



ADVENT

AN INVITATION TO HOPEFUL WAITING

Week 4



WEEK 4: DAY 1

Family Story Night

Each week starts with a short story that will help awaken our imagination to the wonder of the Incarnation. If you have children, these are designed to be read aloud with your family as a way to include them in Advent. It will conclude with a Scripture as well as a time of reflective prayer. Make these moments special. One way the early church did this was by lighting a candle at the beginning of each week during their Advent reading. For example, read the story at night and light a candle in a dark room. Let it be a reminder to your children that God has brought light to the darkness.

Visitors

The boy's eyes shot open and darted around the midnight sky. Every star was still in its place. Pulsing and bright. Just like they were when he drifted off to sleep. He thought perhaps they were sparkling more than before, almost as if they were dancing, but dismissed it. He glanced over at his father who was not watching the sheep. He too was looking at the sky.

The breeze shifted suddenly out of the north. He sat up. His father looked at him but said nothing. Neither knew what to say. There was nothing to say, exactly. It was something they felt. Something in the air. Something in the blades of grass. Something in the stars. It all looked the same but it was not. Everything felt alive. Like the whole world had just plunged into a deep spring in the heat of the day. The boy looked at his father's arms. His hair was standing up as well.

"What is it?" asked the boy. His father looked around the valley, up into the sky, then breathed in the air around him.

"I don't know. It's as if..."

There was the sound of cracking. It couldn't have come from a tree, for it was far too loud. Like the sound of a forest of oaks snapping in unison. They both stood up and looked for where the sound was coming from.

Then it wasn't dark anymore.

It was as bright as the morning. Maybe even brighter. The trees and the hills and the rocks looked as if they were glowing with light. The boy tugged on his father and pointed to the place where it was brightest. He could hardly look at it without burning his eyes. But he could make out what looked to be the image of a man. An angel?

Yes, it was an angel. They were both sure of it now. The angel had eyes that sparked like fire. Neither the boy or his father could look into them without being filled with fear.

Then the angel spoke. His voice felt more ancient than the earth and moon. It at once filled you with awe and dread and hope.

“Do not be afraid,” said the angel. The boy and his father could not take their eyes off the ground. They were both trembling now. The angel took a step forward.

“Sons of Adam, do not be afraid. Be filled with courage. May your hearts overflow with gladness. For I have come to bring you good news of greatest joy that will be for all people. From the lowest to the highest. From the greatest to the smallest. For those in this land and distant ones. For unto you has been born this day, in Bethlehem – the city of King David, a Savior. Christ, the Lord. You will find him with ease. He is wrapped in swaddling clothes and lies sleeping in a manger.”

The father looked at the boy. *The Messiah had come? In swaddling clothes? They both thought. The Lord of all Kings is wearing strips of cloth we put on donkeys? He is sleeping in a food trough? That is no way to welcome a King.* The thoughts were coming too fast to make sense of it all.

The sounds of cracking returned so loud it was as if the mountains were crumbling into the valley. And the light that was brighter than day somehow became brighter. They looked around and the entire night was filled with angels. All of them were singing. Over and over and over they sang.

“Glory to God! Glory to God!
Glory to God in the highest!
Be filled with joy! Good news has come!
Our God has brought peace to the earth!
Glory to God in the highest,
For our God has brought peace to the earth!”

After the final note, they were silent for one moment, then vanished the next. The boy and his father could see nothing at first, as if they had walked from the

sunlight into a cave. They blinked quickly trying to make their eyes adjust to the night. Slowly, the boy could see a star poking out of the darkness. Soon the valley returned to their vision. It was quiet.

The boy heard his father weeping at a distance. He was already walking quickly towards Bethlehem. He ran to catch up with him and, between heaving breaths, could hear his father saying over and over again,

“He was faithful to them. And He is faithful to us.”

Reading

Luke 2:15-20

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. 17 After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. 18 All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, 19 but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. 20 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.

Family Prayer

Invite each member of your family to offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God. Thank Him for His promises. Ask Him to fill your heart with wonder this Christmas. Pray that your mind will be renewed and your spirit filled with hope in His promises.



WEEK 4: DAY 2

Reading

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. 5 God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. 6 And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” 7 Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

Reflection

Christ came into the world to set us free. In Him, we have the ability to live as sons and daughters of God – filled with the Holy Spirit, strengthened with courage, and empowered to walk in righteousness. Because of His reconciling work, we can know God as Father. We can love others with genuineness and compassion. And we can have peace in the midst of frightening and heavy circumstances.

Prayer

Father in Heaven,

Your presence in my life brings gladness. I rejoice to call You Father. May I experience the nearness of Your presence today in the small moments – in my car, my conversations, my meetings, my solitude, my errands, my eating, my drinking – let them all be marked with the fullness of God. Amen.



WEEK 4: DAY 3

Reading

Matthew 1:18-24

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

23 “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means ‘God is with us.’”

24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

Reflection

When we hear the voice of Jesus, we hear the voice of God. “If you’ve seen Me,” He said to Philip, “then you’ve seen My Father also” (see John 14:9). That’s what makes the word, “Immanuel,” so special. “God, *with us*.” The invisible made visible. By calling Him “Jesus,” the angel showed Joseph His purpose. Jesus’ name literally translates to “God saves.” Imagine what it was like for Joseph to awaken the next day. Not only was God with them. He had come to save.

Prayer

Father in Heaven,

To know You in Christ is to have abundant life. May Your presence strengthen me today with power through Your Holy Spirit; that I may comprehend with all the saints what is the height and breadth and length and depth of Your love. May I know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge – that I may be filled with all the fullness of God. Amen.



WEEK 4: DAY 4

Reading

John 3:16-17

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

Reflection

God sent Jesus into the world to bring salvation and new life. Over the coming days, you may find yourself with family who don't believe the truths of the Gospel. Or perhaps you have friends who will soon be in difficult conversations around dinner tables. Spend some time today interceding on their behalf. Ask that the true joy and celebration of Christmas would be experienced by everyone in your life.

Prayer

Father in Heaven,

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save (Isaiah 59:1). As Nicodemus came to Christ and asked how to inherit eternal life, may _____ find their heart stirred with the same question this Christmas. May they hear the saving message of Christ and come to faith. Give me boldness in my proclamation and wisdom in my speech. For with You, nothing is impossible. Amen.



WEEK 4: DAY 5

Reading

Matthew 7:24-29

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. 25 Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. 26 But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. 27 When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 for he taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious law.

Reflection

As you enter these days of Christmas celebration, reflect on the last year. What have you been building your house on? What storms have come your way? Has obedience to Christ’s commands marked each season? Where do you hope to grow in your faithfulness to God this upcoming year?

Prayer

Father in Heaven,

Your commands are good and bring life to us. Thank You for sending Christ to not only reconcile us, but to call us towards obedience and flourishing. Forgive me for wandering astray. Draw near today as I draw near to You. May my feet be set on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. So anchor my heart in Your good words that the storms of life cannot overtake me. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I will celebrate the birth of Christ today by obeying His commands. Amen.