

Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room

Four Advent Reflections inspired by Sacred Christmas Songs:

Joy to the World
Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming
O Holy Night
O Come Let Us Adore Him

Written by Kristin Jones

© *with quiet hands*

Introduction

Thank you so much for choosing this set of advent reflections! I have found the celebration of advent to be such a beautiful time for me and my family, and I hope that this series of reflections will enrich your Christmas season.

Background

Advent is the Latin word for “the coming.” Its history traces back to the Middle Ages as a way to anticipate Christ’s second coming and was a time of prayer and fasting similar to Lent. Later, it became associated with recognizing Christ’s birth.

It is traditionally celebrated the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, and is a time to reflect on the first coming of Christ and looking forward to his second coming. It is commemorated with the lighting of candles, symbolizing Light coming into the world, and different aspects of the Christmas story and what it means for us.

Why Celebrate Advent

While people celebrate it in different ways, Advent is meant to be a time to slow down, practice gratitude, and meditate on what Christ’s lowly birth meant, and continues to mean. It is a time of love, joy, hope, and peace. I believe that, as believers, it is essential to take a step back from the vast cultural construct of Christmas and come back to the true heart of the holiday, and celebrating Advent is a wonderful way to renew our minds.

Using “Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room”

Each week, there is a reflection inspired by a different Christmas song. Included are Scripture verses and references to the song, as well as thoughts for personal application.

Each week also includes suggestions for celebrating advent with your family (whoever it includes: your spouse, children, grandchildren...whoever you call family!). Weekly, there is a song to listen to, a scripture passage to read, topics to share about, something to do, and a song to sing. You can do as much as or as little as you like, in whatever order you like.

What a sacred honor it has been to write these advent reflections! May you feel the hope, peace, joy, and abundant love of Christ in this beautiful season! Soli Deo Gloria.

Kristin

Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room

Advent Week One - Inspired by *Joy To the World*

Anticipation

It is a world rich with meaning. It can be qualified as joyous or anxious. It can be associated with that which is unknown or that which is familiar. It can be a gift, or it can be a burden. Regardless, it looks forward, not behind.

In addition to my marriage, the events for which I had the most anticipation were the birth of our children. From the moment of discovering we were pregnant, my entire life shifted, both internally and externally.

Among the myriad of questions and feelings, we began to make adjustments. We adjusted our lifestyle, made space for a nursery, collected baby items, read books, made new plans, had different conversations. We prepared room, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually for the new little lives that were inevitably coming our way.

Then, of course, our children arrived. The event occurred, the anticipation was over, a new way of living began. And there was no going back. And I'm totally ok with that. Sure, parenting has its trials and struggles, but also immense joy and love. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

So it is, I believe, with my relationship with Christ. At one point, I had to make adjustments to welcome him into my life. I had to reprioritize, make sacrifices, submit to his plans. I needed to prepare him room.

No Room

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. Luke 2:7, ESV

Sometimes, in my familiarity of the Christmas story, I lose sight of its significance. It is a strange story, if you think of it, from the angel visitation to the arrival of wise strangers.

Of course, as the story goes, there was no room for Joseph and Mary. We see the images of Joseph and Mary stumbling into town late at night, being refused by various innkeepers, and Mary finally giving birth to Jesus in an isolated stable behind some inn.

That classic image, though, actually isn't biblical; scholars believe that Joseph and Mary were staying with one of Joseph's family members, but were not able to secure a room of their own due to the fact that the other guest room(s) was occupied by other family members. They could have been there days, even weeks, before Jesus was actually born, removing some of the urgency we associate with the story. And while Jesus *was* laid in a manger, it was likely in the lower compartment of a peasant family's home where animals would have been kept at night.

That's a different image of the Nativity story, isn't it?

Here's what *is* biblical: Jesus was laid in the manger because there was no guest room for him. Isn't that amazing? The Messiah didn't require some well-prepared, immaculate, clean space; he entered the world and was laid down in a bin of animal feed. He, being born to poor parents, was nothing to be celebrated, no guest of honor.

He Came to His Own

Here's the thing I find beautiful and poetic about that view of the story; Jesus was born among family. Yet, as is consistent with the Scriptures, "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him," (John 1:11). Did his earthly family recognize who he was? Likely not.

