



ADVENT

AN INVITATION TO HOPEFUL WAITING

Week 1



WEEK 1: DAY 1

Family Story Night

Stars

The fire crackled, spitting sparks high into the night. They swirled together with the stars. There were so many stars and sparks the air danced and it made the boy laugh.

“Abba, look!” he said to his father, who had his face towards the sheep. All of them were still sleeping as they had been for hours. But he was the watchman. Men from Bethlehem counted on shepherds like him to take care of their flocks. The boy tugged again.

“Look, Abba, the sky.”

The watchman, now shaken loose of his trance, glanced down at his son with a smile then followed his finger up to see the dancing sky. He took a long breath, almost as if trying to pull the whole sight into his lungs.

“I’ve sat under these galaxies for many nights,” the watchman said. “They never stop filling you with wonder. These stars,” he waved his finger in a wagging motion all around him, “they are full of hope.”

“Because of the promises?” the boy asked.

“Yes. The promises. Do you remember God’s promise in the stars?”

“I remember,” he replied. The fire popped another plume of sparks. “But I like it when you tell the story of Abraham and the stars. Tell it again.” The watchman eased another log onto the coals.

“Long ago,” he said, “before our town. Before our land. Before our tribe made their home here. There was a man. An old man. A man so old that he was quite nearly dead. His name was Abraham. And his wife, Sarah, was just as old and just as quite nearly dead as Abraham. They were very wealthy. They owned fields and more sheep than are in this valley. Thousands more. Abraham and Sarah were blessed. But they had waited their whole lives for the blessing they most longed for. The blessing that

outweighed all their silver and gold and jewels. A child. Abraham and Sarah had waited and hoped for so long that it hurt. So long that their hope had dried up like a twig in the desert. They knew it was too late to have a child now. Quite nearly dead people simply can't have children.

Then one night, very much like this one. Abraham was out in a field and our God spoke to him.”

The watchman took a deep breath and the boy smiled. He liked this part.

“Abraham!’ the Lord thundered from the heavens.”

“Well, of course Abraham nearly fell over,” the watchman said, “but he recognized God’s voice. So Abraham said to him, ‘Yes Lord, here I am.’”

“Abraham, tonight is a special night. Look at the stars, how many do you see?’ the Lord said.

‘There’s...there’s too many to count,’ Abraham stammered.

‘I am going to make your family bigger than the stars,’ God said.

Abraham raised an eyebrow in confusion,” The boy laughed as his father tried to make the same confused look.

“But Lord,’ he said, ‘I am old. And so is my wife.’

The Lord replied, ‘Nevertheless, I will give you a son.’

Abraham knew it sounded impossible. Even still, his heart, which for so long had been hopelessly dry, now flooded with faith in the Creator of life and His promise. He believed God could do it.

‘I will bless you, Abraham,’ the Lord said. ‘But this blessing is not just for you. Through you, through your family, I will bless every family on the earth. Your people will become a mighty nation that will bring new life to my world.’”

“But then...years went by. Then more years,” the watchman said. The fire sizzled in front of them as they stared into the winking coals.

“Do you think Abraham doubted while he waited?” the boy asked.

The watchman looked down into the fire for a moment. “What do you think?”

“Well,” the boy replied slowly, “I feel like I would. He had to wait so long, you know? But God did it. He gave them a son.”

Sparks shot up and floated down into the flames. The boy stayed silent. He knew what the next part would be. It was how his father always ended these stories.

“And our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, if his promises were true then...” he paused and waited for the reply.

“They are true now,” the boy said.

“They are true now,” the watchman repeated. “And if he was faithful to them...”

“He will be faithful to us,” said the boy.

“He will be faithful to us,” said the watchman.

The fire was beginning to burn low and the boy yawned as he laid his head on his father’s lap. Both were quiet under the blanket of planets and galaxies. The boy looked up and saw his father’s eyes back on the field, staring closely at the crags and curves and little lumps of sleeping sheep dotting the valley. He sat up and stared too, squinting his eyes in the same direction.

“Abba,” he said to the watchman.

“Yes, my son?”

“What is it exactly that we’re watching for?” he asked.

“The morning,” he replied. “We’re watching for the morning.”

Reading

Genesis 22:17-18 (God’s promise to Abraham)

“I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your children as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore...and in your children shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Psalm 130:5-8

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his sins.

Family Discussion

What is something you've had to wait for? What did waiting feel like?

There are many promises that God has made to us. Sometimes, like in the story of Abraham, we have to wait for them to become real. As we look forward to Christmas, that's what Advent helps us do. It helps us wait for the arrival of Christmas just like sometimes we wait on God's promises. And, as we get closer to Christmas, we will see how God always fulfills His promises to us... sometimes in surprising ways!



WEEK 1: DAY 2

Reading

Isaiah 9:1-7

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

2 The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.

3 You will enlarge the nation of Israel,
and its people will rejoice.

They will rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest
and like warriors dividing the plunder.

4 For you will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

5 The boots of the warrior
and the uniforms bloodstained by war
will all be burned.

They will be fuel for the fire.

6 For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His government and its peace
will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!

Matthew 4:12-17

When Jesus heard that John [the Baptist] had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. 13 He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

14 This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

15 "In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

16 the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.

And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,
a light has shined."

