



⇒ A HANDS on ADVENT ⇒

Advent 2016 Daily Reflections

Introduction

We invite you to journey with us through this Advent season by reading these daily reflections, either individually or together as a family. Each day someone from Chestnut Grove has offered a reflection around the Scripture and theme for the week. This Advent, we hope to experience the season through our senses which include, **Seeing & Seeking, Hearing & Heeding, From Foretelling to Forhtelling, and Incarnation: The Touch of Christmas.** Our prayer is that everyone who participates would experience this Advent in rejuvenating way. Thank you to all of those who prayerfully and thoughtfully submitted their reflections.



Week 1: Seeking & Seeing // Matthew 2:1-12

Sunday 11/27

Reflection by Bill Sutherland

The wise men traveled many hundreds of miles to see the king of the Jews. When they finally found him, they responded with joy, worship, and treasure. This is a momentous turning point in the story of salvation. Why? Later in Matthew's Gospel Jesus teaches his disciples that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Isn't this really the response we all should have when Jesus is revealed to us? In this Epiphany story Jesus himself doesn't actually do anything at all. Or say anything. No teaching, no blessing, no miracle, no healing. In this story, Jesus simply is, and apparently that's enough to change the lives of these Gentiles and open up the possibility that all of God's children might share in the blessing God gave to Israel. As the first Gentiles to worship Jesus as Lord, they may indeed have something to teach us - no one meets Jesus and walks away from the experience unchanged.

Reflection by Sandra Sutherland

We do not know what brilliant star those ancient Persian astrologers saw, but it was their profession to watch the sky and this star spoke to them about the birth of a king. Was it an accident that the gifts they brought were so fit for this child? *Gold* is the gift for a king, and gold, the king of metals, is a fit gift for the king of men. *Frankincense* is the gift for a priest. This sweet perfume was used in Temple worship and sacrifices. In Latin the word *priest* means *bridge-- builder* -the one who opens the way between God and man. *Myrrh* is the gift for the one who is to die. Myrrh is used to embalm dead bodies. The wise men foretold that the infant would become a king of men, the High Priest, and the Savior of all men through his death

Monday 11/28

Reflection by Cindy Fargo

They KNEW it! With a knowing that called them to action. How could they be so certain? Not one, but three people felt strongly enough to make this trip and make it without any reservations about what they expected to find. And why did they come? As treasure hunters? No, they brought treasures. Seeking wisdom or fame? To right some great wrong? **No.... They came to worship. Simply. To. Worship.** They came to Jerusalem. Could there be any place on earth more steeped in worship? The most pious and religious lived in Jerusalem. But these didn't seek him with the hunger of these eastern travelers. I wonder sometimes about religiousness. About *my* religiousness. Does it ever thwart my pure and simple worship? Is there something about this simplicity akin to the "childlike" faith Jesus spoke of?

Tuesday 11/29

Reflection by Tony Brown

The three wise men seem so awesome. Can you imagine hanging out with these guys and the adventures they might take you on? This particular adventure would have been crazy - following a star to try and find the savior of the world! - WOW! Wonder how long their journey took to find Jesus and what did they have to overcome to finally get there? What obstacles are in our way of finding Jesus this Christmas? Can we look past the family drama, advertisements, credit cards and sales events? I pray that we can all concentrate on the peace, love, joy and hope of this season!

Wednesday 11/30

Reflection by Steve Turner

Do all who seek find? I find it interesting that the Magi find King Herod in their quest to see the Christ Child. They are seeking intently for the purpose of worship, but upon hearing the news, Herod begins to seek as well, but for a very different reason. The Magi were looking to kneel in the presence of Jesus' majesty, but Herod wanted to preserve his own power and status. Are we able to put our power and status aside to honestly seek Jesus to give him our worship? This Advent, like the Magi, may we see ourselves as less so that we may see Christ for who he truly is.

