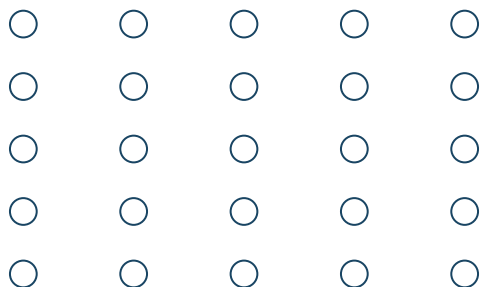




The Long Night is PAST

advent devotional



+ introduction

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we commemorate the coming of Jesus into the world through different spiritual practices and devotions. We commemorate with prayers, the reading of scripture, the lighting of candles, and the marking of calendars. Each day the anticipation builds to that glorious day, Christmas Day, when we sound the bells and gather to feast and give gifts. We call this time of waiting “advent,” which comes from the Latin word for “coming”.

But if Jesus, the Savior of the World, who would dry every tear and make all things new, has come, then why, at least for many of us, is Christmas so hard? What is there to celebrate about his birth in light of the enduring pain that so many feel all the more at Christmas time? Why, if he has come, do we still seem to be waiting?

The reason is because Jesus must also come again. There is a second advent that has not yet happened, for which we are now waiting.

This is the story of us. Waiting.

Perhaps it is better to say this is our special part in God’s story. We are experiencing a unique time in human history, one that will never happen again. A time that is between the advents. In the rhythm of the Advent season, it is good to remember, as we commemorate the coming of Jesus the infant, that we also wait, with anticipation and expectation, for the coming of Jesus the King.

+ how to use this advent devotional

What follows is a collection of readings, drawn from the Grace Music album *The Long Night is Past*. These readings are for a season of waiting. Our hope is that, as you go through it, day by day, you'll gain a greater understanding of how the Christmas story fits into the broader narrative of God's story of redemption for humankind and why we can rejoice – even as we wait.

Be prepared. Not all of these readings are happy ones. There is no value in romanticizing the events of Jesus' birth, and certainly not his life and death. He was, as Isaiah said, a man of great suffering, familiar with sorrow. The gift of his birth, death, and resurrection was light for a dark world, a payment owed for our redemption, and a promise of eternal life for those who would believe. But the final gift, the one that is coming, is the world as it was meant to be, and that is what we hope for. In the end, it is our hope that through this devotional you will come to fully understand what is meant when we sing that "the Comforter is coming, and the Comforter has come."



Each daily devotion has three main parts –



LISTEN | READ | REFLECT

Each day begins with . . .



A particular song from *The Long Night is Past* to listen to and a lyric from that song to reflect upon. You can find "The Long Night Is Past" music on  Spotify and  Apple Music



A passage of scripture to read that connects to the truth spoken of in the given song – Bible passages are taken from the New International Version (2011).



A short passage of reflection written by those who have helped write, plan, or perform the musical.

We hope this collection of readings and meditations will encourage you to celebrate the coming of Jesus, both remembering his first, and waiting for his second.

DAY 1



The Lord Almighty Reigns, Pt. 1

I see a world in darkness lain
And the people toil in vain
With a fury and a wail that's never heard
But the Lord has laid His plans



Genesis 3:6-19

*"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food
from it all the days of your life.
It will produce thorns and thistles for you..."*



Human beings are not very good at simply being. We are doers. Hard work is considered a virtue. We must toil, at first to survive, but then also to achieve, to prosper, and to elevate ourselves above one another. We look at those who have more than us and we say "I must work harder". This life of toil, what the book of Ecclesiastes calls "a chasing after the wind," is not what God intended. Our work in this life was designed to have meaning. Our souls were designed to be at rest.

There's a great passage in Shakespeare's play Macbeth where the title character has just ascended to the throne of Scotland. He considers all he has lost, all the toil and death it has taken to get to this point, and he finally gives into hopelessness and despair:

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty place from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

-- Macbeth Act V, Scene V

Apart from God's plan to redeem the fallen world, the human experience is one of meaninglessness and hopelessness, all "full of sound and fury" but "signifying nothing". A life begins. It goes on. It ends, like a "brief candle". This continues like a trance inducing cadence ("tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow") until the end of time. This is a picture of hell, and it is the stage onto which Jesus stepped at that pivotal moment in history, that moment we celebrate in this season of Christmas.

Over the next month, don't give into the temptation of constant toil. Lift your eyes to your Heavenly Father. Learn to wait, to hope, and to rest.

