



Advent Devotions

One Advent tradition practiced at CPC, and by Christians around the world, is the lighting of an Advent wreath. The wreath contains four candles, one for each Sunday of Advent.

This devotional is designed to be used alongside the lighting of the Advent wreath.

We encourage you to read the Bible passages, reflections, and prayers aloud with your household, and listen to the Christmas carols for a holy time at home each Sabbath. Don't have an Advent wreath? Make your own at home by setting up four candles in a circle and decorating with whatever festive decorations you have on hand.

WEEK 1 • BELIEVE

LIGHT THE FIRST CANDLE • READ: LUKE 1:5-20

REFLECT:

The first verses of Luke introduce us to a couple who have known waiting and the struggle to believe amidst deep longing. Although Elizabeth and Zechariah are described as righteous, they've likely faced many tearful nights and sideways glances as year after year passed without the one thing their culture would have understood as proof of God's favor upon them: a child.

When the angel announces this good news to Zechariah, his struggle to believe is, on the one hand, surprising: shouldn't he of all people—a priest, someone in “ministry”—be the most ready to embrace what God is up to? On the other hand, we've all had experiences where an invitation from God feels difficult to accept. We've gotten used to disappointment; we don't want to get our hopes up; we only see the obstacles.

This seems to be where Zechariah is: struggling to believe, wrestling with doubt, and rendered literally speechless. While it's easy for us to think that this silence is a punishment for Zechariah's doubt, what if we imagined it as a gift or a hidden blessing in the midst of his struggle to believe? Unable to voice his doubts aloud to others, Zechariah's silence gives him the opportunity to rest in God's promises in a new way. And nine months later, when his tongue is loosed alongside his infant son's cries, his doubting becomes a song of praise.

Perhaps the journey from doubt to belief in our own lives is paved with not filling our minds and mouths with our own words but with returning and resting in God's promises to us—even while we wait.

LISTEN to one of these Advent carols that point to the belief in the coming Savior:

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

PRAY: Lord, we pray that you will replace our doubt with a longing for your presence and a belief in your promises. We know that your Word is true. When the world bombards us with uncertainty, may your Holy Spirit strengthen our belief. Keep our eyes on the promised One, Jesus. Amen.

**Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has visited and
redeemed his people.
He has sent us a mighty Savior
from the royal line of his
servant David, just as he promised
through his holy prophets long ago.**

-LUKE 1:68-70

WEEK 2 • TRUST

LIGHT THE FIRST AND SECOND CANDLES • READ: LUKE 1:26-45

REFLECT:

In this passage, we find Mary in a position in which she has everything to lose. The angel Gabriel has informed Mary that she is pregnant and is going to have a child, despite the reality that Mary is an unmarried woman. This scenario would have been highly scandalous in the time when Mary lived and jeopardized her standing with her fiancé and in her family and community.

Yet Mary responds to Gabriel saying, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” The only support Mary had as she stepped into potential social and familial disgrace was her confidence and trust in the Lord above all else.

This type of all-in, confident trust that Mary models for us is at the heart of the gospel. Indeed, the Greek word for “faith,” which is *pistis*, does not so much mean “belief in the right doctrines” or “spirituality,” so much as it means *trust*. The ways we put our trust in the Lord are the greatest indicators of the strength of our faith.

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

-LUKE 1:38

In our world, it is easy for us to look to our bank accounts, health, families, and jobs as sources of security and safety. But what Mary shows us is that our true and only hope comes when we trust—body and soul—in the Lord.

LISTEN to one of these carols, and reflect on Mary’s journey:

“Mary, Did You Know?”

“Breath of Heaven”

PRAY: Heavenly Father, we pray that we may be a part of your Kingdom here on earth, trusting in your promises. Help us to open our hands and hearts to your will, emboldening our faith to be more than mere words. May we trust deeply in who you are and the hope we have in you.

WEEK 3 • PRAISE

LIGHT THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD CANDLES • READ: LUKE 1:46-55

REFLECT:

A few days after she hears from the angel, Mary leaves to visit her relative Elizabeth, who is also expecting a child. We can guess that Mary might have been wondering if the angel’s visit had been real, or she might have been simply overwhelmed at the magnitude of what was before her. But as the child within Elizabeth leaps at Mary’s voice and Elizabeth acknowledges her as “the mother of my Lord,” Mary responds with joyous words of praise.

**“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.
How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
and from now on all generations will
call me blessed.**

**For the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.”**

-LUKE 1:46-49 (NLT)

As we read through this passage, Mary’s praise resonates with God’s faithfulness. Her words reveal that she recognizes and understands how God works. When she acknowledges that God is using her, “a lowly servant girl,” she shows that God uses the small and weak to bring about His strength and glory. He is a champion to the

poor, the oppressed, the despised. That He would choose her as a vessel of His grace overwhelms her.

Mary was able to praise God amidst her hard and surprising circumstances because she knew and trusted that God was in charge of the outcome. As we encounter our own unexpected circumstances, may we, too, respond in joyous praise for a God who chooses the weak and helpless to fulfill His purposes. For God blesses us with a gift that transforms us: the gift of Jesus.

LISTEN to these carols of jubilant praise for what God has done and the coming of the Christ Child:

“Angels We Have Heard on High”
“Joy to the World”

PRAY: Lord, we praise you for your love—for how deep, wide, and unchanging it is. We praise you for your faithfulness and for your mercies, which are new every morning. You know us all intimately; you call us your beloved. Thank you for the gift of Jesus and the life we find in Him.

WEEK 4 • PREPARE

LIGHT ALL FOUR CANDLES • READ: LUKE 1:57-80

REFLECT:

At the end of Luke, the arrival of Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son occurs. As Zechariah writes *His name is John*, his tongue is loosed and he responds with praise. He also recognizes that God had a specific purpose for John: to “go before the Lord to prepare his ways.”

Are you prepared for Jesus? As we get ready for Christmas, it might feel that way. Trees are decorated, lights are strung. Nativity sets and advent wreaths are on display. Presents are bought and wrapped, food is made, and carols are sung. A lot of energy is spent on the outward trimmings; less often do we prepare our hearts in the same manner.

In Zechariah’s prophecy, we see his expectation that God will come and rescue him. In those words we see the honesty of his need for a Savior and his belief in the surety of God’s promises. Zechariah emerges from his silence with a proclamation of the preparation work that John would do and beautifully prophesizes: “Because of God’s tender mercy, the light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and . . . to guide us to the path of peace” (v.78-79, NLT).

May the preparation of our own hearts this Christmas bring both a recognition of our need for Jesus and an outpouring of love that compels us to share the wonders of His grace with others.

LISTEN to these carols that prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus, knowing how He was born so that we might find forgiveness and salvation through His death and resurrection.

“I Wonder as I Wander”
“In the Bleak Midwinter”

PRAY: Loving Father, prepare our hearts for the gift of Jesus, your Son who came to earth to set us free from sin. Help us to recognize our great need for Him. May our words and our actions point to Jesus, the Hope of the world.

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.”

-LUKE 1:76-77