17 From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

Reflection

Have heartaches, disappointments, anxieties or griefs occurred this year in your life? Advent is a time to be honest about moments of darkness, and to allow the light of hope to flood every part of it.

Imagine the shadow of death from Matthew's gospel as a real place - a cold valley with steep walls and disorienting darkness. All gloom in life fills the canyon until, without warning, light pierces through and pushes the fog to either side. The light warms the valley and reveals the trail towards home. Remember that Jesus entered our valley of death and shadows. He knows how real our darkness can be. And how bright His hope can shine. Spend the next few minutes meditating on the truths of today's reading in light of the hope of Christ.

Prayer

Father in Heaven,

I am humbled to think that Jesus was willing to enter the hopelessness of my situation and rescue me. Thank You for turning sorrow into joy. Turn my eyes now from any temptation to return to darkness. Keep them directed towards You. May the Kingdom of Christ shine so brightly in my life today that the gloom of others is banished as well. Amen.



WEEK 1: DAY 3

Reading

Isaiah 11:1-9

Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—
yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.

2 And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

3 He will delight in obeying the LORD.
He will not judge by appearance
nor make a decision based on hearsay.

4 He will give justice to the poor
and make fair decisions for the exploited.
The earth will shake at the force of his word,
and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked.

5 He will wear righteousness like a belt
and truth like an undergarment.

6 In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together;
the leopard will lie down with the baby goat.
The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion,
and a little child will lead them all.

7 The cow will graze near the bear.
The cub and the calf will lie down together.
The lion will eat hay like a cow.

8 The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra.
Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm.

9 Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,
for as the waters fill the sea,
so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD.

Romans 15:8-13

Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. 9 He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote:

“For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles;

I will sing praises to your name.”
10 And in another place it is written,
“Rejoice with his people,
you Gentiles.”

11 And yet again,
“Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles.
Praise him, all you people of the earth.”

12 And in another place Isaiah said,
“The heir to David’s throne will come,
and he will rule over the Gentiles.
They will place their hope on him.”

13 I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection

What would life be like without the hope of Christ? Think of how accomplishments or disappointments or happiness or sorrow might feel in a Christless world.

Martin Luther once wrote, “The Incarnation is proof that our God is not against us.” He has not left us without hope. The Root of Jesse (Jesus) reveals that the Kingdom of Heaven is filled with purpose. It is filled with *delight*. Following the Lord saturates a hopeless heart with joy that sustains us through our darkest hour. For the next few minutes, see how many reasons you can list for delighting to follow Jesus.

Prayer

Father in Heaven,

As one who was once separated from Christ and a stranger to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, I praise You for bringing me near through the blood of Jesus. May this Christmas be filled with reconciliation. In the same way that You have reconciled the church to Yourself, may family and friends experience Your love in ways that bring peace. Where there was once division, bring healing. Where there was once anger, bring mercy. Where there was once separation, bring nearness. May the delight of knowing Christ fill my heart with hope to see it happen. Amen.



WEEK 1: DAY 4

Reading

1 John 1:1-9

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. 2 This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

4 We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

5 This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. 6 So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. 7 But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

Reflection

The purpose of practicing truth, according to John's letter, is to have *fellowship*; both with God and one another. Light brings friendship. However, he warns of two trails that diverge from the path of friendship and lead us deep into darkness. The first deceives us into thinking darkness doesn't really exist. There is no sin (or so it says). This trail dismisses the darkness. The other embraces it. Practices it. Prefers it. They are different in their features but snake their way to the same destination – isolation, despair, and hopelessness.

The true path to fellowship (with God *and* others) embraces forgiveness made possible only in Christ. It's an honest, humble path. And we are invited to walk it each day with a Savior who is faithful and just.

Prayer

Father in Heaven,

My heart's desire is to have fellowship with You, but there are places in my heart that I am tempted to stray. Please forgive me, in Christ, for [repent of places where you have turned away from God]. I believe You are faithful and just. I receive Your forgiveness and accept Your cleansing work. Draw me close today and may our fellowship with one another spill over to my fellowship with those around me. Amen.



WEEK 1: DAY 5

Reading

John 1:1-18

In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

2 He existed in the beginning with God.

3 God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

4 The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.

5 The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

6 God sent a man, John the Baptist, 7 to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. 8 John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. 9 The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him.

11 He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. 12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

14 So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of un-failing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

15 John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

16 From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.

17 For the law was given through Moses, but God's un-failing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

Reflection

Jesus said, "If you've seen me, you've seen my Father also" (John 14:9). With that in mind, spend a few minutes answering the following questions:

When God the Father looks at you, what do you think he sees?
What words would you use to describe how Jesus feels about you?
Were your answers different?

Many times, we forget that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15) and the exact imprint of His nature (Hebrews 1:3). The Incarnation shows us, in the flesh, how gracious and full of truth our God really is.

Prayer

*Father in Heaven,
There are things my finite mind simply cannot grasp. I cannot understand Your eternality or omnipotence. I do not comprehend what it is like to know all things and be present in all things. I don't understand all mysteries or knowledge. But I understand Jesus. I hear Him and see Him in the Scriptures and I love Him. I see the mercy He shows and the power He holds. I feel the conviction of His words and the call He makes to us. I find all of Your promises fulfilled in Him. And, because I have seen Him, I have seen You. Thank You for Your grace and truth. Thank You for the cross. And thank You for the manger. May I understand both more fully today through Your Son. Amen.*