

A circular gold wreath made of leafy branches, partially encircling the word 'Advent'.

Advent

ENCOUNTERING GOD IN

Advent



HOW TO USE THIS

STUDY

- 1 Study the Scripture**
We encourage you to read the scripture at least 5 times a week.
- 2 Respond to the Questions**
After reading the passage, ask yourself the questions after each devotional.
- 3 Talk About It**
Engage your friends and family by discussing the table questions.

"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."

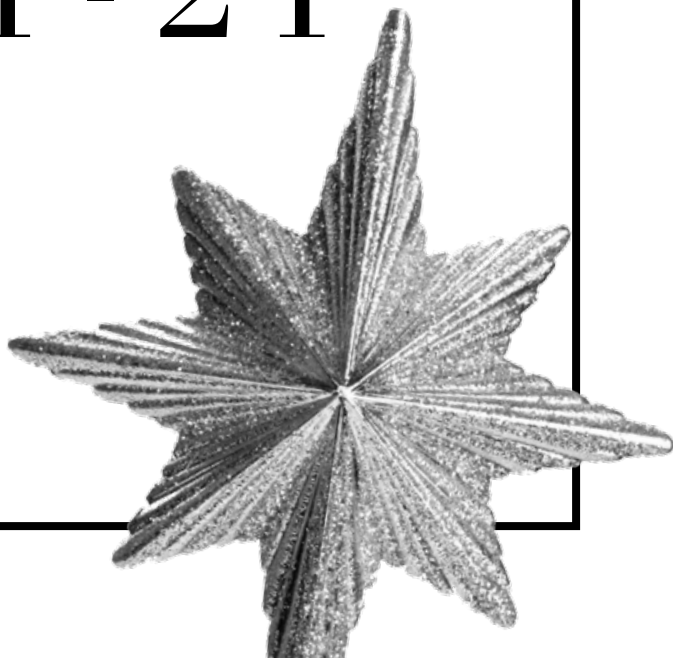
ISAIAH 9:6 ESV



ISAIAH

9:1-21

JON JENZ



DEVOTIONAL

The season of Advent begins today. The word “advent” is derived from the Latin word, *adventus*, and it means “to come.” As followers of Christ, it is vital that we remember His story from beginning to end. For this season, we begin by remembering the prophecy of the coming of God’s only Son.

In Isaiah 9:2, Isaiah says that “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light.” Darkness refers to a spiritual condition where the people choose to follow their own ways rather than God’s ways. While Isaiah was speaking of the nation of Israel, the same darkness is real for us today. People who walk in darkness do not follow the ways of God the Father.

The first week of advent reminds us that the incredible story of Christmas centers on a promise. This was no ordinary promise, but a promise of hope, peace, justice, grace, redemption, and even salvation into a dark world. This promise came true in the form of a child (9:6).

If your eyes are open today, you will undoubtedly see darkness all around. Darkness is the reality for those who choose to not follow God but instead follow their own, sinful way. Know this: darkness is not of God. God is light and in Him there is no darkness. Do you need proof that God does not want you in such darkness? The proof is the completed promise in the birth of the child. While we were still ignoring God and choosing our own way, God sent us hope! Hope in the form of a baby.

If you believe in Jesus Christ, take time every morning this week and remember in prayer why you follow Him. Memorize your own belief and pray that belief to God, by faith, this week.

If you do not believe in Jesus Christ, then what do you believe in? And why do you believe it? Don’t be afraid of the answers to these questions, but try to be as honest as possible.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

- 1 What is a promise? Have you ever been promised something but had to wait a long time for what was promised? How did that make you feel?
- 2 What promise do we read about in this passage? Why is it important?
- 3 How does this promise change the way we view Christmas?
- 4 What is one thing you could do, make, or set out to be a visible reminder that Christmas is about this promise being fulfilled in the birth of Jesus?

TABLE QUESTIONS

- 1 IF there were people in the passage, what were their names? What does the passage say about who they are or what they do? Do you notice anything else about these people? If they were sitting right here at the table with you, what questions might you ask them?
- 2 In what way do the people in the passage hear about or experience Jesus and/or His birth? How did they learn about it? Who told them?
- 3 What does God, directly or through His messenger, ask the person in this passage to do (if anything)? In what way was this person or this group of people important in the story of Jesus's birth?
- 4 Look again at the news the people in this passage are able to tell about Jesus. Can you put that news into your own words? What makes that news so important? What does the passage say about how the people in the passage first felt or reacted to the news? If you were them, what do you think your first response in this situation would be?
- 5 How did they ultimately respond to the news? What did they do? Why do you think they responded in that way? Why is their response important?



FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY
Visit www.gcc.org/adventweek1

LUKE

1:26 - 38

JON JENZ



DEVOTIONAL

In our culture today, when a wife becomes pregnant, it is common for the husband-and-wife to mail out an announcement of the coming of a child. Perhaps there might be a “gender reveal party” or a baby shower. Whatever it looks like, there will be some sort of glorious proclamation: a baby is on the way!

This advent, don’t miss the announcement of the birth of Christ.

Centuries ago, a teen named Mary was betrothed to Joseph. This betrothal was the equivalent of a binding agreement that the two would be married. One day, an angel (yep, an angel) appeared to this teenage girl and told her she would give birth to God’s Son.

For a moment, right now, imagine how you might feel if you were Mary in this narrative. The story would be with you forever. This announcement would define your life. Doubt, shame, terror, embarrassment, wonder, and much more than we could ever fathom would be your companions.

Verse 1:29 says that Mary was “greatly troubled.” Then Mary asks a fairly obvious question, “How can this be when I have never been with a man?”

Mary was an ordinary young woman with great hopes for her life with her betrothed, Joseph. The birth announcement from this angel changed everything. “And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38).

Don’t miss this. God knew Mary would be faithful. And she was. As you read, pray, and study Luke 1:26-38 this week, how can you be faithful to the call God has placed on your life?

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

- 1 Based on what we read in the passage, why was Mary chosen to carry Jesus into the world? What does it say about who she is?
- 2 What was Mary's response to the angel's news? Is there anything that surprises you about her response?
- 3 Has God ever called you to something that you felt would change the way people looked at you? What was your response to Him? What did you learn about God or your relationship with him?

TABLE QUESTIONS

- 1 IF there were people in the passage, what were their names? What does the passage say about who they are or what they do? Do you notice anything else about these people? If they were sitting right here at the table with you, what questions might you ask them?
- 2 In what way do the people in the passage hear about or experience Jesus and/or His birth? How did they learn about it? Who told them?
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- 5 How did they ultimately respond to the news? What did they do? Why do you think they responded in that way? Why is their response important?



FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY
Visit www.gcc.org/adventweek2

LUKE

2:8 - 20

KYLE SMITH



DEVOTIONAL

“Honey, the baby is coming!” My sweet wife announced that our first child was ready to come into the world, and I did what any good husband would do: I walked the dog. It seemed like the right thing in the moment, but only in that moment. Not sure I’ll ever live that decision down. Our son arrived safely (at the hospital), everyone was healthy, and I could only improve as a dad.

In Luke 2:11, we witness the greatest birth announcement ever proclaimed. “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” The announcement was made to shepherds. Not executives, athletes, or rock stars, but faithful shepherds who were doing their job to protect their sheep. Angels, with news that changed everything, greeted lowly shepherds. The long-awaited Savior was coming to rescue and redeem. His birth would end the separation between God and man, bring

peace into our souls, and hope into our lives. The sight frightened the shepherds, but their actions are inspiring. They heard the news and then went to see for themselves. After meeting Jesus, they told others about Him and went back to their homes, lives, and jobs praising God. The shepherds weren’t content with just hearing about the Savior, they wanted to meet Him, to know Him, and to tell others about Him.

I want to be as the shepherds and know Jesus more and be changed by Him. This busy and hectic Christmas season will likely provide many opportunities to show grace like God has shown us. Will you join me in looking for those opportunities? Let’s be like the shepherds. Let’s glorify and praise God because of Jesus and let our gratefulness be evident.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

- 1 Remember the last time you received exciting news. What was it? How did it make you feel? What did you do when you found out?
- 2 What do you know about shepherds? Take a moment to research shepherds if you don't know much about them or what they do.
- 3 Why do you think God chose to announce the birth of his son to shepherds? Why is this so significant?
- 4 What stands out to you about the shepherds' reaction to the news? What did they do? How do you think they felt?
- 5 Do you get this excited about the birth of Jesus Christ? What is one way you could respond to the exciting news of the birth of Christ?

TABLE QUESTIONS

- 1 IF there were people in the passage, what were their names? What does the passage say about who they are or what they do? Do you notice anything else about these people? If they were sitting right here at the table with you, what questions might you ask them?
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FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY
Visit www.gcc.org/adventweek3

MATT

1:18-25

CHRIS WITT



DEVOTIONAL

3 significant things said about Joseph and how they shape my day.

Mary was pledged to be married to

Joseph: He was no extra in this play. He was the man God chose to connect to Mary for a purpose. In addition to providing the divine authoritative link from David to Christ, he was also important at a daily level. He was to be the care-taking, love-giving provider for Mary and our Lord Jesus as He grew from infancy into manhood. Every father in every home should see the opportunity to love their wives and care for their children with no less awe, honor, and gratitude for the role God has allowed them to play in His plans.