But who did? The shepherds. The strangers. Those poor folk out in the fields, those who shared God's heart for care-taking. They were given the knowledge of the tiny baby's true identity, and they were the first to hear and spread the word of Jesus' true mission.

Who else? The wise men, however many there were. The foreigners. Those of high regard and esteem, with wealth and wisdom. They, too, were part of God's plan for declaring and protecting the news of the King's arrival.

God is not exclusive. He invites all to come and know him through his Son, regardless of status, background, situation, occupation, or previous beliefs. And, "...to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

The story of Christ's birth truly sets the stage for the entire gospel.

Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room

When I think about the sacred carol, *Joy to the World*, I am struck by the exhortation: "Let every heart prepare Him room." There is no limitation to the type of heart that is allowed to prepare space for Jesus.

Yet, preparation is required. Much like we prepared our lives for the birth of a child, we need to prepare our hearts for this holy Child.

When preparing for a guest, you can get away with shoveling piles of messes into closets and under beds. You can put on a happy face for the allotted amount of time, and serve to your heart's content. You can give up sleeping in your own bed for a time, know that having a guest in your home is temporary, that you may, at some point, return to your usual routines.

But to prepare for a child means to prepare for your entire life to change. It means you have to prepare not only your physical space, but your mental space as well. You realize that welcoming a child into your life is going to be filled with joy, but also heartache. You begin to adjust for not just an extended weekend of sacrifice, but a lifetime of it. There is no returning to normal, but rather the making of a new normal.

When it comes to welcoming Jesus into our lives, I am certain it will look more like the latter than the first.

Personal Application

As we anticipate Christmas day, let's take time to reflect on our own hearts. Have we already welcomed Christ? Have we treated him as the honored guest he is, or have we limited his residence to the basement of our souls where less is required of us? Have we allowed his presence to transform our lives, or have we sought to maintain our old way of life? Have we valued him, revered him, cherished him, or have we kept our distance from him? Have we embraced the reality that life under the Lordship of Christ is one of sacrifice and struggle, but one that is worth living because we can't fathom our life without him?

If not, what is holding you back? Remember: our Savior was laid down in a manger. He will reside in any space, no matter how lowly. He has, in his grace, made all of our hearts acceptable homes, even if we see them as dirty, shameful, insignificant, or insufficient. Invite him in. He will not refuse you.

Now is the time to prepare him room.

Suggestions for Family Time - Week One

Every heart can prepare him room, including your children or grandchildren. Little ones have such a unique perspective; hearing their thoughts can enhance our own. Here are some ways to engage this concept with the little ones or teens in your life as you celebrate the first week of Advent.

LISTEN: For younger kids: Listen to *Jesus is Born* by Rain for Roots.
For older kids: Listen to and read the lyrics for *I Celebrate the Day* by Relient K.

READ: Read or summarize the passage from Luke 2:1-20.

- For younger kids, ask questions such as, *What would it feel like to have no place to sleep? Do you think Jesus liked being laid in a manger? Imagine you were the shepherds: what would you do if you heard this news? What would you do if you had been there that night?*
- For older kids, ask them if there's anything in the story they haven't thought of before, ask them what they would have done if they were Mary or Joseph.

SHARE: Share with your children the story of your own salvation, or talk about what it means to make room in your life for Jesus. Talk about your relationship with Jesus openly, addressing both struggles and joys.

ACT: Discuss ways your family can make room in your hearts for Jesus. Write them down and lay them down by the figurine of baby Jesus in your nativity.

SING: Sing *Joy to the World* together.

Joy to the World

Isaac Watts

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n, and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

Amid the Cold of Winter when Half-Spent Was the Night

Advent Week Two - Inspired by *Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming*

Darkness

Eight years ago, I went through a dark night of the soul. As a result of an unusual circumstance in which my safety was compromised, I began to descend into a deep valley, one overgrown with anxiety, loneliness, and doubt.

The worst of it was around Christmastime. Instead of the love, hope, joy, and peace characterized with the season, I was experiencing incapacitating fear, hopelessness, depression, and unrest. And I endured the journey alone. I keep my feelings veiled to my family and friends. I did not seek help or counsel.