Thursday 12/1

Reflection by Robbie Yeaman

Lord, you showed astrologers where You were born with the stars You created. You showed the chief priests and scribes where You were going to be born with Your Word that You composed with prophets, kings, murderers, prostitutes and everyday people. Help me be open to You showing me about Yourself with all things You have made. Forgive me for being so narrow minded to think You only work in certain ways. Help me trust Your Word, Living and Written and help me look for You at work in places I never have before

Friday 12/2

Reflection by Sharon Veith

Why do we make such a big deal of Advent when we already know what happened!? Jesus came to earth years ago- we know how the story goes, a star, wise men, shepherds. We know it is a big deal. We even go so far as to be grateful from time to time. Christmas decorations out in stores so early- what's that all about?! And then there's the shopping and cooking? Get the picture? Celebrating the birthday of Jesus is one of the most important events in our faith journey. We often anxiously anticipate and plan at least a month in advance for the birthday of a child, spouse, parent, or friend. Don't we owe Jesus that and more? Advent is a time to be intentional about the renewing of our faith. Maybe the retailers have it right but for the wrong reasons. As you see "Christmas" in the stores, instead of aggravation, let those things slow you down and bring the Peace of remembering the Greatest Gift ever given. Is a month really too long to ponder and "follow the star"?

Saturday 12/3

Reflection by Shannon Brown

The Magi – examples for us of intentionally seeking, seeing and responding. Yes, they were following a star; but really they were following the Light of the World... As we prepare for this Advent season, let's remember that we, like the wise men, are called to come; to follow. Let's respond intentionally as we look for and follow God's light. May it guide our paths as we journey ever closer to our Lord and Savior. Eventually, the wise men found the place the star had led them and, awed by what they saw, presented their gifts. But, what gifts? Some say gold, frankincense, and myrrh. For me, though, this story highlights the much more lasting and profound gifts they offered – they sought and saw; they followed, worshipped, and believed. What gifts will each of us offer to Jesus this Christmas? I pray that in the "seeking" we will "see" the "king".

Week 2: Hearing & Heeding // Matthew 1:18-25

Sunday 12/4

Reflection by Erin Collins

What stands out to me when reading this passage, is Joseph's faith and trust in what God is asking him to do even though it's going against the culture of his time. Hebrews 11:13-16 it says, "All these people (of faith) were still living by faith when they died... admitting they were foreigners and strangers on earth... they were longing for a better country- a heavenly one." They were looking ahead to what will come and trusting God. God is with us. He is always leading, guiding and strengthening us for whatever he's asked us to do. What is God asking you to do? Will we step out in faith even if we look different or it feels uncomfortable?

Monday 12/5

Reflection by Steve Turner

When I consider the message that Joseph heeded, I think of the pride that he swallowed to do so. He returned to his family and friends with a wife bearing a child that did not belong to him. By law and by custom, he was within his rights to "put her away" as the King James phrases it. I wonder what I would encourage Joseph to do if he were a friend of mine. "Just put her away quietly Joseph. There's nothing wrong with that, it's your right. This girl is bringing way too much baggage for you to deal with." In our world, we define freedom as the exercise of our rights. Is there ever a time where freedom is gained from learning to sacrifice our rights in the pursuit of God's calling?

Tuesday 12/6

Reflection by Cindy Fargo

This is similar to the angel visiting Mary. It isn't every day that an angel comes with a message. (they probably talked and compared their experiences) The angel gave Joseph specifics. He probably needed that. He told him the baby's gender, His name and even what His purpose would be! In fact, the angel even named Joseph's feelings for him. (fear) Oh, dear Lord, that my course would be made so clear to me! —THEN it would be so much easier to heed your instructions. If you would only paint in some details for me, THEN I would...but wait I **DO** have your words. I may not know every detail before it unfolds, but then, did Joseph? Did Mary? Father, help me to simply do what I already know to do. I want to listen for the sound of your voice with a tender heart that is eager to obey. You always have my best interest at heart, far beyond what I could plan. My greatest desire is that I would be a joy and delight to you.

Wednesday 12/7

Reflection by Sandra Sutherland

This passage tells us how Jesus was born by the action of the Holy Spirit. The focus is not that he was the son of a virgin woman, but rather the work of the Holy Spirit of God through Mary the vessel. Joseph had been taught and believed that the Holy Spirit was the person who brought God's truth to men. The Holy Spirit taught the prophets what to do and say. Joseph was told to call the child *Jesus*, Jesus is the Greek form of *Joshua* and *Joshua* means *Jehovah* which is *salvation*. This betrothed man was being told that Mary's child to be born would grow into the Saviour who would save God's people from their sins. An unorthodox entry for a King? Can you imagine the enormity of Joseph's sense of responsibility? Jesus is the one person who can tell us what God is and what we ought to be. He is the epitome of

love, compassion, purity, mercy, goodness. Jesus enables us to see God's truth: he opens our eyes to see things truly.

