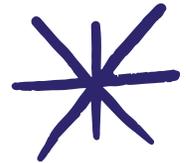


NEW DAY COMMUNITY CHURCH

Advent Devotion Guide



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First Week of Advent

Four Faces of Christmas: Gospel of Mark

We start our series with the gospel of Mark. At first glance, this might seem like a strange place to begin our deep dive into the season of Advent. Mark doesn't pick up his retelling of Jesus' story until Jesus has already started shaving! In his gospel we won't find an angel informing a very young and frightened Mary about her surprise pregnancy...or any angelic dreams for Joseph. In fact, Joseph, Jesus' step dad is never mentioned once in Mark's account. The wisemen or shepherds don't make the cut either. We can't even find the innkeeper! Okay, the innkeeper isn't in any of the gospels...we kind of made that up, but still! So why even talk about Mark during this Christmas season? Because Mark solidly plants the Christmas event in the sweeping narrative of the entire biblical story. Say what? In Mark's very opening words in chapter 1, he points all the way back to the Old Testament (Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1) and the hope and expectation of God's people for a Messiah, One who would come and save. One would not only bring good news, but would in fact, incarnate it. So in truth Mark is the perfect place to begin our Advent journey. I encourage you to read his gospel slowly with a study bible so you don't miss the rich divine tapestry of the greatest story ever told.

Reflection from Pastor Ron Garner

Sunday: Mark 1:1-3

Monday: Malachai 3:1

Tuesday: Exodus 23:20-22

Wednesday: Isaiah 40:1-3

Thursday: Isaiah 40:9-11

Friday: Isaiah 9:2

Saturday: Mark 1:1-3

Daily questions for reflection

What word or phrase captured your attention?

What may God be trying to say to you through this passage of Scripture?

What do you hope for?

How do you think your hope is the same or different from that of God's Old Testament followers?

What encourages you and fuels your hope?

Second Week of Advent

Four Faces of Christmas: Gospel of Luke

There is something missing in the actual story of Mary and Elizabeth in Luke 1. What's missing is what so many movies on the birth of Jesus take extra effort to fill in because it is obvious, or suggested by the Gospel of Matthew, but the Gospel of Luke never feels the need to dwell on it. What's missing is *fear* -- the deep, overwhelming concern over her situation that Mary must have felt or experienced. She was, by all accounts: poor, a young teenager, single, engaged to be married, and living in a formal religious culture that took their purity laws very seriously, to the point of death for breaking those laws in some cases. So she turns up pregnant. From God. Yeah, right. Would you believe that story? Seriously? Mary had to be in huge trouble and great danger, and she had to know it. But Luke shows us only the incredible joy at the reality of what Mary was experiencing. While Mary seemed a bit confused when the angel said she would give birth to the son of God (wouldn't you be?) she quickly accepted the challenge to become the miracle. She soon ran off to her relative Elizabeth's house, who was experiencing a pregnancy miracle of her own. Rather than judge Mary for being an unwed, pregnant teenager, Elizabeth screamed out in joy and praise in recognition of the miracle. And so Mary sings a joyful song of praise to God for the tremendous blessing of God's redeeming work that is beginning in her. I believe Luke disregards the fear and danger side of the story to point us all toward the genuine experience of joy in the miracle of God's salvation in spite of what the world is throwing at us. In her song, in every instance where Mary alludes to her lowly state, she overshadows it with praise for the great miracle of God's redeeming love.

Where are you feeling lowly, lost, in danger, afraid, sick, tired, vulnerable, misunderstood, worried, out of control, anxious ...? Take a deep breath, and leap of faith -- learn from Mary and trust in God to overshadow those challenges; partner with faithful people (as Mary did) to share together joy and celebration in the miracle of salvation in spite of what the world around you may tell you about your flaws. After all, Mary's great joy, shared in her song, was from the recognition that her joy was not for herself alone, but for you to experience in Jesus as well.

Reflection by Pastor Darren Hickerson

Sunday: Luke 1: 26-38

Monday: Luke 1: 39-45

Tuesday: Luke 1: 46-55

Wednesday: Luke 1: 56-65

Thursday: Luke 2: 1-7

Friday: Luke 2: 8-14

Saturday: Luke 2: 15-20

Daily questions for reflection

What word or phrase captured your attention?

What may God be trying to say to you through this passage of Scripture?

Where do you see the sparks of God's love shining around you?

How do you most feel God's love during the Christmas season?

What small act of love can you choose to show someone else?