DAY 2



Long Expected Jesus

Come, thou long expected Jesus
Born to set thy people free
From our fear and sin release us
Let us find our rest in thee



1 Corinthians 15:19-28

"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."



Jesus left his father's house in heaven and willingly fell to Earth, a helpless child on an impossible rescue mission. He was born behind enemy lines, initiating the first step in a mission to bring an end to sorrow and oppression for all people. He grew up to be a man in anonymity, all the while coming to understand his identity and purpose. Then at the proper time, he entered the world stage to turn it upside down with miracles and radical teaching.

Finally, he tricked death itself into submission through perfect suffering, ransoming his people. However, that was only phase one of Jesus' mission. The final battle, the battle for the total redemption of the Earth and justice for the oppressed, where death itself will be destroyed, is yet to come.

Even during the joy of holidays and the Christmas season, we are reminded that the world is still broken. The poor still go hungry. The wars rage on. Many remain in slavery. We honestly feel it especially at Christmas, as we long to be with our lost loved ones. Death is loud, and the cacophony of its song is always close by. Is there someone you are missing right now? Will this Christmas just not feel the same without them? One day Jesus will crush this last enemy beneath his feet, and we will no longer have to mourn the ones we love. And so we wait. We must learn to wait well.

DAY 3



Long Expected Jesus

God be with us
Light of the world shine upon us
For we are in need of a Savior
The nations are longing for peace
All creation cries Come, Lord Jesus



Haggai 2:1-9

"I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty."



The verses in the song, "Long Expected Jesus" were written by Charles Wesley in 1744 and were inspired by this passage from Haggai. By his own account, the words in this passage struck him, particularly in light of the social injustice he observed around him in his native Great Britain. God promised, through his prophet Haggai, that the desire of all nations would come and that this coming would bring glory to himself.

So what is it that all nations desire? Freedom from fear and sin, rest, deliverance from oppression and slavery, grace, and an end to war. In a word: justice. Wherever you go in the world, you can see and feel this desperate need. Wesley looked at the plight of orphans and widows and prisoners and the poor around him and said "come, thou long expected Jesus." We sing this hymn most often during the Advent season, as we commemorate Jesus' first coming. However, it's his second, long-expected coming that will truly bring the justice and peace for which every nation is longing.

Christmas is not just a statement that God is with us in the tragic stories on the news or the suffering and strife we see all around us in the world today. Christmas is also a declaration that God one day will fully and finally restore this world, making all things new. So, with all of creation, we cry "Come, Lord Jesus."

DAY 4



Hope of the World

The hope of the world
The hope of the world is born
A savior has come
A savior has come to us



Luke 2:21-40

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."



Simeon was a man who lived waiting in hope for Christ to come to the earth. He waited for the consolation of Israel his entire life. Though he was about to die he was preserved by God long enough to catch a brief glimpse of Jesus in the flesh. It's hard to imagine how thrilling it must have been to see the newborn Christ. We get a glimpse

in this passage as Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple to be dedicated by Simeon. Filled with amazement, Simeon praised God, for he had truly seen his salvation right before his eyes.

Hope is an interesting thing. Hoping for something is not just a fleeting feeling like impatiently wishing for something to come true. Real hope is a confident expectation through faith! Simeon's hope was fulfilled when he saw the Lord's Messiah, the Christ born as the hope of the world and the "light for revelation." When Simeon saw Jesus, he knew that what had been previously prophesied was now right before his very eyes. His hope was not a wish that might not come true. It was a hope fulfilled!

It is never too late to put your hope in the beautiful life of Jesus. Take a step towards him today and ask that he give you a fresh appreciation for the hope we have in him.

DAY 5



Hope of the World

Gather round I will sing another story
I will tell another tale of a deep transcendent glory
Of a love that never fails
And when the final note is sung
You'll know the Comforter is coming
And the Comforter has come



Revelation 22:7-21

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."



Jesus defeated sin and death once and for all through his death and resurrection. Yet, for many Christians, comprehending the finality of Jesus' victory is no small task. We look at the world around us and see death and destruction everywhere, sin still reigning supreme. Yet, he tells us to wait and watch. We look inside of us, though made into a new creation by his grace, and still see sin infiltrating our thoughts, decisions, and actions. Yet, he tells us to wait and watch. Jesus has already entered the world and won the battle for us, but we see it still raging around us day and night. Yet, he tells us to wait and watch. And so, by faith, we wait.

The lyrics of today's devotional song "Hope of the World" exemplify this dichotomy. The Comforter (Jesus) has already come, but he tells us that he is coming again. That promise, that hope, is our focus during Advent. We shouldn't only look backwards to Christ's birth into our world, but also look forward with anticipation towards his return. We wait patiently for Jesus to return when our hope, our faith, will become a reality. Take heart, because Jesus encourages us in the midst of this tension, this period of waiting. Here are two things we can focus on today to keep us as we wait.

Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, First and Last, and the Beginning and End. He has the final word in all things. There is nothing outside of his control. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus is the *"author and perfecter of our faith."* Take solace in the fact that God not only authored your faith, but he will perfect it. *"For I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 1:6).

Jesus is coming back soon. We don't know when, but Jesus tells us that he is returning soon. Though countless generations of Christians have clung to this hope, we know that God's time is not our time. In light of spending eternity with him, this time that we wait is short. *"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison"* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Remember in this season of Advent: he is coming again. *"So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him"* (Hebrews 9:28).

DAY 6



The Long Long Night

And Jesus must be called a Nazarene
There he will remain
Until appointed day
When for your sake he'll face
The longest night
The long long night



Matthew 4:12-17

*"The people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the
shadow of death a light has dawned."*



With Jesus' rejection at Nazareth, he moves on to the city of Capernaum in Galilee to begin his ministry. This movement was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 9:

*"The people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the
shadow of death a light has dawned."*

As Jesus' ministry began in Galilee, his light radiated in a land of those living in darkness. His light scattered and defeated darkness. He spoke truth to a divided land. He healed those in bondage. He loved the poor and needy.

What a perfect way to describe Jesus: light. Both before and after his death and resurrection, he illuminates the path of life for all man-kind. His light exposes our sins, brings wisdom, and radiates holiness. In John 8:12, Jesus himself says *"I am the light of the world, he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."*

Jesus empowers us in Matthew 5:14 that his followers inherit a similar light; that we are *"the light of the world; a town built on a hill that cannot be hidden."* Isn't that good news?

This season, let's live for Christ. We will glow like bright lights to share the good news of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

DAY 7



The Long Long Night

For Jesus will be the star that won't fade
This love that will turn the night into day



Romans 13:8-14

"And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here."



As I reflect on this past month, I ask myself, "How often did I live intentionally thinking about the return of Jesus?" If you're anything like me, you may say "not much" or "not at all." The reality is, Jesus is coming again! He is on the return, and we have been called to live accordingly.

Paul exhorts us in this passage: *"the night is nearly over; the day is almost here."* Night refers to the present evil time. We cannot afford to get so exhausted in taking care of our day-to-day that we become oblivious to what God is doing. God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. Be alert and be awake.

As Christ's followers, we must clothe ourselves with the armor of light (verse 12). We shouldn't be bothered with jealousy or dissipation, but rest in the waiting of Jesus Christ. This is good news for us. The night is nearly over; the day will come. As we wait, let us bear the sweet light of Jesus Christ in anticipation of his return!

DAY 8



Prepare the Way

From Judea Desert near the Jordan's shores
Comes a voice that's calling
Prepare the way for the Lord



Isaiah 40:1-11

*"Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain. And the glory
of the LORD will be revealed, and all
people will see it together..."*



Before our son was born, my husband and I spent our days preparing for his arrival. We bought the crib, the car seat, and all the adorable newborn outfits. We transformed our home office into a nursery. We discussed everything from parental leave to preschool. And we prayed for God's providential care over this new life.

How did John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus? He preached to everyone who would listen, *"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near"* (Matt. 3:2). Jesus has come. In light of his coming, John asks us to take a good, hard look at our lives, and turn away from all that turns us away from God. The valley is raised up through confession. The mountain and hill is made low when we seek forgiveness and reconciliation. The rough ground becomes level when the Spirit uses others to speak truth, even painful truth, into our lives and we choose to listen. The rugged places become a plain when we embrace words like James 1:25: *"Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it--not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it--they will be blessed in what they do."* The glory of the Lord will be revealed in our lives when we reflect the radiance of Christ through our actions--not because our actions save us, but because we have already been saved by the beloved Son, and in our love for him, we follow. As we look forward to celebrating Jesus' birth once more, let us prepare our hearts to welcome the Savior by choosing his way and turning from our sin.

DAY 9



Prepare the Way

Prepare ye the way
Prepare ye the way
Prepare ye the way for the Lord who
comes the captives to claim



Isaiah 61:1-11

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim
good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind
up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for
the captives..."*



The opening bars of this song remind me of going on an adventure: packing up the car with a backpack, tent, and adventure dog and heading out into the unknown, full of excitement and anticipation. This passage in Isaiah 61 also sets us on an adventure: it tells us both who we are and who we are called to be.