The most traumatizing part of the whole ordeal, though, was that I felt God had abandoned me. I begged for deliverance from my mental state, cried out to God for peace, to remove the thorn in my flesh. But deliverance did not come. I knew in my head that my Shepherd was guiding me through the valley, but I did not see Him, nor did I hear His voice. In my heart, I believed He had failed me.

By God's grace, I did not abandon my faith or quit on life. Slowly, healing came, but it did not come the way I hoped it would. It certainly did not come soon enough...it took years for me to return to a state of what I would consider "normal." But, indeed, healing came.

I look back on that time with solemnity, with a shudder. We all endure dark times. We all must pass through the Valley of the Shadow of death.

But the hope lies in this: there is Light, and there is Life.

I know that Jesus' birth was not the end of December. I know that the reason we celebrate it around the Winter Solstice is because of paganism. Yet, I think the season in which we celebrate Christ's coming is rich with meaning just the same.

This gift of hope comes in the darkest season. It comes, as the sacred hymn states, "amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night."

A Flow'ret Bright

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*

*And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
Isaiah 11:1-6, ESV*

The nation of Israel had gone through its own dark night of the soul before Jesus arrived. For four-hundred years, God was silent. He did not raise up or speak through prophets. He allowed Israel to be taken over by other nations. I'm sure it felt like He had abandoned them.

Yet, there was this hope of a Messiah, a deliverer, one who would bring salvation; one who, because of his perfect, wise, and righteous rule, would usher in a season of peace for all the earth.

Promises like these are what sustained the nation of Israel through the season of darkness. God gave a glimpse of what to look for, a rope to hold onto, a reminder that things are not as they should be, and that things would get better.

A Savior, When Half Spent Was the Night

*Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore to men a Savior,
When half spent was the night.*

We know that this shoot of Jesse is Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher. But most did not. He did not fit the expectations of many. His first Advent was too humble, His purpose misunderstood.

*For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
Isaiah 53:2-5, ESV*

Oh, the suffering, the passion of Jesus.

So often I forget what He endured for our sake.

It began that dark night when He was born; being manifested in a limited, physical form, becoming in part, a piece of the creation which He brought into existence. To then experience ridicule, judgement, misunderstanding, betrayal, and slander by those He came to save. To be tempted. To lose friends whom He loved. To be separated from the Father. To suffer physical, mental, emotional, spiritual torment. To ultimately receive the punishment of sins which He never committed.

Peace comes through Christ, of course; but it cost Him dearly.

I so often forget the suffering of Christ. I get so caught up in my own journey through darkness, that I forget that His entire time on earth was the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and He entered into it willingly for our sake.

Dispels with Glorious Splendor the Darkness Everywhere

*This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor*

*The darkness everywhere.
True man, yet very God,
From sin and death He saves us,
And lightens every load.*

When God spoke the world into being, the first thing He created was light. Darkness had already been; God was doing something new. This light, though, was not sourced from the sun or the moon or stars, for their created day was yet to come. Where did this light come from? We are not told.

Yet we know that in Bethlehem town, in the midst of deep spiritual darkness, another Light was brought into being: “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world,” (John 1:9).

I love how the hymn states it: Jesus “dispels with glorious splendor, the darkness everywhere.” We know and have seen for ourselves the way a small flame can illuminate the darkest room, can bring previously unseen things into detail. We know how even the smallest light can bring comfort, warmth, and joy, especially when things seem bleakest.

The coming of Christ meant that darkness was ending. The night is not fully over; we have yet to reach the paradise that will come with Christ’s second coming, when he will reign. But we know that dawn is on its way.

In the meantime, we celebrate the hope Jesus has been brought into the world. He has redeemed us. He has loved us. He has entered the darkness and illuminated it. He is the True Light.

In Him, we have hope.

Personal Application

This second week of Advent, we celebrate the hope that is manifested in the birth of Jesus. We can look to our Savior, knowing that just as He has dispelled spiritual darkness in the ultimate sense, He can, with glorious splendor, dispel the darkness in our own lives.