Thursday 12/8

Reflection by Sharon Veith

In my faith journey over the years reading and hearing stories about faithful men and women of the Bible, a question has come to mind. I have always wondered, "How many people did God have to ask before Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Mary, etc. said yes? Did the people He asked before just say no? Did they hear Him? Did they see Him at work in their lives?" I then have to ponder about my own life and relationship with God. I am often too busy to recognize God's Hand in my life. Family, work and yes, even church competes for my time and my ear. How many awesome blessings and opportunities to bless others have I missed just because I didn't hear? How many have I missed because I said yes to the wrong things and no to the most important things? Oh, to have missed being the mother or father of Jesus! I pray during this Advent season that we refocus our lives to listening in whatever way God speaks and obedience to that voice, "and he did what the angel of the Lord commanded."

Friday 12/9

Reflection by Allison Yeamen

In your opinion, what is worth saying "yes" to? Joseph had an opinion. It says right there on the page that he "resolved to divorce her". Based on the surrounding circumstances, the swell of shock within him, and the overwhelming emotions that followed, he made up his mind. God broke in. He sent an angel messenger to deliver a holy telegram. "Hey. I see you Joseph. You are not forgotten. I know this is terrifying. You could lose your dignity among friends and family. This is not what you were hoping for. You were anticipating a new beginning with the wife of your youth. But Listen. This plan of Mine is not only for Mary. I need you, too, Joseph. Trust Me." There is no maybe. There is only one answer from your mouth, from your heart to Him. "No, I can't. Won't. Thanks, but no thanks". Or "Yes, Lord. Even when it makes zero sense. Yes."

Saturday 12/10

Reflection by Bill Sutherland

The only response to God coming into our lives, and the only response to grace must be obedience. That is the cost of grace and the avenue to discipleship. Obedience and faith are tied together. Faith is only real when there is obedience and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience. Obedience is the only work of discipleship!

Week 3: From Foretelling to Forthtelling // Luke 1:26-38

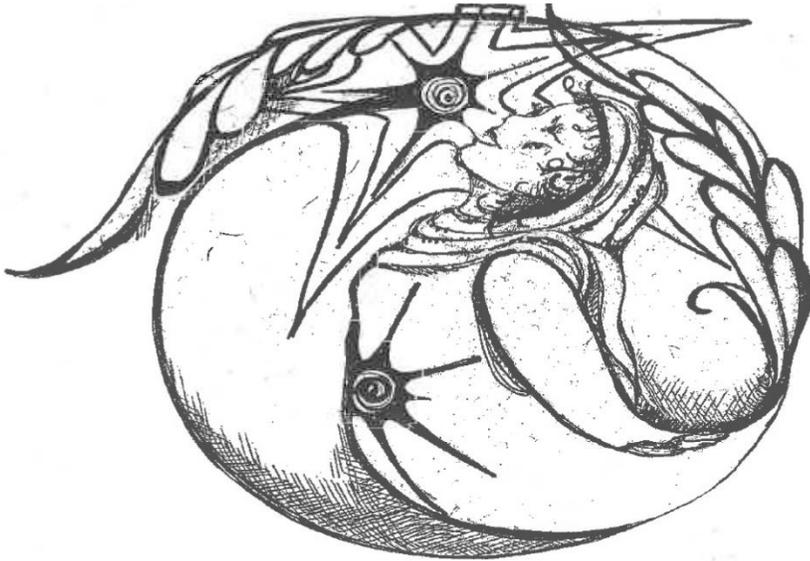
Sunday 12/11

Reflection by Laura Vinzant

Have you ever wondered if Mary felt favored or blessed? "Greetings, blessed one!" the angel says. But the message that follows was probably not what Mary wanted to hear. I don't really know what the hopes and dreams of a young woman were 2,000 years ago, but I can guess that being pregnant and unmarried were not among her top choices. The angel gave her some comfort by telling her not to fear. And he gave her a vision of what the future would hold for her child – he would be a king whose kingdom would endure forever. But other than that, Mary didn't have much to go on. No instructions about how to break it to Joseph. No words about how to navigate the disapproving glances from neighbors. Just a promise that the Lord would be with her. Isn't that the great hope of Christmas? That the Lord is with us now. In all things. Even hard things. Even when we don't know what we're doing. Maybe especially when we don't know what we're doing. Immanuel. God with us.