In Luke 4, Jesus reads aloud this Isaiah 61 passage and proclaims the incredible truth: *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* In other words, the "me" in this passage is Jesus. Jesus is the one who frees the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives. He alone has the power to save. After two thousand years of waiting, God's promises are being fulfilled. The listening crowd is flabbergasted. They "spoke well of him," amazed at what he was saying, and yet asked, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Don't we know this guy? How can he be the savior of the world?

Jesus forces the crowd -- and us -- to make a choice. Will we humble ourselves and admit that we are the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives in need of saving? Will we receive freedom from this man who claims to be God himself? Then, having received that freedom, will we join Jesus on his mission and become who we are called to be: the ones proclaiming the freedom of Jesus to those still trapped in darkness? Let us join Jesus on his mission of salvation -- the greatest adventure of all time.

DAY 10



Lay Down Straight

With a kiss I stole your life at the garden gate,
Threw it all away, to the field of the Potter I go, I go
Because I betrayed innocent blood,
Thirty pieces I gave you up



Matthew 26:14-16; 47-50; 27:1-10

"Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus replied, 'Do what you came for, friend.'"



I can't believe how selfish and short-sighted Judas was. If I had lived when Jesus came to earth and was one of his disciples, I would not have been Judas. In fact, I would not have deserted him and fled like all the other disciples.

Have you ever had these thoughts? I know I have, but the reality is that each one of us played a much more sinister role than Judas in the death of Christ. It was my own sin that is so terrible in God's

sight that it demanded the death of someone innocent as punishment. Jesus chose to come to earth as a man and die in our place; therefore, each one of us is personally responsible for his horrific death. Take a moment and feel the weight of that reality.

Our story does not have to end there. God offers us something incredible! He sent his Son, Jesus, to live a perfect, innocent life here on earth and then die in our place for our sins. But Jesus was raised from the dead and in his resurrection, defeated death once and for all. He asks us to acknowledge and accept that Christ did this for us, ask for forgiveness for the sins in our life that demanded it, and then he invites us to be adopted as a child into his family. That would be quite a sacrifice, but God does not stop there. He says I'll take the perfect life of Jesus and impart that righteousness to you so that every time I look upon you, I will see the life of Jesus and not even a hint of your sin.

Take some time today to reflect on the wonderful God who chose to not only die in your place but offer a place of eternal honor and privilege as one of his children. What an amazing expression of mercy and grace!

DAY 11



Lay Down Straight

Only one who is innocent
He the one whose blood was spent
For the souls of those who still in sin
Cried 'Let his blood be on the hands of our children'



Matthew 27:11-26

"When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!' All the people answered, 'His blood is on us and on our children!'"



As we sit and read the painful account of Jesus' condemnation, we could be filled with any number of emotions. Anger kindles in our hearts as we read of the deceit of the chief priests and the Pharisees. We lament the cowardice of Pontius Pilate in front of the crowd as he knowingly condemns a Man that he himself has declared innocent. We pity the crowd of people, blinded by sin and fueled by envy, as they rage for a crucifixion. We reel at the prospect of the murderer Barabbas being released in lieu of an innocent man. We are inspired by Jesus as he stoically holds his ground, allowing his purpose to unfold. But do we see ourselves in this story?

In a moment of honesty, I'm sure we have all been guilty of these same things at one time or another. Every time we lie to serve ourselves, we are a deceitful Pharisee sacrificing truth for comfort. When we fail to stand up and speak out for fear of our reputation, we are a cowardly Pilate washing our hands futilely hoping they will be clean. When we embrace our anger with no thought of the consequences, we are the angry mob asking for Jesus to be crucified.

The truth is, it wasn't simply a group of Jews from 2,000 years ago that killed Jesus. It was our sins that nailed him to the cross.

"...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23).

But the story doesn't end there.

"God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it... therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope" (Acts 2:24, 26).

We are all like the Pharisees, Pontius Pilate, the angry crowd, and the guards that killed him... but we are also, by the grace of God, like the murderer Barabbas. We are guilty, and yet we walk free because an innocent Man took our place. Though we were under the sentence of death, Jesus went to the cross on our behalf and his blood paid the ransom for which our life was bought. Now, with hope instead of anger, we echo the same cry of the crowd so long ago:

"His blood is on us, and our children!" (Matthew 11:25).

DAY 12



Lamb of God

He had no beauty
No sign of majesty
Nothing to draw us close
He was rejected
Hated by everyone



Isaiah 53:1-11

*"He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."*



The prophet Isaiah recorded these words around 700 years prior to Jesus' birth and so clearly points to both the suffering and glory of Christ. Now thousands of years later the words are still so vivid and help us see the heart of Jesus and the will of the Father. It's also profound that before the

foundations of the Earth were laid, this story of suffering turned to glory, existed in the mind and sovereign will of God. How can we even begin to comprehend that?!

God became flesh and took on our pain, our suffering, and every sin we have ever committed, thought about committing, or attempted to commit. Every last one laid upon the shoulders of the innocent Christ. Even though we wander and stray off course and are prone to be wayward, Jesus took all of our baggage and offered us a path towards redemption. He still does this today because it is who he is. He suffered so that we might have abundant life. He was crushed so that we might live.

DAY 13



Lamb of God

Surely this is the one
He was held on a cross
Jesus the Son
He's the author of love
He is the Lamb of God



John 1:29-42

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"



Look! Look! It is a command, an imperative. John the Baptist, the one who came as a "forerunner," is calling direct attention to Jesus. He is deflecting attention away from himself. He is proclaiming that this man, this Jesus, walking towards them is the final sacrifice. Gone is the old covenant's constant

spilling of blood. The one and only sacrifice isn't an animal substitution. In God's redemptive plan, the final sacrifice is a human without sin. It is Jesus, God's Son. The day after John baptized Jesus, John cries, "Look!" again. "Look, the Lamb of God!" He doesn't want the historic moment to be missed. This is God's chosen one.

In this season of advent, of waiting, don't allow day-to-day living to distract from the fact that God, the author of love, has sent a Savior. Surely, this is the one.

DAY 14



This Is The Christ

This is the Christ
This is the Holy One of God
Crown him with praise
Worship his name
For he has bought us with his blood



Mark 1:21-28

"Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!'"



There are many stories of the miraculous power of Jesus recorded in the Bible. One of the things that stands out in this particular one is the amazement of the people who witnessed it. If you look closely, you'll see what amazed them was that he taught with authority. It wasn't just that he commanded impure spirits to leave a man and they obeyed, but this was a demonstration of the authority with which he taught.

What was so different about Jesus? Where does this amazing authority come from? I'm reminded of a quote from Andy Stanley, "If a man can predict his own death and resurrection, and pull it off, I just go with whatever that man says." You see, it isn't solely that Jesus is God, but it is that he came to earth, lived a perfect life, died as a sacrifice for every sin committed by every person throughout history, and then rose from the dead. He defeated the curse of sin and death by rising from the dead and that is what gives him ultimate authority. That is why impure, evil spirits will do as he commands, because he has defeated them.

Think about your own life right now. Where do you need the ultimate power of God to invade your life? Sing that chorus from above and then pray and ask God to speak to your own heart with amazing authority!



This Is The Christ

The cross is now the path to life
The power of death undone
The curse of sin has lost the fight
The Lamb has overcome
The Lamb has overcome



Revelation 5:1-14

"Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."



Waiting is hard. Waiting with what seems like lack of hope is devastating. Some of the most difficult stories told are from military families who, while waiting for loved ones to return, find out a death has occurred and a reunion isn't going to happen. Hope seems lost. The anguish makes people weep. Family members weep. Friends weep. Communities weep. This weeping, this deep sadness is universal brokenness.

John, the writer of Revelation, is weeping from this deep place. "I wept and wept because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and look inside."

Then! Then! The elders say to John "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." They are referring to Jesus, the Lamb.

The ugliness of death, including Jesus Christ on the cross, is now the path to life to all who believe. Life! This is the gift. Here lies the miracle. The power of death is forever undone!

"Heavenly Father, truly Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is worthy of our praise. We can sing a new song because with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. Father, this is the gift. The true hope of Christmas." Amen.

DAY 16



O Spread the Tidings Round

O boundless love divine! How shall this tongue of mine
To wandering mortals tell the matchless grace divine –
That I, a child of hell, should in his image shine!



Romans 3:9-26

*"There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God."*



"There is no one righteous." Is it any wonder Christmas is full of messiness? With hard relationships and disappointment, unmet expectations and anxiety? While we fight to keep our attention on Jesus this Christmas, these things will always fight to distract us. Yet, that in itself is also the absolute beauty of Christmas. The idea that from this we are waiting to be rescued. We who doubt have the tangible proof; we who doubt

have the glorious hope. We've seen it done before. We've watched God break through the silence with the cry of a baby. Emmanuel. God with us. God in our mess. God rescuing us. Yet, while we were still sinners, we were so utterly beloved.

Out of sheer generosity, God put us in right standing with him. He set things right. For everyone who believes in him. Christmas itself is a pure gift. Christmas itself is the gift. While happiness is often hard to obtain, joy can exist with the hard. Joy can exist in the mess. We can have joy because we know that all of these hard things point us to the idea that we are being rescued and life isn't hopeless.

Over this month, focus your attention on the hope we have in Jesus' rescue. Let that comfort you in the midst of whatever hard season you find yourself in. When the hard happens, let it remind you of the rescuing that has come and that is coming.



O Spread the Tidings Round

The Comforter has come!
The Comforter has come
The Holy Ghost from heav'n
The Father's promise giv'n



John 16:5-16

"But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."



Hundreds of silent years stand between the Old and New Testament. A lot of us have gone through seasons where we haven't heard the voice of God. It's often those times when we feel the most hopeless, the most lost. But that's part of this season. God breaking the silence. Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us. Lonely exile torn like the veil to come. God himself, coming to earth to bring

good news to the poor, to the ones with a cold and broken hallelujah, to the hopeless ones, the despairing ones. He came to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to those bound, and to comfort those mourning, even this Christmas.

This Jesus would utter the words the world had so longed to hear whispered into their ears and curled around their hearts. He would unroll the scroll and find the place where these prophecies were written, read them aloud and say,

"Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."
(Luke 4:21)

The one who whispered life into being chose to step into cold rejection for you. He did not leave you orphaned when he ascended. He left behind the Holy Spirit to live inside of you, to strengthen and comfort you. The Comforter. We know the Comforter has come and you are not alone.

DAY 18



I Heard the Bells

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep
God is not dead nor does he sleep



Psalm 121:1-8

*"He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not
slumber; indeed, he who watches over
Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."*



Christmas is a busy season and sometimes it's hard to pause. Sometimes it's hard just to take a minute. So pause for just a minute now. Think about the places where you need God to meet you this month.

Some of us are waiting on God to move. We're facing difficult family interactions, tough financial burdens, depression, anxiety. Our hearts feel spent. But God is our defender. Even now in this season. He goes before us. He doesn't sleep. He will not let our foot slip. He watches over us. And he will go before us this season.

Even in all the busyness, the Lord is with your coming and your going. This month, practice your awareness of his presence. Because he is there and sometimes we miss it.

Wait for him; he is coming soon.

DAY 19



I Heard the Bells

The bride still awaits her groom
Her heart is spent
Oh Maker of Sun and Moon
Are you coming soon?



Revelation 21:1-4

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."



Think back to the last time you were at a hospital. Remember the waiting? Do you remember the feelings? Pain, anxiety, restlessness. Remember the people? Solemn, silent, nervously waiting to be called.

The Christian life is a lot like a hospital waiting room. We live in the "in-between," where Jesus has come and salvation is available, but we are still waiting for God to make everything new. Just like the people in the waiting room, we have hope, but that hope hasn't been fulfilled yet. We've read the story. We know the ending. But in the meantime, life probably isn't what we expected. The bells may ring "peace on earth, good will to men," but the reality around us is more often strife, dissension, grief, sorrow, racism, addiction, sexism, anguish, hate—sin abounding on Earth, often within our own community of believers.

Waiting is tough. No one enjoys waiting, but waiting is easier when we aren't alone. Jesus, Emmanuel, "God with us," is still with us. The work of the cross is finished. A glorious future awaits, and though we wait in this "in-between," God promises he will be with us in the waiting.



Tempus Adest Floridium/The Story of Us

All creation is groaning and longs for release
We are losing our loved ones to war and disease
So we cling to the promise, we're down on our knees



Romans 8:18-25

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."



Ahhhh! So much is happening right now, so much to do, so little sleep! If it wouldn't cause too much stress, take a look at your planner/task list for a moment. Yes! There is a lot happening; activities and events and meetings filling your calendar. Then there is your task list... OK, look away. As you are working to check things off your list, at this very moment in time, God is working as well. He is doing something new, right here, right now. Can you sense it? Do you know it? Take a breath and read this with me now. "All creation waits in eager expectation!" Eager expectation. That sounds good. That doesn't sound like fear or stress, frustration or even planning... just waiting,

anticipating, expecting eagerly. There is freedom in that. Freedom in knowing that God is doing the big work. We get to wait with eager expectation.

At the same time, Paul writes that the whole of creation has been groaning. So which is it? Eager expectation or groaning? It's both and both bring good news. There is good news for this groaning world. God is doing something new! God is at work not only saving and reconciling people to himself, but also to each other. What freedom! John 10:10 says, *"[Jesus] came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance."* Abundance! So, while we wait, and yes, groan, trust and take heart that he is at work in each and every detail. Nothing is lost, unnoticed, or unused by our Heavenly Father. Paul says in Romans 8:18 that *"our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* To that end, no experience is untouched by pain, even if the pain is that the experience will end. I think it's worth noting that just a few verses later (20 and 21) God shares in our hope. Not only can we be encouraged because Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33), but we can be courageous in our hope for a better world in relationship with God. So, yes, even in present circumstances and sufferings and task lists and calendars, we can be encouraged. Jesus has overcome and Glory WILL be revealed! Revealed in us! Believe it.

So as we wait with eager expectation in freedom and continue to suffer and groan, join me in praying...

COME LORD JESUS, COME!



Tempus Adest Floridium/The Story of Us

Let the last words be written in the story of us
Let the sleepers awaken from out of the dust
Let them shine like the heavens who've led
many sons to you



Daniel 12:1-4

"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."



Have you ever felt like you've had something disastrous looming over your head? A few months ago, my wife and I heard that her previous employer had made a mistake when we switched health insurance providers, which caused our old insurance to pay for some medication after our coverage stopped, which meant they now wanted us to pay them almost \$12,000. We called them and told them what happened. They said that it would take 7-10 days to process, but it was essentially certain that we were going to have to pay.

We were crushed and anxious, even a little angry, certain that we were about to get a huge bill we shouldn't have to pay.

Daniel 12:1-4 is a prophecy to a man named Daniel, where

God described to him what will happen in the future. He describes our lives in the days to come as a *"time of distress"* like has never been seen before. Those who aren't currently living will be raised from the dead, and everyone will be judged by God for the life they have lived.

I was certain that I was going to have to pay that \$12,000 bill. The company told us that was sure to be the outcome.

Likewise, it's certain that we will be judged for the life that we've lived. God has told us. (And he has the inside scoop!) So right now, we wait, often with a sense of dread for what will come. But how will it end?

Yesterday, we got a call from the insurance company after more than four months of waiting. (What happened to 7-10 business days? Who knows?) Then we heard, "We've chosen to pay for this. You're clear." ...What? I thought this was supposed to be a health insurance company? We weren't sure what happened, but—full disclosure—when my wife stopped by my office to tell me, we responded with a little dance party.

Someday, in that day of great distress and judgment, you will see Jesus face to face. He will say to you, "I've chosen to pay your debt. You're clear." After years of waiting, struggle, and strife, you will rise to everlasting life, so full of life that you will be shining brighter than the sun. The weight of sin and the dread of judgment will be gone.

What are you expecting to hear?

In that day, how will you celebrate?



Tempus Adest Floridium/The Story of Us

Let us look to the mountains! The sky is ablaze
For our help now is coming, igniting the day
Oh wake up you sleeper! The dawn is upon your face



Ephesians 5:1-20

*"Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."*



Living with a one-year-old is like having a second alarm clock... that you can't program. I regularly experience the strangest phenomenon: I'll be deep in a wonderful dream and then I'll hear the low rush of water. After a moment of confusion, I realize that it's actually my son crying in the night. Frustrated, groggy, and determined that he'll settle back down in a moment, I'll look at the time and see it's just a few minutes before my real alarm is set to go off. Ugh... Do I ignore the time and try to settle back into sleep and the dream? Or do I accept that I've lost a little sleep and get up to care for him and start the day?

Yesterday we discussed that the day of judgment and salvation is coming. Today's passage says that day is much closer than we think. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were like my son's crying, an indication that it's later than we think and the day is upon us. The first glimmers of dawn started creeping upon your horizon the moment you encountered God's forgiveness and grace to you in Jesus, and now you face a decision.

Will you ignore God's grace in your life and continue living as if you're in charge of your life, or will you recognize that you have been saved from your sin and live in that reality today?

Waking up from your sleep will require you to accept that what you thought was true, was just a dream—you are not in control of the universe, you cannot do whatever you want without consequence, and living for yourself doesn't lead to happiness and fulfillment. If you do choose to wake up, though, you will certainly find that God's reality is far better than any dream, and walking in the light is far more joyful and fulfilling than life in the dark.

What would happen if you ignored your alarm and responsibilities tomorrow morning, choosing instead to continuing dreaming?

What would happen if you chose to let go of your old ways of living to embrace the life and salvation that God is giving you today in Christ?



The Lord Almighty Reigns, Pt. 2/Joy to the World

From the Earth the serpent rose
And the ground recoiled below
But the angel threw him down



Revelation 12:1-17

"Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven."



Revelation can be hard to read with its symbolism and figurative language. Will there actually be a pregnant woman floating in heaven and a red dragon running around on the earth? These are literary features to help us understand some core truths about the future. Let's take a look at two of them:

There is a spiritual being named Satan that is bent on ruining God's plan and destroying you.

In your struggle against sin and the tragedies of life, you are not just dealing with yourself and other people. In this passage, Satan is depicted as a water-spewing dragon that is trying to bring down God's redemptive plan and his people. If you are a follower

of Jesus, you should expect to meet spiritual resistance. This can come in many different forms, from inexplicable tragedies or challenges, to hurtful thoughts filling our heads. Salvation is assured and is coming, but the road there can be painful and difficult.

No matter how hard Satan might try to destroy God's plan or wreck your life, God is more powerful... and will throw him to the ground. I love the image of the dragon being hurled down, almost like a whip. You can hear the smack, feel the resounding thump, as Satan lays defeated on the ground. Do you ever wish you could throw your challenges or temptations to the curb like that? No matter how much resistance you face in your life, and no matter how hard Satan will try to bring down your faith, Jesus will defeat your enemy. You will be standing there looking down at that dragon, lying defeated on the ground before you. After such a long road, and seeing such a display of power, I know what I'll be doing... falling down on my knees in worship, singing "The Lord Almighty reigns!"

The book of Revelation is written to encourage you to persevere in your faith, no matter how much resistance, temptation, or persecution you face. (Turn this into a question: What are you facing? Where do you feel resistance? What is your plan to persevere?) I don't know the troubles that you are facing right now, but you do, and God does. He assures you that if you continue to trust in him, then he will deliver you from whatever you face, and you'll get to join in a joy fills the world.



The Lord Almighty Reigns, Pt. 2/Joy to the World

Hallelujah, hallelujah
God is with us now forever
Death is beaten, sin defeated
Hallelujah, praise the Lamb



Revelation 19:1-8

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."



Having the privilege of getting to serve as the bass player for *The Long Night is Past*, I have the unique role of helping to lead worship through playing the low notes you feel right in your feet and chest. The bass is a powerful instrument with its low range creating an intangible force of sound that can inspire emotion. It's the closest I can get to help produce what verse 6 refers to as "like the mighty rolling of great thunder."

There's an indescribable joy I experience praising God through my bass. However, to be perfectly honest, that joy didn't come as a result of playing the bass but as a result of my time spent embracing who God is and what he has done for me. When the lights of the stage are off and the instrument put away, the depth of my relationship with God and the joy I experience are a byproduct of time spent wrestling with my faith away from all the music I get to play. Discovery of what it means to give sincere praise came from submitting my messy life to a patient, kind, and loving God. It's in the wrestling, struggling and finally submitting that we can truly declare with an expectant heart, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!"

Our passage today speaks to a moment of overwhelming awe of who God is and being in his actual presence responding with praise and declaring his greatness. It is an appropriate response to God's greatness! Will you join us as we choose to focus on God's mighty presence and lead our hearts to our own feelings of awe?

DAY 25



The Lord Almighty Reigns, Pt. 2/Joy to the World

And he will reign forever
He will reign forever
He will reign forever, Amen



Luke 1:26-38

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."



This section of the song declares that Jesus will reign forever. Musically, these lyrics are part of an emotionally charged moment leading us to a big finish in our presentation. It's exciting and stirs up strong positive feelings for followers of Jesus to declare our acknowledgment of his kingship.

This song written as an expression of reverence to the descriptions of Jesus in the Bible but also as a response to the personal impact of who Jesus is to us.

As you listen to this part of the song, listen and feel how the chords build as the singers faithfully declare, "he will reign forever." Can you sense the wonder of the moment? We know what Jesus came to do. It's all there for us to read about in the Bible. We can choose to set out hearts in expectant hope that our God will complete all his promises. No matter what life challenges or joys may distract us this season, today, let us allow ourselves to revel in the declaration of God's everlasting reign over all of creation. He will reign forever. Amen!

FOR TOO LONG
THE CHURCH
HAS BEEN KNOWN
FOR WHAT
IT IS AGAINST.
WE WANT TO BE
KNOWN FOR
WHAT WE ARE FOR.

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