He was faithful to the law: To be faithful to the law meant Joseph was a man seeking to live a life set apart. He did not live a life of public praise filled with secret hidden sin but sought to be a man whose life was an act of worship. Was he perfect? Absolutely not. When Joseph first heard what Mary had to tell him, he responded as any human would. There was frustration, anger, and probably some disbelief. He didn't immediately embrace

the idea that God could do something like this. He thought about running away from it and considered ending the relationship. It took a divine intervention to overcome Joseph's lack of faith.

Joseph woke up and did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him: When he finally did understand what God wanted from him, he responded. He woke up and went about the business of being the man he was called to be. He embraced the responsibilities in front of him.

So what do I do with Joseph? Instead of treating him like a placeholder in my nativity scene, someone to balance out the sheep and donkeys, what if I embraced the truth his story offers me? If I am a parent, do I reject the fear, frustration, and confusion that comes with the process of raising a child? Can I embrace the privilege with as much passion, purpose, and intentionality that I embrace other interests in my life? Am I giving my kids everything in me because I am honored by their presence? Or do I need to pray for God to change my heart and help me to see my family in the correct light?

Am I living in fear or confusion for some other reason? I can still embrace the fact that God has already intervened in my life. A believer is connected through Christ to the same strength that created the universe. Rest in that and approach your day as Joseph did. Go about the purpose for which you were created. Get into the business of loving God with everything in you, then love the one next to you in His name.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

- 1 We read about Joseph in this passage. What do we know about him? What kind of man do you think he was?
- 2 What did Joseph think about doing when he heard the news of Mary's pregnancy? What do you think he was thinking or feeling at that time?
- 3 Why did Joseph decide to marry Mary?
- 4 Has your obedience to God ever put you in an awkward or difficult position? What did you risk?
- 5 If we are Christians, God has already directly intervened and communicated with us. What keeps us from being obedient to His call, specifically at Christmas?

TABLE QUESTIONS

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FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY
Visit www.gcc.org/adventweek4

JOHN

1:1 - 14

DOUG CLARK



DEVOTIONAL

All year we have been encountering God through our study of the Bible. As we close out another great year of study together, we turn to John 1:1-14 to celebrate the coming of the Lord Jesus. When you encounter Jesus in John 1, you quickly see that He was no ordinary person. When you encounter Jesus, you experience the Word - that means He is the total expression or revelation of God. When you encounter Jesus, you meet the God who gave His hand to creation. When you encounter Jesus, you are face-to-face with the source of life and with the one who shone light into the darkness, beating it back and destroying it.

When you encounter Jesus, you quickly see that His arrival was like no other in history. John 1:14 says that He became flesh and pitched his tent (dwelt) among people. This was no ordinary arrival. God took on Flesh-Humanity. Why would He do that? Certainly not just to give people a chance to gather with family and exchange gifts. He took on flesh because He had to.

The point of Christmas, the point of His coming, is that the world needs a Savior.

Sacrificial death is the act required of the Savior. That means that He must be like the person He is saving: human. But a human without sin of His own to be covered, and, therefore, God. Ah ha! The God man! God in flesh! That's it.

The encounter with the Savior should have been glorious for all, but some, after meeting Jesus, left confused while others left in rebellion. The people He created didn't even recognize Him as God. The people He had called out, committed, and blessed refused to acknowledge who He was or conceive that what He came to do was in the plan of God.

Praise God, there was another group. They were the ones who encountered Jesus the Savior, believed, and were born again. The most important part of any encounter with God is the receipt of His Son's sacrificial death for your sins. If you haven't yet received the Savior, would you trust Him for the forgiveness of your sin? If you have already trusted Christ, would you allow that relationship to transform you this Christmas season and always?

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

- 1 We read about the Word. Who and/or what is the Word? How long have we had it?
- 2 How important is it that Jesus, the Son of God, was born fully human? How does that change the story for us?
- 3 How does believing that Jesus is indeed the Word, the Son of God change the way we live? How does it change our view of or interaction with Christmas?
- 4 What is your honest, gut-level response to this passage? Do you believe that Jesus is God's Son? That the Word became flesh, as this passage says, and lived, breathed, and talked among mere humans? If you don't believe, what would it take for you to believe? If you do believe, what are you going to do about it this Christmas season?

TABLE QUESTIONS

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FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITY
Visit www.gcc.org/adventweek5



A BLESSING FOR YOUR FAMILY ON

CHRISTMAS MORNING

This Christmas morning, we're asking you to go to the address below and watch a short video that we've prepared for you to watch together with your family.

WWW.GCC.ORG/CHRISTMASBLESSING

The background of the entire image is a close-up, vertical view of dark brown wooden planks. The planks are arranged side-by-side, showing natural wood grain patterns, knots, and some minor surface wear or staining. The lighting is slightly uneven, creating subtle gradients of brown across the surface.

A BIBLE STUDY *by* GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH