

# “Come, Lord!”

An MSYGNews 2012 Christmas Daily Devotional

I was walking into Lowe’s shortly (emphasis on the short time period) after Halloween with my youngest son when I noticed something very odd. Before I could cross the threshold of the store I noticed sparkly, yea tinsel-like, decorations in the store. Sure-enough what beset my eyes were not requirements of the store like tools, plumbing, grills... you know... man stuff...but what had taken over Lowes (hostile-takeover I might add) were Christmas trees, Santa Clause inflatables and a host of other Christmas decorations. And it wasn’t even Thanksgiving yet. We have a rule in the Mackenzie house that I feel is slowly being challenge because of societal pressure: ***NO CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS UNTIL THE DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING!!!*** My mother, bless her heart (which means I can make fun of her now!!! Thank you people from the south!), would start decorating for Christmas after Labor Day if we let her but somewhere we must cross the line!

Seriously, the mention of the word “Christmas” makes many of you want to run for the hills! I don’t blame you though because Christmas has ended up something that it was never intended to be. Thanks to consumerism, which is driven by, you guessed it, consumerists Christmas has evolved into stacking up gifts instead of important themes like family, the ultimate gift-Giver and sharing. To put things in perspective the National Retail Federation said that during last year’s Black Friday consumerists spent close to \$52 billion!<sup>1</sup> Think of how many families could eat, drink and survive on that money. Yet we quickly spend that money on gifts, rush into services on Christmas Day, listen to Carol of the Bells, throw in some Bing Crosby Christmas Classics, eat Ham or Turkey and then rush home feeling exhausted, tired and frustrated. Is it any wonder why we end up dreading the season rather than anticipating it?

“What’s your point bro?”

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nrf.com/modules.php?name=News&op=viewlive&sp\\_id=1260](http://www.nrf.com/modules.php?name=News&op=viewlive&sp_id=1260)

I'm glad you asked... or I am glad I asked. Whatever. This season *can* be different for you in the sense that the rush of the season can be something you can completely avoid. Why not make the season about Jesus Christ and serving him in hopeful anticipation? Why not celebrate something millions of people have been celebrating for years?

I'm talking about a season called ADVENT!

## ***WHAT IN THE WORLD IS ADVENT?***

The Christian calendar is a tool that allows Christians to move through the year focusing on different seasons of Scripture. This time of the year is what is called "Advent" and has been focused on for many years. The word "advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus* meaning coming and stems from the New Testament Greek word *parousia* which focused on the Second Coming of Jesus (cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-11). The point was for Christians to focus on the birth of Jesus Christ this time of the year like the early Jews did. Advent is about anticipation and being vigilant and sober for the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 5:6, 8). The early Jews were vigilant and sober for the first coming of Christ (i.e. Messiah) as he would right all wrongs and establish justice to those who were oppressed and his kingdom would reign forever.<sup>2</sup>

Dennis Brown, in his lovely article "The Christian Season of Advent," shares these splendid thoughts about advent:

*In this double focus on past and future, Advent also symbolizes the spiritual journey of individuals and a congregation, as they affirm that Christ has come, that He is present in the world today, and that He will come again in power. That acknowledgment provides a basis for Kingdom ethics, for holy living arising from a profound sense that we live "between the times" and are called to be faithful stewards of what is entrusted to us as God's people. So, as the church celebrates God's inbreaking into history in the Incarnation, and anticipates a future consummation to that history for which "all creation is groaning awaiting its redemption," it also confesses its own responsibility as a people commissioned to "love the*

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<sup>2</sup> I took this from a blog series I did called "Teaching your students the importance of Advent." It was one of my most popular blog series. You can access the first part of this series at <http://robbiemackenzie.com/2011/11/28/teaching-your-students-the-importance-of-advent-part-1/>

*Lord your God with all your heart” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>3</sup>*

So Advent, and its history, is about the who (Jesus came and will come), the what (incarnational kingdom-living) and the to-what-extent (until the new heavens and the new earth). Different things are done on advent like feasts, fasts and special services all of which are not the means to an end but merely a way of praising God for what he has done and will continue to do.

