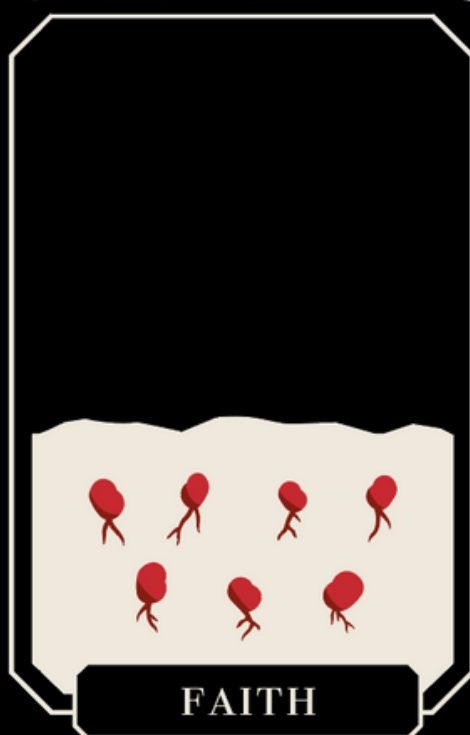
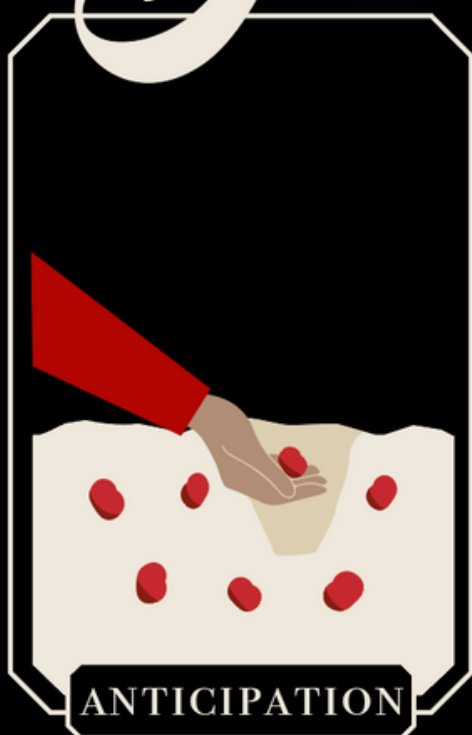


# Advent+



Austin Bridge

# Using this guide

This year for the Advent season, we simply desire for the Word of God to instruct us on the life and way of Jesus. We will be looking at scripture over the next four weeks through the lens of:

Anticipation

Faith

Wonder

Celebration

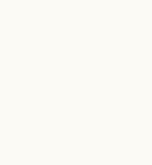
At the end of each week are reflection questions to help process what you have been reading and learning from the Word.

Please use this guide as you see fit! You can go through this individually, in small groups, or with someone interested in learning more about Jesus. We pray that the result of your time in the Word would yield worship and delight in our God.





# **Anticipation December 3-8**





# December 3, 2023

*For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

**Isaiah 9:6-7**

**It is estimated that Isaiah was written approximately 700 years before the birth of Jesus. How would you respond if the Lord asked you to do something that would not come to fruition for 700 years?**

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**The “zeal of the Lord of hosts” is a phrase used in the Old Testament to denote God’s passion for His people, especially in battle. How does knowing this change the tone of Isaiah 9?**

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**Do you anticipate your life to be filled with the increase of Jesus’ peace (v7)? Why or why not?**

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**December 4, 2023**

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

**Hebrews 1:1-4**

**Jesus as the radiance of the glory of God infers He perfectly reflects the One who sent Him. What characteristic of Jesus stands out to you?**

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**How does Jesus being the "heir of all things" affect how you view the world you live in and how you view the future?**

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**Spend some time reflecting on the mind-boggling reality that you will see Jesus face to face one day. Write down some things you anticipate to happen on that great day.**

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**December 5, 2023**

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

**James 1:5-8**

**One of the main ways we as Christians wait and anticipate the Lord to move is through the gift of prayer. What expectations do you carry into times of prayer? Are you generally hopeful, pessimistic, or somewhere in between?**

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**Referencing your previous answer, why do you think that is? What experiences have led you to this place?**

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**If you have found yourself believing a lie that is not from the Lord, spend some time proclaiming a truth from scripture over your circumstance and mindset.**

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December 6, 2023

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick,  
but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.*

Proverbs 13:12

This verse highlights the value and effect of hope within our hearts. Has there been a time in your life where your heart “became sick” due to a hopeless circumstance?

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To defer hope means to put it off to a later time and choosing hopelessness in the present. What do you miss out on when you defer hope?

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If you could have one desire fulfilled to your joy, what would it be? Spend some time asking the Lord for this to come about.

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December 7, 2023

*I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living!*

*Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the Lord!*

**Psalm 27:13-14**

**Spend some time and read through the entirety of Psalm 27. What stands out?**

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**In this Psalm, King David anticipates he will see the goodness, or beauty, of the Lord. What characteristic of God do you dwell on as you find yourself waiting on the Lord?**

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**How can you “take courage” as you wait on the Lord today? Write down some ideas below.**

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**December 8, 2023**

*By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.*

**1 John 4:17-19**

**Studies have identified the top emotional responses to feelings of anticipation are fear, anxiety, hope, or trust. Which of these emotions do you gravitate toward when you find yourself in a time of anticipation?**

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**How could anticipating in a state of fear or anxiety affect your faith?**

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**What would it look like for you to live in a state of hope and trust in the Lord's promises? What would change in your life?**

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# Week One - Anticipation

## Reflection Questions

What did you learn this week about anticipation?

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Were there any misconceptions on anticipation that were addressed while reading the Word?

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How might the Lord be cultivating holy anticipation within you in this season?

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What would it look like for you to live in anticipation of Christ's return?

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# Faith

## December 9-15





**December 9, 2023**

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel”*

*(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

**Matthew 1:18-25**

**Can you imagine the sense of doubt and unease Joseph felt when he found out that Mary was with child? How would you respond if you were put in his position?**

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**In Jewish culture at this time, an engaged woman found in infidelity was subject to public shaming and stoning. What made Joseph reconsider Mary's position and to “divorce her quietly?”**

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**Fear prevented Joseph from walking in faith and taking Mary as his wife. If you had no fear in your life, what would change? Spend time in prayer reflecting on this and confessing any fears that may come to the surface.**

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# December 10, 2023

*The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”*

*Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

**John 1:43-51**

**In this account, Nathanael questioned Philip’s claim of discovering the promised Messiah. What intrigues you about Philip’s response?**

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**Nathanael veiled his doubts of Jesus with sarcasm. Has there been moments where you could relate to Nathanael, who minimized the presence of Jesus?**

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**Nathanael had some underlying pride and assumptions that needed uprooting before he honored Christ as Rabbi, Son of God, and King of Israel. Is there anything in your heart that is preventing you from honoring the Lord in a similar way? Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal any grievances.**

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# December 11, 2023

*Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”*

*Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

## John 20:24-26

**Reflecting on yesterday’s devotional, what similarities do you see between Nathanael and Thomas regarding their doubts?**

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**Jesus addressed Thomas’ doubts in a unique way to produce faith necessary for reverent obedience. Has there been a time when you allowed doubt to prevent you from obeying what the Lord was asking of you?**

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**After this moment, Thomas would commit the remainder of his life spreading the gospel and was eventually martyred in modern-day India in AD 72. Thomas’ doubts were the hurdle he needed to clear so he could radically obey Jesus. Write down any doubts you might have and spend time in prayer asking the Lord to increase your faith!**

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# December 12, 2023

*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.*

*By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.*

## Hebrews 11:23-28

**Do you, like Moses, trust that the reproach of Christ is better than the comfort and treasures of this world? Why or why not?**

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**Reread the passage for today. What relationship does fear have with faith?**

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**What is one practical way you can, in this Advent season, cultivate faith? Read through Hebrews 11 for further examples of walking in faith.**

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# December 13, 2023

*Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”*

*And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”*

## Matthew 14:22-33

**The disciples experienced hours of being “beaten by the waves” before watching Jesus walk on the water. How do you assume the disciples felt in this moment, knowing Jesus sent them on this boat?**

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**Peter started sinking when he took His eyes off of Christ, the object of his faith. What “winds” in your life tempt you to take your eyes off of Jesus?**

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**The phrase “you are the Son of God” appears in the New Testament in predominantly two contexts: doubting or worship. Do you, like many others in scripture, find yourself waiting on a miracle before worshiping Jesus as Lord? If time permits, do a word study on this phrase and reflect on what the Holy Spirit is revealing to you.**

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December 14, 2023

*The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

**Genesis 18:10-14**

**Why do you think God chose Abraham and Sarah to bear Isaac so late in age?**

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**In Hebrew, verse 14 can also be read as “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” Is there anything in your life that you’ve counted out as possible because of its difficulty?**

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**What do you imagine is the Father’s intention for us as He works through the most unlikely and challenging circumstances in our lives?**

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December 15, 2023

*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

*Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

**1 Peter 1:6-9**

**What do you notice about the relationship between faith and joy? Has your life been marked by an increase of faith?**

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**The promise of your faith-refining trials is that they only last “a little while.” Do you view your faith in God as more precious than gold? Does your life reflect this conviction?**

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**Though you have not seen Christ, do you love Him? Spend time asking the Father to fill you with inexpressible joy and love. He desires to give you this heart posture!**

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# Week Two - Faith

## Reflection Questions

What did you learn this week about faith?

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Were there any misconceptions about faith that were addressed while reading the Word?

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What doubts do you need to address to increase your faith in the Lord?

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What would it look like for you to walk in faith in this season?  
What would be different about your life?

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# **Wonder**

## **December 16-22**





# December 16, 2023

*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

*“Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

*When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Luke 2:8-20

**These shepherds were doing their everyday job when an angel of the Lord appeared to them. Why would God use people like shepherds to appear to? Why not someone of higher standing?**

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**God’s miraculous appearance to the shepherds required a response. What was this response?**

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**What was the effect of the shepherds’ obedience to what the Lord asked them to do? What did it do for them personally and for those they spoke with?**

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December 17, 2023

*When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”*

**Exodus 32:1-4**

**The very presence of God was hovering over Mt. Sinai in a cloud of smoke and sounded like thunder. Yet, Israel asked Aaron to make them other gods to worship. What was within Israel that provoked them to create the golden calf?**

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**Israel had become numb to the manifest presence of God that Moses interacted with. In what ways have you become numb to God’s presence in your life?**

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**The same God that dwelled over Sinai now dwells within the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit. Do you revere the Lord’s majesty within you?**

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December 18, 2023

*How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!*

*If I would count them, they are more than the sand.  
I awake, and I am still with you.*

**Psalm 139:17-18**

Scientists have estimated that there are more than  $7.5 \times 10^{18}$  grains of sand, or seven quintillion, five hundred quadrillion grains of sand on earth. More than these are God’s thoughts! Yet, many of His thoughts are for and toward you (Psalm 8:4). How does knowing this affect how you view yourself?

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David declares God’s thoughts as precious and innumerable. What would it look like for you to cherish the thoughts and motives of God?

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It is a miracle that you have woken up this morning and God is with you. Spend some time praising God for this beautiful reality given to you.

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December 19, 2023

*I will remember the deeds of the Lord;  
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.*

*I will ponder all your work,  
and meditate on your mighty deeds.*

*Your way, O God, is holy.  
What god is great like our God?*

*You are the God who works wonders;  
you have made known your might among the peoples.*

*You with your arm redeemed your people,  
the children of Jacob and Joseph.*

**Psalm 77:11-15**

**We, like Israel, often forget the wonders God has done for us throughout our lives. Recall one wonder God has done for you and allow your heart to be stirred toward worship.**

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**What’s at risk if we do not take time to remember the wonderful things God has done for us?**

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**What prevents you from continuing to ask God to perform wonders in your midst? Spend some time in prayer asking for faith.**

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December 20, 2023

*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”*

*There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”*

**John 10:17-21**

**Jesus made some remarkable claims that upset the Jewish people listening to Him. In what ways have you found yourself similar to the Jews, denying Jesus’ ability to do the miraculous?**

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**How does knowing that Jesus willingly laid down his life change your view of the crucifixion?**

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**The Jews attempted to deny Jesus’ claims by rationalizing them, saying Jesus has a demon. What have you tried to rationalize in your life rather than receiving in faith?**

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# December 21, 2023

*Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”*

*After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.*

## John 18:37-40

**Jesus, who is one with God the Creator, was now standing on trial by His own creation. Yet again, the stiff-necked people of God responded to the wonder of Jesus with apathy, demanding the release of Barabbas. How does apathy hinder our sanctification?**

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**In what situations are you most tempted to be apathetic in your relationship with the Lord? How can you combat this?**

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**Is there someone in your life you can invite to keep you accountable to remain “fervent in spirit” (Romans 12:11) as you walk with the Holy Spirit? Reach out to them!**

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December 22, 2023

*It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.*

**Luke 23:44-49**

**There was no doubt that a curtain tearing, clouds darkening, and an earthquake rumbling at Jesus' death would cause wonder in the hearts of those present. Is there anything in nature that causes you to wonder at the reality of God's presence in your life?**

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**The eye-witnesses to the crucifixion went home "beating their chests" because of the sorrow they felt at seeing Jesus innocently murdered, on their behalf! Has the cross ever moved you to an emotional state like this? If not, why?**

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**The curtain tearing symbolized the gap between us and God had been bridged by Jesus, now giving us direct access to the Father. Spend some time marveling in the wonder and mystery of this, that God's very Spirit dwells within us!**

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# Week Three - Wonder

## Reflection Questions

What did you learn this week about wonder?

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In what ways are the Lord inviting you to marvel at His creation?

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What would it look like for you to delight in your salvation?

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What are the things that threaten your ability to behold the wondrous things God has done for you or others?

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# **Celebration December 23-24**





# December 23, 2023

*And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”*

## Luke 22:39-46

**On the night before the greatest moment of celebration in human history, Jesus asks the disciples to pray so they “may not enter into temptation.” In what ways can you practically “stay awake” as you await the fulfillment of God’s promises?**

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**Before every resurrection is a crucifixion. Are there parts of your old self that tempt you from walking in the newness of life that Jesus purchased for you?**

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**Verse 45 tells us that the disciples fell asleep because of their sorrow at the thought of Jesus’ death. Yet before this, Jesus told the disciples that their sorrow would turn to joy (John 16:20). Ask the Lord to bring to mind a time of sorrow and to revisit that memory in light of the resurrection. What joy-producing promise(s) of God can you claim over that memory?**

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December 24, 2023

*After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

**John 19:28-30**

**Jesus knew that all was finished, meaning our atonement has been exacted by the sacrificial giving of His life. Why then, would Jesus be so devoted to fulfilling scripture (Psalm 69:21)? What value does that add into God’s Word?**

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**Does your life reflect the finished work of Jesus? Or does your flesh tempt you to believe that you still have to work for your salvation?**

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**Jesus has enabled the forgiveness of all of your sins by the love He displayed for us while on the cross. Praise God for this invaluable gift of salvation by singing praise or writing out a prayer.**

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**“It is finished”**







# Celebration

## Reflection Questions

**What were some of the most impactful truths or themes from God's Word during this Advent season?**

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**Is there any of the four topics (Anticipation, Faith, Wonder, Celebration) that you'd want to grow in or learn more about?**

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**What intrigued you about Jesus while reading the Word?**

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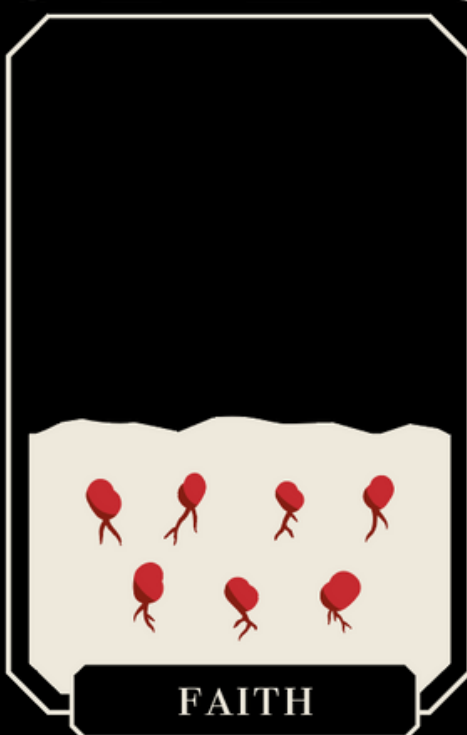
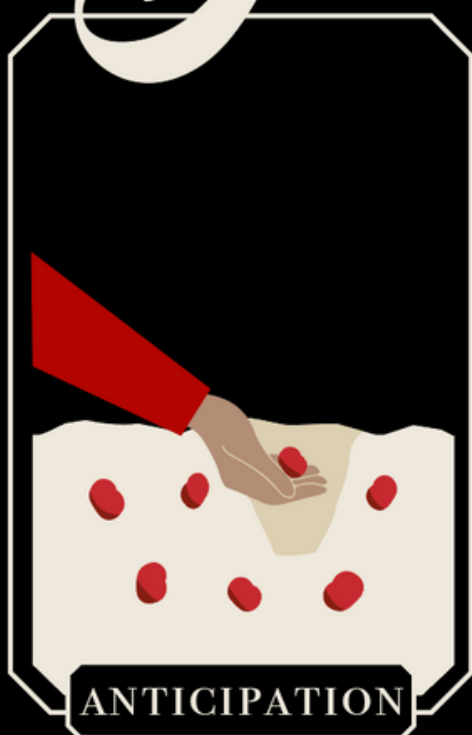
**Is there someone in your life who needs to hear the hope of the resurrection? Write out a prayer for that person and reach out to them!**

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# Advent+



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