

Advent Week 4

The theme for the 4th week of Advent is love.

The scriptures for this week are Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:1-20

Sunday 12/21

God of grace,
Your eternal Word took flesh among us
when Mary answered your call on her life.
Throughout this Advent journey, we have waited with hope,
trusted in faith, celebrated in joy, and prepared with love.
Now make our hearts ready to receive the Christ child.
Amen.

Monday 12/22

Matthew 1: 18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

We've been going through the events leading up to Jesus' birth in the Gospel of Luke, and today we are reading the account of Jesus' birth from the Gospel of Matthew. Don't worry- we are returning to Luke's account tomorrow!

Notice the brevity of Matthew's story. This is it- 7 verses- in total. If you open your Bible, you will find that the Gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus, then this brief account of his birth, and the next story is the account of the Magi searching for and finding the baby Jesus.

It's the same story, told from a different perspective. The end result is the same- Jesus, the Messiah, is born. How does it feel different than living through the birth story in the Gospel of Luke?

The good news of Jesus the Messiah born for us is still the good news... but maybe how we share the story of the good news makes a difference. Looking toward the new year, how will you tell the story of Jesus Christ in both words and deeds?

Gracious God,

You work through ordinary people to accomplish your extraordinary purposes. Just as Joseph trusted your angel's message and chose the way of faithfulness, give us courage to follow where you lead, even when the path is uncertain. May we tell your story with both our words and our lives, bearing witness to your love in all we do.

Amen.

Tuesday 12/23

Luke 2: 1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

We conclude our Advent journey almost the same way we began it, with the phrase, “In those days...” In this passage, though, the events, names and timing confuse historians because they do not align. As much as we might like to definitively say, Jesus was born *here*, we are probably left to accept that Jesus’ birth story might be more like a beloved family story that has been handed down from one generation to the next. It’s true, but in the telling and retelling of the story, some of the details may have gotten lost.

As we reflect on our Advent journey this year, how has waiting for Jesus’ birth impacted your faith? Did you do anything different this year that helped your journey to the manger? What would you tell your 2026 self about December and waiting faithfully during Advent?

God of the journey,

As we near the end of our Advent waiting, we give thanks for these days of preparation. You have walked with us each week with hope, faith, joy, and love, drawing us closer to the mystery of your love made flesh. Help us carry the lessons of this sacred season into the year ahead, so that we may wait faithfully and live expectantly for your kingdom to come.

Amen.

Wednesday 12/24

Luke 2: 8-20

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of

David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth 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 heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The Christ child has been born but his birth announcement to the world still needs to be made! Our scripture today tells us that once again an angel is the messenger of God’s good news for all of humanity. The recipients of the heavenly birth announcement are shepherds in the field. While our imagination often goes to children’s Christmas pageants with cute and cuddly shepherds and sheep, these shepherds were quite different. They were on the margins of their society and were considered to be of questionable character in general. Because shepherding kept them out where the sheep would graze, they could not keep the religious rituals of their faith. Yet, it was to the shepherds with whom angels shared the good news of great joy about Jesus’ birth.

The shepherds wanted to see for themselves if what the angel told them was true. Notice how every angel encounter in Luke’s birth story is met with varying degrees of uncertainty before people embrace the news told to them! Indeed, the shepherds found the baby, shared the angelic encounter with Mary and Joseph, and left praising God. Like all of the other divine encounters in this story, no matter how life-changing the moment is, they then return to their regular lives.

Several years ago, Jupiter and Saturn aligned in such a way as to look like a very bright star. It could have looked like the “glory of the Lord that shone around them.” We could have seen something very similar to what the shepherds saw, over 2,000 years ago. When you see extraordinary natural events, how does it affect you when you return to your “regular life”?

How will you carry the good news of great joy throughout your everyday life?

Good and gracious God,

On this holy night you gave us your Son,
the Lord of the universe, wrapped in swaddling clothes,
the Savior of all, lying in a manger.

On this holy night draw us into the mystery of your love.

Join our voices with the heavenly host
that we may sing your glory on high.

Give us a place among the shepherds
that we may find the one for whom we have waited,

Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, forever and ever.
Amen.

Thursday 12/25 Christmas Day

Wonderous God,
Maker of heaven and earth and creator of little babies,
You reconciled humanity through the gift of your son.
He wasn't born in a palace, even though he was a king. Angels announced his royal birth... to people whose greatest gift was their joy of being included in God's love.
Thank you, gracious God, for the gift of your son, in our lives and our world. May we continue to honor him with joy, so that we can be the light of your love, in word and in deed, telling your story again and again with our lives and our faith.
Amen.

Friday 12/26 and Saturday 12/27
How will you sabbath with love this week?

Loving God,
In these quiet days after Christmas, as the world returns to its regular rhythms, help us hold the wonder of Emmanuel, God-with-us. May we rest in your love, reflect on the gift of your Son, and renew our commitment to share the good news of great joy with all we meet.
Amen.

Thank you so much for journeying through Advent with me with this devotional! I hope that it has enriched your faith during this special season.

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