This is a great opportunity for us to really generate some talk in our families and discuss things that, wait for it, REALLY MATTER! It is nice to give gifts and it is nice to receive gifts (wink wink) but those things are not what make Christmas special. What makes Christmas special is that Jesus came, Jesus sent forth the kingdom, Jesus left (physically) and some day Jesus will return and all wrongs will be right. I am reminded of the Messianic passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that are wrought with such anticipation for what was to come.<sup>4</sup> We too, can anticipate, hope, expect and desire that same Messianic fulfillment like the children of Israel.

## ***SO WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?***

The calendar for Advent starts December 2<sup>nd</sup> and ends Christmas Eve! I won't short-change you though and so I will include a special devotional for Christmas day. Since there are four weeks in Advent we will have four themes for each week understanding that the last week will be short. Here are the themes:

- Waiting
- Expectancy
- Joy
- Peace

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.criovoice.org/cyadvent.html>

<sup>4</sup> See 2 Samuel 7:16; Daniel 9:24-26; Isaiah 7:14; 11:10; 40:1-5, 9; 49:6; 50:6; Jeremiah 23:5; Micah 5:1-2 (and many others).

The devotional will contain the Scripture for the day, a thought, some questions and then a prayer exercise.<sup>5</sup> Nothing major but this will help your family each day in journeying through Advent in a thoughtful and helpful way. Below is an idea I saw from Letitia Suk in an article she wrote called, "Celebrate Advent" that originally appeared in the December 2000 edition of the *Focus on the Family* magazine.<sup>6</sup> These are some great ideas:

***Prepare your family:*** *Let your family or household know that this year you are going to start a new tradition to celebrate Jesus' birthday. Whenever you can with children, refer to Christmas as Jesus' birthday. Decide which time of the day will work best for your Advent time.*

***What you need:***

- *An Advent wreath, which can be purchased at most Christian bookstores, or made of fire-safe materials or a log with holes for candles. Perhaps it could be a family event to choose or make the Advent wreath.*
- *Four candles, three purple and one rose, and an additional white candle for Christmas Eve. A box of four Advent candles can be purchased at many card stores or Christian bookstores.*
- *A Bible for readings and, for younger children, a selection of children's Christmas stories that focus on the birth of Jesus.*
- *Advent readings.*

***Optional items:***

- *An Advent calendar, available where cards are sold, with 24 windows to open each day in December or a paper chain of 24 red and green links to mark the number of days until Jesus' birthday.*
- *Christmas carol books.*

***Beginning the celebration:*** *On the first day begin with either a prayer or a Christmas carol. Light the first purple candle, known as the prophecy candle. The liturgical color purple is a sign of penance and longing as we wait for the birth of Jesus. With the lighting, talk about Jesus being the*

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<sup>5</sup> All Scripture will come from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted. © Crossway Bibles 2001.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/holidays/making-meaningful-christmas-memories/celebrate-advent.aspx>

*light of the world. Read the Advent Scripture of the day. Conclude by singing or praying. Have one child blow out the candle.*

*Light the same candle each day of the first week. Follow with the reading, Christmas carols or other meaningful activities. On the second Sunday light two purple candles, both of which are relit each night. The second candle is known as the Bethlehem candle.*

*The third week light the two purple candles and then a rose candle, or shepherd candle. Rose is a sign of joy and hope that He is coming.*

*Light the last candle, known as the angel candle, on the fourth Sunday. All four candles are lit each night that week to symbolize the growing brightness of Jesus' coming.*

***Advent activities for Christmas Eve:*** *Conclude the Advent season by lighting all four candles and placing an additional white candle in the center in its own holder. Have a birthday party for Jesus complete with cake, the Happy Birthday song, candles and presents of nonmaterial gifts such as singing, readings, a play and prayers that each family member brings to share with others. Consider doing a nativity play with simple costumes. As you prepare to open gifts explain how we give gifts as a reminder of how much God gave us in Jesus.*

*Long after the new toys are banished to the back of the closet and the decorations stored away for another year, the memories of the four weeks of Advent will remain. Don't be surprised if it turns out to be your favorite tradition!*

### ***Additional Advent Activities***

- As Christmas cards arrive, save them with the Advent wreath and use your Advent prayer time to pray for the senders.*
- Do an Advent service project for the needy. Collect money or goods and use a portion of the Advent time to decide whom to help and how to do it. Some possibilities are to join a church's gift-giving project, call the Salvation Army for names of families who are needy, send a special food or gift package to a missionary or give anonymously to those you know in need.*