Have you endured a season of darkness? Are you enduring on now? Reflect on that experience, and look for glimpses of Christ’s light through it. Pray for the Light of Jesus to enter the dark spaces of your life. If necessary, confess any doubt or fear that may be reigning in your life in place of our sovereign Lord. Thank Him for walking through the Valley alongside of you. Thank Him, too, for enduring darkness on your behalf.

Suggestions for Family Time - Week Two

Here are some suggestions for how you could celebrate the Hope of Jesus as a family.

LISTEN: If you have younger children, listen to Listen to “Come Light up Our Hearts” by Rain for Roots. Otherwise, listen to “Lux Arumque” by Eric Whitacre and discuss how the music represents the concept of light entering the world (this is a beautiful choral piece; translated from Latin it means: “*Light, warm and heavy as pure gold, and angels sing softly to the new-born babe.*”)

READ: Read or summarize Isaiah 11: 1-9, focusing on the “peaceable kingdom.” As a family, imagine what it would be like, then come up with your own concept of what a peaceable kingdom would look like in today’s world. Explain to children that some day, when Jesus is reigning, there will truly be peace on earth.

SHARE: Share with your spouse and/or children what has been like to walk through dark times in your life. Take a risk; be vulnerable about your own experience. Testify to God’s faithfulness, the power of hope in your life.

ACT: Gather your advent candles and an unlit candle for each individual in your home. Before lighting them, turn off all the lights, or go outside at night. Light the first two candles of Advent. Ask your children to compare the space before and after the candles are lit. Then, light each of your candles using the Advent light. Discuss how light affects a dark space. If you are celebrating with children, tell your little ones that Jesus brings hope to a dark world, that we can all be a part of bringing light to others by sharing His light with others.

SING: Sing or listen to *Lo, how a Rose E’re Blooming* (I enjoy Sufjan Stevens’s rendition).

Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming

*Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As men of old have sung.
It came, a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half-spent was the night.*

*Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore to men a Savior,
When half-spent was the night.*

*This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor
The darkness everywhere.
True man, yet very God,
From sin and death He saves us,
And lightens every load.*

His Law is Love and His Gospel is Peace

Advent Week Three – Inspired by *O, Holy Night*

Won by Love

Though I grew up in a Christian home, I did not become an official follower of Jesus until I was in middle school. Sure, I had begged Jesus many times to come into my heart to save me from Hell, but that fear-based decision wasn't a conversion at all.

It wasn't until I was an anxious, lonely, insecure middle schooler that I heard the call to follow. I had been at summer camp, and been processing what it meant to have the God of all creation love me. I remember the speaker had knelt on the ground by the evening campfire, telling us that God knelt in the dust and formed Adam with his very hands, breathing the breath of life into his nostrils; that God was intimately interested in and invested in us, that God sent Christ to redeem us because He *loved* us.

While the rest of the group was singing, I was having a conversation with God. I was arguing with Him, telling Him that I was unworthy of His love, that I couldn't understand why He would love me, let alone die on my behalf. I literally heard the voice of God in my head, saying: "Kristin, you don't need to understand it. You just need to accept it."

And, with many tears, I chose to accept it.

Immediately following, two emotions emerged in my soul, two emotions that were usually strangers to me: joy and peace. I remember actually *feeling* different, and knowing without a doubt that the presence of the Holy Spirit was with me.

Though my faith journey has indeed been a journey of highs and lows, I know that without my relationship with Christ, all would be in vain. I have suffered, but He has suffered with me. I have rejoiced, and He has rejoiced with me. It is in my relationship with Him that life has meaning.

Joy

The third week of Advent is meant to commemorate joy. We move on from repenting to celebrating. And what better way to inspire our joy than to reflect on the fact that our Savior came not to condemn or criticize, not to burden us with an unattainable code of behaviors, but to lavish love upon us; that because of God's love for us, Christ was sent to die on our behalf, and because of this beautiful narrative of redemption, there is peace for our souls. How great our joy!

Good News of Great Joy

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.

Luke 2:8-18, ESV

"Do not be afraid." This is the command that appears multiple times in Christmas story; to Mary, Joseph, the shepherds. In the face of uncertainty, fear is a go-to emotion. Fear is a deceiving emotion, one that certainly drives our decision making.

What if Mary had given into fear? If Joseph had decided not to marry his pregnant fiancée? If the shepherds cowered instead of seeking out the Christ child?

The antidote, we know, for fear is love: "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," (1 John 4:18, ESV). Surely, love was part of what moved these individuals to embrace the situation at hand.

In fact, the Good News of Great Joy that the angels proclaimed is rooted in God's astounding love for us; because of His love, Christ came to redeem us. And, there is the promise of peace. For *all* people.

Truly, He Taught us to Love One Another

I am so grateful for the inclusive nature of God; that He has not considered one more valuable than another based off of ethnicity, gender, status, ability, age, or health. In this world that we

live in, one in which it is easy to fear, judge, or hate those different than us, it is especially important for me to reflect on this truth.

The verse of O Holy Night at the beginning of this post has always been profound to me: “Truly, He taught us to love one another...and in His name, all oppression shall cease.” Throughout Christ’s life, we see the reoccurring theme that no one is greater than another. All of us come to Jesus in the same situation; sinners, in need of His love and grace. When we become recipients of that love and grace, we, in turn, ought to be practicing it with others.

If we are looking to Christ as our model, love for our neighbor should become paramount in how we live out our lives. We are his ambassadors, and it is His love that we are to share. If we are truly living with Jesus as Lord, then His law of love and gospel of peace should be prevalent in our interaction with others.

The Weary World Rejoices

Joy is contagious. In a weary world, joy shines like a beacon.

When we are joyful, others will see and observe, perhaps will be drawn to the same Savior in whom we have found our hope. Just as the shepherds spread the news of the Christ child’s birth with rejoicing, so we ought to share the Good News of Great Joy with all people.

If we are struggling to find joy ourselves, however, let us learn from the shepherds. Let us cast aside our fear, run to the feet of Jesus, and fall on our knees. Let us take in his glorious splendor and receive his great love and forgiveness.

Then, when we are reminded of the gift we have received, rejoicing may come.

Personal Application

Reflect on your own experience upon hearing the news of salvation. What emotions or memories characterized that time for you? How did your conversion change you, your life?

Are you experiencing the joy of Christ? If so, share it. Are you feeling weary and joyless? Confess it. Christ is able and willing to share your burdens.

Suggestions for Family Time - Week Three

Here are some suggestions for how you could celebrate the Joy of Christmas as a family.

LISTEN: With little kids: listen to sidewalk Prophet's *Oh What a Glorious Night*, and have a dance party. With older kids: Listen to *Rejoice Greatly* from Handel's Messiah.

READ: Read John 3:16-17 and 1 John 4:7-19. Discuss how we see God's love as demonstrated through the birth of Christ and how the love of God inspires us to love others.

SHARE: Share as a family the ways you've felt or experienced God's love in your life. Share, too, how you've experienced God's love through the love of others.

ACT: Together, generate a list of things which bring joy in your life. Give thanks to God for these blessings. Then, generate a list of ways in which your family can share the love of God and bring joy to others in the coming week. Hang it somewhere so it can be seen throughout the week.

SING: Sing or listen to *O Holy Night* (I enjoy the version by Josh Groban).

O Holy Night

*O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born;
O night divine, O night, O night Divine.*

*Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from the Orient land.
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friend.
He knows our need, to our weaknesses no stranger,
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King, Before Him lowly bend!*

*Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever,
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
His power and glory evermore proclaim.*

O Come All Ye Faithful

Advent Week Four – Inspired by *O Come All Ye Faithful*

Come

Last year, I attended the funeral of a friend’s father. While I had only met the man once, I shed many tears during the service as friends and loved ones shared, especially hearing about his passionate love for Christ and others. The church was overwhelmingly filled with people who had been recipients of that love, and it was truly humbling to see the impact one man could have, especially a man whose whole life was devoted with his loving Savior. It was clear that this man adored Jesus.

During the service, the pastor made a point that in the Scriptures, Jesus often presented the invitation: “Come.” That if there was anything that the deceased would want the audience to hear, it was that Jesus never stops beckoning, “Come.”

