



ADVENT

UNWRAPING CHRISTMAS

SPRINGSCR

Week One: Waiting Expectantly Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. —Psalm 62:1 Advent calls us to wait. Just as Abraham and Sarah waited for Isaac. Just as the Israelites waited in oppression and in the desert. Just as the prophets waited to hear a word from God. Just as humanity waited for a Savior, we wait. Most of us are all too familiar with the waiting rooms of life. We wait for graduation. We wait for a spouse. A child. A job. A promotion. A diploma. A prodigal to return. A diagnosis. A cure. Another round of chemotherapy. A retirement party. Life is filled with seasons of waiting that become the breeding ground for insecurities and self-doubts as we anticipate what's next. The story of the Israelites waiting for the Messiah reminds us when it comes to waiting, the darkness always precedes the dawn. The journey of God's people was marked by slavery, oppression, hunger, death, disease, war, and much more. We shouldn't be surprised when in our waiting the light begins to dim. We look up only to discover we're surrounded by inky blackness. Such darkness doesn't mean God has left, but the opposite. God is ever-present in our weakness, in our waiting. Waiting is not a passive activity, but an active one. The Hebrew word for wait, *yachal*, means to "wait expectantly" and to "wait in hope." Waiting can also be understood as meaning to "long for." Waiting invites us to grasp for God. Our job is to wait. Never losing hope that the flickers of that first light will come. The wonder of Advent is that though you wait, we wait, all of humanity waits—we do not wait alone. God is with us.

Prayer | Dear Heavenly Father, In the midst of my waiting, reveal Yourself to me anew that I may know with full confidence I do not wait alone. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dig Deeper | Look up the following passages: Psalm 24:4-5, Isaiah 26:8-9, and Lamentations 3:25-26. What does each passage reveal

about waiting on God? Which is most meaningful to you right now? How do you sense God is transforming you as you wait on Him?

Christmas Melody | Find this song on Spotify, iTunes, or Youtube this week and spend time in worship and reflection: “Winter Snow” by Audrey Assad.

All material from www.margaretfeinberg.com.

Week Two: The Beautiful Paradox While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a

son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. —Luke 2:6-7

A paradox is a seemingly self-contradictory, but true statement. Like the paradox used to open the infamous Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Born during the rule of a dictator, Jesus posed a paradox in Himself. The Israelites anticipated a ruler and king as the Messiah. But instead, the Messiah was born in the basement of a rundown Bethlehem motel. The *pax Romana*, a time of relative calm within the government and military, began during the reign of the first Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus. While peace was mandated by Caesar, many sects awaited a revolution—including the Jews. The Jews waited for the Messiah to come as a military and political leader to establish Israel's throne in Jerusalem. But compared to Caesar Augustus the *rex, pontifex, maximus*, Jesus was powerless, helpless, weak. Caesar reigned from a throne; Jesus reigned in hay. God continues to prove that no matter how developed our theology is, it cannot and will not contain Him. We must reevaluate our expectations of God. From the birth of the Messiah to God's presence in our everyday lives, the Creator continually flips, twists, and jumbles our expectations. Much like the Israelites, we have our own anticipations of how God should be moving or acting in our lives. We pray for healing or restoration or financial stability, but are left scratching our heads in disbelief when God doesn't protect, provide, or produce in the ways we predict. We can find comfort that God isn't meant to be fully understood or described. Yahweh stoops down from His heavenly throne to wipe our tears, forgive our sins, and dwell among us. He sent His only Son to redeem the world by reigning on a cross, not an earthly throne. A servant leader. A humble king. A loving master.

Prayer | Dear Jesus, Give me confidence to unclench my hands of control and let You reign in my life and heart this season. May I

rejoice in the beautiful paradoxes of Your birth, life, death, and resurrection. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dig Deeper | Look up the following passages: Luke 2:1-21, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, and Matthew 5:3-12. Which of these Scriptures is most challenging you? How are you challenged by the paradoxes in Scripture to live opposite what the world says? In what ways have you experienced the kingdom of God as an upside down kingdom?

Christmas Melody | Find this song on Spotify, iTunes, or Youtube this week and spend time in worship and reflection: "Away in a Manger" by Sufjan Stevens.

All material from www.margaretfeinberg.com.