- *Use your nativity set with as many animals as possible to enact the story. (Great for younger kids!) Some families set up the manger scene and each day move the people and animals in a little closer.*
- *Add occasional craft times to the end of an Advent ceremony. Make ornaments using salt dough or glue pictures of family members on flat foam shapes and decorate.*
- *Make cookies or candies to share at the conclusion of your Advent time, or make special Advent cookies different from Christmas ones.*
- *Have children bring homemade instruments to enhance the singing.*
- *If you have competitive children, alternate who will light the candle, pick the carol, lead the prayers and read the Bible.*
- *Invite your friends to share an Advent evening with you.*

### Videos About Advent

- “Advent in 2 Minutes” by Busted Halo - <http://youtu.be/S02K0lw7dIA>
- “Advent: God With Us” by The Village Church - <http://vimeo.com/32459389>
- “[Advent Conspiracy] Enter the Story 2011 by the Advent Conspiracy - <http://youtu.be/9IN0W3gjnNE>

# Waiting

First Sunday of Advent  
December 2, 2012

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*A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

*Isaiah 40:3-5*

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**THINK:** How would you like to be told that you were going to get the greatest gift the world has ever known but it would not come in your lifetime? Yet that is what the Israelites had to experience when Isaiah prophesied about this. The Messiah will come but you have to wait!

**REFLECT:** *What does it mean to wait for something? Give examples!*

*Why is it so hard for us (especially Americans) to wait?*

*How might waiting teach us more about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Take about 5 minutes as a family to pray about the upcoming project. Pray for waiting, expectancy, hope and peace and to learn something about each other. You might close with a song.

# Waiting

Monday, December 3, 2012

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*In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock. For he has humbled the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city. He lays it low, lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust. The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy."*

*Isaiah 26:1-6*

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**THINK:** Have you ever tried a trust fall? One person falls backwards not looking "trusting" that the other person will catch them. Trust is an important part of waiting and in the season of gift-giving it is important to know who or what we trust in.

**REFLECT:** *How is trust an important component of waiting?*

*What are some things that break trust?*

*How might trusting teach us more about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Write down on a piece of paper some things that hinder you and your family from trusting God. Pray about those things as a family asking God to grant you the confidence to trust in him more.



# Waiting

Tuesday, December 4, 2012

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*Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”*

*Mark 13:33-37*

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**THINK:** When we think of “waiting” most of the time we think about passively sitting around whereas biblical waiting carried with it the idea of active participation in bringing something into existence. Waiting on the Lord means making things right and being active in the Lord’s work.

**REFLECT:** *What does it mean to be alert and awake?*

*Why should we be alert for the Lord’s return?*

*How might alertness teach us more about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Pray for vigilance... pray for alertness... pray for the power of waiting on the Lord’s return.

# Waiting

Wednesday, December 5, 2012

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*In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

*Luke 1:5-7*

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**THINK:** This section of Luke is about the birth of John the Baptist. For someone to be barren meant many years of frustration, impatience and public shame. Like then, it is hard to wait for the Lord when the cards are stacked against you.

**REFLECT:** *In what ways do earthly frustrations ruin our “waiting” for the Lord?*

*What are some frustrations occurring in your life or in the life of your family right now?*

*How might frustrations in waiting teach us more about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Grab some paper, post-it notes or whatever. Write your frustrations down on paper (money, bills, travel, jobs, etc.). Let each family member pray for each frustration. Find a place in the house where the family walks through and display the frustrations there so you can pray for those each day.

# Waiting

Thursday, December 6, 2012

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*Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.*

*And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth."*

*Luke 1:8-14*

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**THINK:** Have you ever had something you have been waiting for suddenly come upon you? There are moments when what we have hoped for and longed for comes true and, in a small way, we experience in part what all creation will ultimately experience in full.

**REFLECT:** *How do you think Elizabeth and Zechariah felt about the news?*

*There was probably some hesitancy with the news? Are you often tempted to discard something as "from God"? Why?*

*How does God answering our "waiting" teach us more about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Talk about some times in your life/family's life when God suddenly answered what you have waited for. Express your gratitude to God in prayer thanking him for all he has done.