Monday 12/12

Reflection (via art) by Tonya King



Tuesday 12/13

Reflection by Deb Pennington

Thinking about this story, I realize we need to understand the difference between Foretelling & Forthtelling. **Foretelling:** Having insight from the Holy Spirit into a situation beforehand and declaring it.

Forthtelling: Having prophetic insight from the Holy Spirit about something that has already happened or is occurring at the present, and declaring it.

As I read the story of Mary, I find a young virgin woman betrothed to Joseph who was of the house of David. She was selected by God to be the mother of Jesus. Gabriel, God's messenger, was foretelling the future. I ask myself how I might react to an angel foretelling an event that would be supernatural. Would I question this as a possibility just as Mary did? Mary was told as a result of the creative power of God's spirit, her son, Jesus, would be the son of GOD. He would reign forever.

Gabriel then shares with Mary the pregnancy of her aged cousin Elizabeth. In this forthtelling he cites this as a sign of God's power. Our story concludes with Mary humbly submitting to the will of God and

conceives as a servant of the Lord. What faith this submission takes! God shows us in many ways his power. We just have to believe. Will we accept?

Wednesday 12/14

Reflection by Steve Turner

"Greetings you who are highly favored!" What a word of blessing. But do we fully understand the blessing of God. Mary was blessed with a holy burden. Through God's favor, she would bear a child and watch him suffer for the world. What does it mean to be blessed? Her high favor didn't earn her a life of ease, but it did offer her a chance to play a part in changing the world. That is what it means to find God's favor and blessing. We are given the honor of partnering with God in world changing work. Wealth, prosperity, and success are not blessings, or the sign of God's favor. God's favor on us is the gift of bringing light and hope into the world. God's favor on me doesn't make me better, it makes the world better.

Thursday 12/15

Reflection by Bill Sutherland

It is great to be chosen of God but it is hard for us to allow ourselves to be used of God. Once Gabriel had told Mary she was "favored," he began to tell her the way God was going to use her. Mary knows that having a baby does not fit the facts of her relationship to Joseph. She starts to explain to Gabriel the process by which babies are conceived. "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" This becomes the reason so many of us stop short of what might have been our experience of God. The "How?" becomes our stumbling block to a deep relationship with God. This is a faith test for many of us. If we cannot make it reasonable by our notions of what ought to be reasonable, then we will not "believe" or participate. It is at this fork in the road that many good people make the wrong turn

Friday 12/16

Reflection by Cindy Fargo

Highly favored. The Lord is with you...Of course Mary wondered at what kind of greeting this was. Who wouldn't? How would I respond if an angel showed up to deliver a message from God? As I ponder this, I'm thinking...maybe I *have*, in fact, had messages from God. I have his Word. He has spoken to me through prayer, dreams, circumstances and lots of people. Sometimes, like Mary, I have trouble wrapping my brain around it, and am also "greatly troubled". But she is told not to be afraid; *she has found favor with God*. I think this is the real nugget here! It is only when I understand on a base, heart level, that I too have found favor with God. It is the KNOWING of that, *knowing* that I am his, that I am chosen, my name carved on the palms of his hands,...it is in THAT space, that I too can fully surrender to say, "I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled."

Saturday 12/17

Reflection by Sandra Sutherland

What have you done recently that took faith, courage, trust, and great personal risk? And would you have asked "How can this be?" Mary's affirmative answer to God's call did not grant her an easy life. Mary found favor with God at much personal grief....humiliation, possible divorce, exile, the grief of losing a Son in such a painful manner. A brave servant to be honored! A Spanish philosopher summed it up, "May God grant you peace, but give you glory!" With God there are no "outsiders"; we never know how God can use us until He calls.

Week 4: Incarnation: The Touch of Christmas // John 1:1-14

Sunday 12/18

Reflection by Bill Sutherland

If the good news is spoken and we refuse to hear it, is it still good news? According to John 1, it was the word of God that began creation and brought the world into being. Christmas is a reminder that the creative power of God continues to be at work in the world today. The story of Jesus does not end with his death and resurrection, but continues even today in his disciples who share his work and teachings and their faith in him with others. Discipleship means following Jesus and learning to see as he sees; both the truth about God and the truth about who we can be as we come to know, love, and follow him.

Monday 12/19

Reflection by Sandra Sutherland

God exists and always has. His spoken Word has come to us in the form of a human being—Jesus. John the Baptizer was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, to provide witness to Jesus' coming. God's spoken Word became flesh offering forgiveness and judgment, healing and illumination, mercy and grace, joy and love, freedom and resurrection. Many miss the point of who and what Jesus is; many do not accept him. We need to accept Jesus as he is. Put faith in him and the things he embodies. Listen to what he says, then we can begin to "receive him". How can we continue to receive the person this passage talks about?

Tuesday 12/20

Reflection by Tony Brown

When reading this scripture, the importance of the word "light" really seems to catch my attention. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it). I enjoy and take great comfort in knowing this. *There is also a super moon outside tonight!* It seems to me that we are bombarded with perceived darkness, yet with a little perspective the light always seems to shine through. The world needs to know that this light is always with us and can break through any darkness. I know it can be a real struggle to find the light when things become dark in our life but, I believe it to be a great test of our hope in Jesus and the light he provides.

Wednesday 12/21

Reflection by Robbie Yeaman

Lord, You said that the Word, Jesus, became flesh and dwelt among us. Peterson translated that the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. I know this intellectually Lord but I so often don't really live like I believe You are in my neighborhood. I am so quick to trust my own mind and my logical understanding of how this world and people work. Be made incarnate in me so much that I trust You more than I trust myself. Help me believe that You want to be made incarnate in me so much that I see every family and work relationship through the lens of Your desire to love everyone! Through the lens of You wanting to be made incarnate in everybody!

Thursday 12/22

Reflection by Frank Ballif

It is difficult to think of God as both fully human and fully divine. It is much easier to think of Jesus as "otherworldly" than as a person with our challenges and limitations. Jesus had bad days. He got sick, tired, hungry and tempted. In his humanity, he gave us an real example of how to live, serve and sacrifice. His ambitions were not focused on this world. His coming removed the theoretical, distant, and often perceived irrelevancy of a distant God. Jesus embodied an incarnational God living among his people and facing the same everyday experiences as the rest of humanity.

Friday 12/23

Reflection by Allison Yeamen

I recently queried into the scientific nature of light and dark and the characteristics of each type of particle. So, here is a brief science lesson. Light is nature's way of moving energy through space. Light is a visible expression of energy. Darkness is the absence of this energy. The particles of light maintain a high vibration amongst themselves, while there is little or no particle vibration in the dark. This Word that we are blessed to hold in our hands talks a lot about Light. For further meditation, see John 1:4-5, Matt. 4:16, John 8:12, John 12:35-36, 1 John 1:5. I've been recently drawn to Hebrews 1:3 "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." The Greek word "radiance" is *apaugasma*: *a reflected brightness, a shining forth*. The Brightness is to the source of Light as the Son is to the Father. Or as I heard someone say once, *Jesus Himself is the sheen of the Father's glory*. "This Son perfectly mirrors God, and is stamped with God's Nature." verse 3, *His Life is the Light to live by. Darkness doesn't have power to put out His Light. His True Light draws everyone in to real Life*. This True Light is Whom we celebrate.

Saturday 12/24 (Christmas Eve)

Reflection by Katie Alfano

This summer I was blessed to be part of a weeklong formation program for children at Chestnut Grove. Teachers creatively used cave decorations to help teach the theme "Jesus is the light of the world." Writing of Jesus, John 1: 4-5 reads: "Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it." We asked the children, "if we were in a dark room with just one candle and we shut the lights, covered the windows and made the room even darker – would the darkness put out the light of the candle?" Most said no, some said maybe, a few said yes. So we tried it; and no, the darkness didn't put out the light. In fact, the light shined brighter against the darkness. May the lights we see this season remind us of this good news!

Sunday 12/25 (Christmas Day)

Reflection by Erin Collins

When reading this passage, I'm overwhelmed by how good and awesome our God is. In him alone, we find life and freedom from darkness. Almighty God, left his throne to come to earth to save us and dwell with us. Wow! What king leaves his throne and chooses to live with his people? The word dwelling in verse 14 is the Greek word *Skenoo*. This word means to abide (to live) in a tabernacle or tent. The same glory that resided over the tabernacle and tent in the Old Testament (Exodus 25:8, 40:34-38) is now present in Jesus and with us at all times. Each day, are we aware of God's holy presence with us? Are we accessing and living in the power God freely gives us when we trust in Jesus?