We hear it throughout the gospels: *Come to me. Come, all who are weary and laden and I will give you rest. Let the little children come to me. Come out. Come here. Come, follow me.*

“Come” is a simple word. It is a command, or a declaration. But in either case, it is about leaving one place and going to another.

Today, on the last Sunday of Advent, let us take heed to that invitation. Let us respond to that stirring in our hearts to leave behind whatever it is we need to in order to move toward Him.

Come, and behold Him. Come, let us adore Him.

Accepting the Invitation

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.”

Luke 2:15, ESV

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Matthew 2:1-2, ESV

Shepherds heard the angels. The wise men saw the star. Each group was compelled to go and see the Savior. It wasn't enough to hear that a Savior was born, to know that a mighty King had arrived; they had to go and see it for themselves.

I wonder what they were expecting to find. Of course, they knew to look for a child, but what did they imagine Jesus to be like? Would he be noticeably different, even as a newborn? Babies in general can evoke a sense of wonder and awe, but what of God incarnate?

I'm certain they were moved by their encounter with the Christ child. I'm certain that they could not help but adore the sovereign King.

Come to Worship

I often take for granted the image of the nativity scene, where grown adults and animals kneel before a baby. But to really consider what that would have been like is astounding.

When the wisemen state that they had come to worship Jesus, the Greek word used is *proskuneó*. Its meaning is constructed from the Greek *prós*, which means "towards" and *kyneo*, "to kiss", and means – "to kiss the ground when prostrating before a superior; to *worship*, ready 'to fall down/prostrate oneself to adore on one's knees'."

Read that translation again. Isn't it so rich, so full of meaning? Imagine the wise men coming to *proskuneó* the baby Jesus, perhaps even kissing his tiny feet. What an amazing image.

Even more so, the meaning attached to it. Prostration is, after all, a physical act that represents an inner condition. It means submission, servitude, and giving honor where honor is due. As the definition says, it is acknowledging the one before you is superior.

This kind of worship, though, was not out of response to fear. Surely the shepherds and wise men did not fear this tiny King. Rather, it was an act inspired by adoration.

What a beautiful, mysterious, wondrous event it must have been to meet the Christ child.

Come, Let us Adore Him

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Luke 2:40, ESV

The person of Jesus has always been compelling. He is beautiful, merciful, gracious. He is wise, compassionate, righteous. He is King, Savior, and Lord.

Even from birth, he has drawn people to his side, to meet him, to worship him, to follow him, to suffer for him, to find refuge and hope and strength in who He is; God with us.

We can celebrate His birth with joy. If He had not come, we would not know Him or God the Father. We would be lost in darkness.

But the prophecy, praise God, has been fulfilled: “Arise, shine, for your light has come!” It was because He chose to come that we have hope. He brought Light to the earth; hope, salvation, and love.

Come, let us adore Him.

Personal Application

Where are you in your own faith journey? Have you come to Christ? Do you need to come back to Him? What may Christ be inviting you to do in your current season of life?

Do you find that you adore the person of Jesus? If so, offer him some personal worship. If not, consider asking Him to reveal more of Himself to you.

Suggestions for Family Time - Week Four

Here are some suggestions for how you could celebrate the coming of Christ as a family.

LISTEN: With little kids: listen to *Magnificat* by Rain for Roots. Otherwise: listen to the beautiful choral arrangement, *O Nata Lux* by Morten Lauridsen which evokes a beautiful sense of wonder around the birth of Christ.

READ: Read Matthew 1:18 – 2:12. Reflect on the experience of the wise men and consider what it would be like to journey far from home to meet the Christ child.

SHARE: As a family, discuss what it means to come and adore Jesus. Is it easy to adore Jesus, or does that feel like a foreign concept?

ACT: Host a time of open prayer and adoration to the Lord for what he has done.

SING: Sing or listen to *O Come All Ye Faithful*.

O Come All Ye Faithful

*O Come All Ye Faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.*

*Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing all that hear in heaven God's holy word.
Give to our Father glory in the Highest;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.*

*Hail! Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning,
O Jesus! for evermore be Thy name adored.
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.*