust You like Joseph trusted You. Remind us that You always have a good plan. Amen.

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