Third Week of Advent

Four Faces of Christmas: Gospel of Matthew

I am sure that Joseph could have not imagined his life would turn out like it did. An angel in a dream...a pregnant fiancée with a baby not his...marry her anyway and trust that God has a hand in this situation...raise a child that has been spoken of in prophecy for generations. Suddenly, Joseph found himself with a part to play in God's salvation for the world. Do you think Joseph was overwhelmed? I imagine it is a bit like new parents at the first ultrasound appointment, filled with excitement, fear, confusion, joy and worry all at the same time. In many Christmas plays, the role of Joseph is usually the tall kid in the background, simply hovering over the manger with no movement, no lines, just his presence. But what is often left out of the Christmas plays are his encounters with the angels, and his obedience to God, and his family. While it may seem Joseph only has a minor part to play in the story of Christmas, I believe he is a key figure to not only the Christmas story, but in the story of Jesus' life. His choices mattered. No one plays a minor part in God's plan. God must have felt he was a pretty special man to take on the task of raising the Son of God. Just like Joseph, God sees you too! Your life matters, your choices matter. You never know when God may choose you to take on a special task that may be part of God's plan to help bring change to our broken and hurting world.

Reflection by Pastor Abby Hedgecock

Sunday: Matthew 1: 18-19

Monday: Matthew 1: 20-23

Tuesday: Matthew 1: 24-25

Wednesday: Isaiah 7: 13-16

Thursday: Matthew 2: 1-6

Friday: Matthew 2: 7-12

Saturday: Matthew 2: 13-15

Daily Questions for Reflection

What word or phrase captured your attention?

What may God be saying to you through this passage of Scripture?

What situation are you facing that give you a choice of fear or joy?

In what tangible, active ways will you choose to express joy in this expectant season of Advent?

What Bible verses fill you with joy and strength? How can you choose to meditate on those passages during Advent?

Fourth Week of Advent

Four Faces of Christmas: Gospel of John

I want to highlight a single verse in the Christmas story, about really just one single, very powerful little word in that verse. Isaiah 7:14 says, Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). Christmas is all about being with; being with friends, being with family, going to holiday parties, sending out what used to be Christmas cards but are now Facebook posts of amazing holiday experiences that will make other people feel as lonely as you feel when you look at their amazing holiday posts. Yet, for a lot of people who have gone through a loss or a breakup or an illness or depression or who can't have any children or who are looking for a relationship or, maybe for some reason they don't even know, Christmas is often the loneliest time of the year. Maybe it is for you. Now, the story of Christmas is a claim that things are not that way, that you were made by God and God actually hates loneliness. God says, "It's not good for people to be alone." God doesn't want anybody sitting at the table by themselves in the cafeteria. In fact, the central theme of the Bible is God's desire to be with people. In fact, an Old Testament scholar counted 114 times in the Hebrew Scriptures alone where God says, "I will be with you." I will be with you to hear your prayer. I will be with you to receive your worship. I will be with you to give you guidance. I will be with you through the Scriptures. It's almost like all of that is not enough to satisfy God, so finally he says, "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to go down there and be with those people myself." That's Jesus. That's Christmas, when the biggest miracle of all is also the smallest. God causes all of his person, all of his presence, all of his glory, and all of his power to be condensed and to be compacted into one fragile, little human body. He goes down to earth to be with people starting with this peasant girl named Mary and her family and to be with you and me as well. This Christmas, remember the reason for the season, the Word became flesh...so let's get some skin in this holiday.

Reflection by Pastor Tim Bralley

Sunday: Isaiah 9: 6-7

Monday: John 1: 1-3

Tuesday: John 1: 4-8

Wednesday: John 1: 9-11

Thursday: John 1: 12-14

Daily Questions for Reflection

What word or phrase captured your attention?

What may God be saying to you through this passage of Scripture?

How will you look for God's presence in your own moments of loneliness?

How will you remind yourself of God's faithful care and peace as you walk through Advent?

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Four Faces of Christmas

The ultimate reason for our journey together this Advent is for the baby Jesus, God's only Son, the Savior of the world. Jesus is truly the reason for and the meaning of Christmas. He is the source of all the gifts we have discovered on this Advent Journey. He is hope, love, joy and peace. Celebrate the birth of Jesus! The waiting is almost over; the Messiah is coming. And even as we celebrate His arrival in our world, our anticipation grows. We continue to live with longing and expectation for His second coming when His work will be complete and all the world will be reconciled to Him. Yet even now on this Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, we rejoice. Christ has come! He will come again!

Reflection adapted from *God With Us*

Friday: Luke 2: 1-7

Saturday: Luke 2: 8-20

Questions for Reflection

What word or phrase captured your attention?

What may God be saying to you through this passage of Scripture?

How will you continue to live with an awareness and recognition that God is with you in the new year?

How will you rejoice and celebrate and worship Christ's birth today?

What is one of the greatest gifts you have ever received?

What is one of the greatest gifts you have ever given?