# Waiting

Friday, December 7, 2012

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*...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

*1 Pet. 2:5-9*

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**THINK:** We are chosen not to be in darkness but light. Those in light will never be disappointed because ours is a foundation that is built on Jesus Christ, namely, the chief cornerstone.

**REFLECT:** *How are we called out of darkness and into the light?*

*During this season, has Jesus been your chief cornerstone or has he been the rejected stone?*

*How does dwelling "in the light" teach us more about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Get a candle and light it. (If you already have your advent wreath then gather around it). Turn off all lights. Look at the light for a couple minutes in silence. Close by asking God for help to dwell in the light.

# Waiting

Saturday, December 8, 2012

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*“Even youths shall faint and be weary and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”*

*Isaiah 40:30-31*

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**THINK:** Have you ever just been so tired you didn't feel like moving? You would think waiting would not promote angst but sometimes in our waiting we lose strength and we lose focus. Yet, Isaiah tells us that the ones who wait for the Lord are the ones who will receive strength?

**REFLECT:** *How does waiting take our strength in the Christmas season?*

*What does this verse mean to you?*

*How does dwelling “waiting for the Lord” teach us more about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** You ever heard of a God animal? It is an animal you choose from your everyday life (like a squirrel, a horse, a cow, or whatever) that helps you think about God taking care of you. Pick an animal to focus on and every time you see that animal this week dwell on the strength of the Lord.

# Expectation

Second Sunday of Advent  
December 9, 2012

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*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

*Isaiah 7:14*

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**THINK:** The Israelites longed for the Messiah because it meant that everything that was evil could be (and would be) destroyed in a sense. They had great expectations and that led them to an intense desire for the Messiah. I wonder if we feel the same way.

**REFLECT:** *What does the word "expectation" mean?*

*What are some other synonyms for "expectation"?*

*What do expectations teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** *"And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matt. 21:22). Jesus just put it to us simply yet our experience clouds our belief that God will answer a prayer of faith. Do you expect that God will come again? Does that excite you or scare you? Pray as a family for anticipation of God coming much like Israel anticipated the Messiah's coming.*

**BONUS:** Watch/Listen to the song, "O Come, O Come Immanuel" by Selah at <http://youtu.be/bPfdD3pBUig>

# Expectation

Monday, December 10, 2012

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*And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*Romans 15:12-13*

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**THINK:** Hope. No word in the English dictionary provides as much comfort in times of despair than this four-letter word. We anticipate the coming of Christ not with blind luck like winning the lottery but with faithful hope!

**REFLECT:** *What does the word "hope" mean?*

*In what ways does hope comfort?*

*What does hope teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Turn to Psalm 71 in your bibles. For your prayer, read the psalm, personalizing it when necessary. Allow different family members to read/pray different sections.

# Expectation

Tuesday, December 11, 2012

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*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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."*

*Luke 1:26-33*

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**THINK:** Surprise, you will be pregnant!!! Imagine the emotions that must have come from this. You will be pregnant and you have God in your womb! "What?" The kingdom this man has will never end!

**REFLECT:** *What does this verse mean to you?*

*Jesus' name literally means "savior." What's so important about this component of Jesus?*

*What does "Jesus reigning on the throne" teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** As a family share what the news of Jesus being the savior of the world means to them. Pray for the hope of his return.



# Expectation

Wednesday, December 12, 2012

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*And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."*

*Luke 1:46-55*

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**THINK:** This is Mary's Song after hearing of the blessing from Elizabeth. This song is also called the Magnificat from the Latin word meaning "to magnify."

**REFLECT:** *What stands out to you from these verses?*

*In what ways do you declare the "mighty deeds" of God to all people?*

*What does Mary's song teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** As a family write down all of the wonderful things God has done and then write down all of things he has promised that he will do. Put them all over the house on post-its to be reminded of these things that are important.

**BONUS:** Watch, "Magnificat" performed by the Zoe Group at <http://youtu.be/6F33Y7OgXzM>

# Expectation

Thursday, December 13, 2012

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*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name*

*Deuteronomy 18:15-19*

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**THINK:** The prophet the Lord eventually raised was Jesus. With the hope of Jesus' coming there comes a certain preparation that must take place. Note the warning of those who did not "listen" to the words of God the prophets speak.

**REFLECT:** *What stands out to you from these verses?*

*In what ways do we need to prepare for the return of Christ?*

*What does making preparations teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Pray for the preparations you need to make as a family for Christmas but ultimately for the Messiah. Ask God for help.

# Expectation

Friday, December 14, 2012

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*“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”*

*Matthew 25:1-13*

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THINK: This parable is an indictment against those who are not prepared when their time is up. To be prepared Jesus instructs that we must therefore “watch.”

REFLECT: ***What stands out to you from these verses?***

***How are we supposed to watch? In what ways do we watch?***

***What does “watching” teach us about Christmas?***

SUBMIT: Go to [www.biblegateway.com/keyword](http://www.biblegateway.com/keyword) and search the word “watch” in the New Testament. Pray over these verses. Print them out and post them on the bathroom mirror. Keep these verses in mind.

# Expectation

Saturday, December 15, 2012

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*On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

*Isaiah 25:6-9*

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**THINK:** It's not all doom and gloom when it comes to the Lord's return. As a matter of fact, the Lord's return is about righting wrongs, accomplishing peace and creating the atmosphere of the Garden of Eden that was lost millennia ago.

**REFLECT:** *What stands out to you from these verses?*

*What do you hope for the most when it comes to God?*

*What does these verses teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** The verses talk about a feast of rich (in Hebrew it means "fat") food and well-aged wine (the good stuff) as a metaphor for what heaven will ultimately be like. Cook a huge meal. Within budget, make some of the best food and break out the fine china. Enjoy some music and turn off all phones and electronics. Pray during the meal and talk about how the meal is an important metaphor for what heaven will ultimately be like.

# Joy

Third Sunday in Advent  
December 16, 2012

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*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.*

*Luke 2:8-10*

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**THINK:** Joy seems to be a lost art in the world today. The economy, the busy schedules, the wars and all of the day-to-day issues make it hard for us to think about joy. The news of the Messiah's birth, though, was news of great joy.

**REFLECT:** *What stands out to you from these verses?*

*What does the word "joy" mean to you?*

*What does joy teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Talk about some reasons as a family that hinders you from experiencing joy. Pray over those reasons individually and as a group.

# Joy

Monday, December 17, 2012

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*“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!”*

*Luke 2:11-14*

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**THINK:** A manger is a politically correct word for a horse trough. Our Lord and Savior came into this world and was put in a horse trough. Yet, the news was a cause for angels in heaven to rejoice in worship proclaiming, “Glory to God.” I bet that was some good worship!

**REFLECT:** *What stands out to you from these verses?*

*Why do you think the news of Jesus was a reason for angels to worship?*

*What do these verses teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** When was the last time you sang as a family in joy? Sing a couple of Christmas songs as a family. Close with a prayer.

**OPTIONAL:** Listen to the song and watch a neat video of “Angels we have heard on high,” by Sixpence None the Richer at <http://youtu.be/3-b5IC Jsfc>

# Joy

Tuesday, December 18, 2012

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*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." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*

*Matthew 2:1-6*

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THINK: King Herod's intent was not to worship Jesus but to destroy him. To steal the joy of the people and turn it into a selfish focus and selfish joy.

REFLECT: ***What stands out to you from these verses?***

***What are some things that try to steal our joy during the Christmas season?***

***What do these verses teach us about Christmas?***

SUBMIT: Pray these words 10 times, moving slower and slower each time: "Restore to me, the joy of my salvation and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:12).

# Joy

Wednesday, December 19, 2012

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*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

*Galatians 5:22-23*

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**THINK:** Some say that Paul mentions “love” as the first fruit of the Spirit because it is the foundation of being a Spirit-filled community. If so, I wonder why “joy” is mentioned second?

**REFLECT:** *Why is joy a fruit of the Spirit?*

*In what ways are we supposed to infuse joy in all things that we do?*

*What do these verses teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Who needs joy in your community? It could be someone from your local church. It could be someone in your neighborhood. It could be someone in your family. It could be someone in your town. What would it look like for you to infuse joy in their lives? How could you as a family do that? Do it.



# Joy

Thursday, December 20, 2012

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*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 4:4-7*

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**THINK:** Paul rejoiced in all circumstances. He was the example of joy and contentment. Certainly this was learned but certainly this was prayed. Maybe learned in/by/with/through/from prayer...