Week Three: The Ultimate Gift Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. —Matthew 2:2 Confession: I often get

wrapped up in purchasing the perfect gift for someone. Instead of buying another item that gets stuffed in the back of the closet or donated during spring cleaning, I'll try to select a memorable, meaningful gift. Yet sometimes, I don't succeed. The size doesn't fit. The color is off. They already own three just like it. The hardest is when I have to shop for The-Person-Who-Has-Everything. You might have a few of those people in your life. Just when you think you've found the perfect gift, you discover they already own it. The Bible tells us of three gift-givers who faced such a challenge. Traveling about 900 miles from the east, a group of wise men and several attendants and guards closely follow a star in anticipation of worshiping the Messiah—the promised king of the Jews. The gentile (non-Jew) Magi would have combined astrology with their study of religion. On their way to meet Jesus, they are stopped by King Herod, a man installed by Rome to rule as the king of the Jews. Herod's jaw drops when he hears of the Messiah's birth and plots to murder the child. Jerusalem, too, is surprised because they have aligned themselves politically with Herod, instead of spiritually with God. When the Magi arrive in Bethlehem, they kneel at Jesus' tiny feet and reveal treasure boxes to the baby. These wise men bring presents, as was custom when approaching royalty. But consider the gifts these men give to Jesus: Gold—a valued metal in Scripture used much like it is today, frankincense (or incense)—used as perfume and incense for the altar, and myrrh—a perfume or tonic used when preparing a corpse for burial. The gold, frankincense, and myrrh were great in expense and showed reverence to Jesus, but giving anything to the Savior of the world and Son of God seems downright silly. For Yahweh that ultimately has everything and is everything, what gift is appropriate? The Magi purchase the best gifts they can think of—presents of high value. But in the process, one can't help but wonder if they lost sight of the greatest thing they could give to Jesus: The gift of themselves, their presence, their full attention.

During this holiday season, you may give gifts to family, friends, co-workers, and others. But as you give, don't forget that the greatest gift you can give is yourself—baking, babysitting, a coffee date, dinner plans, and more. Don't forget to carve out time to offer yourself as a gift to the King this season. Remember: Jesus doesn't desire your presents as much as your presence.

Prayer | Dear King of kings, This season, I choose to give myself, my whole self, to You. Fill me with more of Your presence as I wait in Your presence. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dig Deeper | Look up the following passages: Matthew 2:1-12, Luke 10:38-42, and Romans 12:1-2. Do you tend to focus on your presents or presence? How can you give yourself as a gift to your loved ones this week? How can you carve out time to give yourself to Jesus this week?

Christmas Melody | Find this song on Spotify, iTunes, or Youtube this week and spend time in worship and reflection: "We Three Kings" by Celtic Women.

All material from www.margaretfeinberg.com.

Week Four: The Holy Mystery Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. —Isaiah 7:14 We're often tempted to skim through Biblical genealogies and move onto the next passage.

With a fleeting glance we skip the impossible-to-pronounce names looking for poignant stories. Yet, genealogies aren't something to be avoided, but celebrated, especially in Jewish culture. The apostle, Matthew, begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus, marking the beginning of the arrival of the Messiah and the coming of the kingdom of God. Matthew uses this genealogy to trace back the promises of God. He even includes five women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bath sheba, and Mary—something rarely done in Jewish genealogical records. The Israelites waited for their Messiah—often impatiently. Matthew historically proves God has not forgotten His covenants with Israel, but is seeing them to fruition. He is bringing the King of the Jews, the Son of God to reign and redeem the world. Beginning with Abraham, travelling to David, moving to Jesus, Matthew reminds us that God promised Abraham and David they would be heirs of the Messiah. God isn't distant or forgetful, but close by and faithful. God sends Jesus to remind us He hasn't left our side. He's with us in the thick of daily life. Immanuel doesn't only sympathize with our challenges, but emphasizes. Instead of whispering messages from the heavens, Jesus dives into the muck and mire of the world. He heals, thirsts, stoops, protects, provides, teaches, holds, weeps, feels, hurts, hungers, suffers, raises. Christ's birth is a holy exclamation point that God is with us in a real and tangible way. This season, wait with bated breath for the God who was, is, and will be to astound you with wonder upon wonder. Press your fingertips to the vault of heaven in hopeful anticipation of God to reveal Himself to you this Christmas.

Prayer | Immanuel, Reveal Yourself to me in real and tangible ways this Christmas as Immanuel. May I learn to dwell in Your presence and seek Your face always. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dig Deeper | Look up the following passages: Matthew 1, John 1:1-18, and Isaiah 9:6. What promises of God are you still waiting on? How do you grow in hope after reading the genealogy of Jesus? What comfort do you find in these passages?

Christmas Melody | Find this song on Spotify, iTunes, or Youtube this week and spend time in worship and reflection: “Immanuel (The Light)” by We Are Creation.

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