**REFLECT:** *How does prayer help with joy?*

*What does angst (being anxious) do to our joy?*

*What do these verses teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Are you stressed yet? Are you feeling the pressure? Are you anxious? What about? Paul tells us to make our request known to God. So as a family, do that. Write them down, one after another and pray each one of them.

# Joy

Friday, December 21, 2012

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*Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.*

*Zephaniah 3:14-18*

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**THINK:** The opposite of joy is, it seems, is fear. Zephaniah was prophesying that the people of Israel can look forward to a time where there will be no judgments, no enemies, and no fear.

**REFLECT:** *What stands out to you in these verses?*

*How will God "quiet you by his love"?*

*What do these verses teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Find a quiet place in the house. Just sit in silence. No agenda but simply to be "quieted" by the love of God. Feel God's presence about you. Spend some time thinking about how deep and wide the love of God is.

# Joy

Saturday, December 22, 2012

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*So also you have sorrow now, but in I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

*John 16:22-24*

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**THINK:** Nobody will take your joy. Nobody. Nobody will take your joy. Let that sink in to the deepest chamber of your hearts. Satan cannot take your joy. The demons cannot take your joy. The powers, principalities and evil forces in this world cannot take your joy away.

**REFLECT:** *What stands out to you in these verses?*

*How can your joy be made full? What does that mean?*

*What do these verses teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** In big letters, write this somewhere visible in your house: "Nothing can take our joy away." Pray that 10-15 times saying this over and over again. Read Romans 8:31-39 and be assured that nothing can separate you from the love and joy that is in Christ.

# Peace

Fourth Sunday in Advent  
Sunday, December 23, 2012

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*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be a their peace.*

*Micah 5:2-5*

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THINK: Peace. Perfect Peace. The return of the Messiah represented, above all things, peace.

REFLECT: ***What does the word "peace" mean?***

***What stands out to you in these verses?***

***What does peace teach us about Christmas?***

SUBMIT: A lot of times we think about repaying people for the evil things they have done to us but Jesus practiced, emphasized, preached and lived peace. What are some things that anger you? What are some violent situations occurring in this world? As a family look at the news (Middle East) and find situations to pray about. Pray for peace.

# Peace

Monday, December 24, 2012

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*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

*Isaiah 52:7*

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**THINK:** Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house not a creature was stirring not even a mouse. Not a creature is stirring because Jesus came with the good news (gospel) of peace.

**REFLECT:** *How is peace good news?*

*What stands out to you in these verses?*

*What do these verses teach us about Christmas?*

**SUBMIT:** Tomorrow is a big day. A lot to pray about. Imagine the night before Jesus was born? What an event! Pray for a wonderful day tomorrow.

# Christmas Day

Tuesday, December 25, 2012

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*And he [Herod] sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

*Matthew 2:8-12*

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**THINK:** They found the child many days after Jesus was born but the story is still instructive for us. Christmas Day is about beginnings, hope, new possibilities, righting of wrongs, giving God glory and trust in God to deliver us now and forever.

**REFLECT:** *What are some special things that happened as a family today?*

*What stands out to you in these verses?*

*With Jesus, what are the possibilities in this world?*

**SUBMIT:** Pray for the Lordship of Jesus in your life and in the life of your family. Talk about what you need to do as a family to place yourself in the reign of the kingdom of God.

# Now What?

As I am writing this I have my two youngest kids on either side of me and we are watching the movie Polar Express. There is a lot of talk about the Christmas “spirit” and “yuletide cheer” but as good as the intentions of those statements are they all miss the point. We celebrate something once a year that, if we are honest enough with the biblical text, was celebrated every day (in a sense) by disciples in the early church. Too often we leave Jesus in the manger and forget that he did so much more than that. Jesus grew up, trained disciples, changed the world and died for the sins of mankind and rose just like he said he would. The manger is important but only so much that it points us to the Messiah. I love watching Christmas movies with the kids and listening to ridiculous Christmas songs (after Thanksgiving of course) and doing all of the things that creates memories.

Yet, if we fail to understand the meaning of the Christmas story it loses the thrust or even the divine intent. Christmas is about beginning the season off right and it is about ending the season off right. What a wonderful time we get to experience with the holidays and with family. So for now we are called to do four things...

We wait...

We expect...

We rejoice...

We promote peace.

Until next year,

Robbie Mackenzie