



GOOD NEWS
of
GREAT JOY

—
25 DEVOTIONAL
READINGS *for* ADVENT

JOHN PIPER

“*Good News of Great Joy* brings within our reach a fresh discovery of the glory of Christmas. What a relief for busy people like every one of us to sit down for 10 minutes each day in Advent and think about Jesus our Savior—and rest, rejoice, revive!”

Ray Ortlund, Pastor to Pastors, Immanuel Church,
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“How can we experience Advent in a way that is advantageous to our souls after December 25? By beholding and enjoying the glory of God in the incarnate Christ, your Savior, your Lord, your brother, your friend. John Piper’s *Good News of Great Joy* takes you on an exploration of the good news of Christmas, inviting you to join him in wonder, awe, and a joy that surpasses holiday cheer. This book is about everlasting joy, and Piper will point you to it, to him, Jesus Christ.”

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“These Advent devotions from the pen of John Piper may be brief, but you will find in them the depth and richness of thought that Piper is well-known for. With a sense of joyful reverence, he holds us by the hand and takes us into the inner sanctuary of the incarnation. As we pause at the fountainhead of the Son born to us in Bethlehem, we are primed to appreciate even more the gushing floods of love in his mangled form on Calvary. If you want your Christmas season to be spiritually enriched, marinate it with thoughts from this book!”

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Good News of Great Joy

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John Piper

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Preface

Advent is for adoring Jesus. At least that's our angle on it at Desiring God.

Advent is an annual season of patient waiting, hopeful expectation, soul searching, and calendar watching marked by many churches, Christian families, and individual followers of Jesus. There's no biblical mandate to observe Advent. It is optional—a tradition that developed over the course of the church's history as a time of preparation for Christmas Day. Many of us find observing Advent to be spiritually challenging, enjoyable, and beneficial.

The English word *advent* is from the Latin *adventus*, which means “coming.” The advent primarily in view each December is the first coming of Jesus two millennia ago. But Jesus's second coming gets drawn in as well, as the popular Christmas carol “Joy to the World” makes plain:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.¹

Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends Christmas Eve. This means the earliest it begins, depending on where that Sunday falls, is November 27, and the latest it starts is December 3. Whereas Lent (the season of preparation for Easter) is forty days (plus its six Sundays), Advent ranges in length from twenty-two to twenty-nine days.

Christians throughout the world have their different ways of celebrating Advent and various practical manifestations. Some light candles. Some sing songs. Some eat candies. Some give gifts. Some hang wreaths. Many of us do all of the above. Over the centuries, we have developed many good ways of extending the celebration of Jesus's coming beyond merely the short twenty-four hours of December 25. The incarnation of the Son of God, "for us and for our salvation," as the old creed says, is too significant to appreciate in just one day. Indeed, it's something we will celebrate for all eternity.

1 Isaac Watts, "Joy to the World," 1719.

Our prayer is that this little devotional book might help you keep Jesus as the center and greatest treasure of your Advent season. The candles and candies have their place, but we want to make sure that in all the December rush and hubbub we adore Jesus above all.

So “O Come, Let Us Adore Him” is perhaps the theme of these Advent readings.² These meditations are all about adoring Christ, the Lord. In spots, you’ll hear strands of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” and in others, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.”³ And, of course, we’ll have a cameo from the magi. But the figure at the center is Jesus—the baby born in Bethlehem, the God-man in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger, destined for Calvary, sent by his Father to die and rise again for his people.

The introduction is designed to be read before Advent begins (or any time during). The conclusion can be read as an additional selection on Christmas Day (or any time before, especially if you’re curious about Pastor John’s favorite Christmas text). The appendix on Old Testament shadows and the coming of Christ coordinates with the

2 John Francis Wade, “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” 1751.

3 John Mason Neale, trans., “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” 1861; Charles Wesley, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” 1739.

PREFACE

meditation for day 12 (and you'll find a note in parentheses there).

May God be pleased to deepen and sweeten your adoring of Jesus this Advent.

David Mathis
Executive Editor
Desiring God

INTRODUCTION

What Does Jesus Want This Christmas?

What does Jesus want this Christmas? We can see the answer in his prayers. What does he ask God for? His longest prayer is John 17. The climax of his desire is in verse 24.

Among all the undeserving sinners in the world, there are those whom God has “given” to Jesus. These are those whom God has drawn to the Son (John 6:44, 65). These are *Christians*—people who have *received* Jesus as the crucified and risen Savior and Lord and Treasure of their lives (John 1:12; 3:17; 6:35; 10:11, 17–18; 20:28). Jesus says he wants them to be with him.

Sometimes we hear people say that God created man because he was lonely. So they say, “God created us so that we would be *with him*.” Does Jesus agree with this? Well, he *does* say that he really wants us to be with him! Yes, but

why? Consider the rest of the verse. Why does Jesus want us to be with him?

. . . to see my glory that you [Father] have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

That would be a strange way of expressing his loneliness. “I want them with me so they can see my glory.” In fact, it doesn’t express his loneliness. It expresses his concern for the satisfaction of *our* longing, not *his* loneliness.

Jesus is not lonely. He and the Father and the Spirit are profoundly satisfied in the fellowship of the Trinity. We, not he, are starving for something. And what Jesus wants for Christmas is for us to experience what we were really made for—seeing and savoring his glory.

Oh, that God would make this sink in to our souls! Jesus made us (John 1:3) to see his glory.

Just before he goes to the cross, Jesus pleads his deepest desires with the Father: “Father, I *desire* [I desire!] that they . . . may be with me where I am, *to see my glory*.”

But that is only half of what Jesus wants in these final, climactic verses of his prayer. I just said we were really made for seeing *and savoring* his glory. Is that what he wants—that we not only see his glory but savor it, relish

it, delight in it, treasure it, love it? Consider verse 26, the very last verse:

I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, *that the love with which you have loved me may be in them*, and I in them.

That is the end of the prayer. What is Jesus's *final* goal for us? Not that we simply see his glory, but that we love him with the same love that the Father has for him: "that the love with which you [Father] have loved me may be in them."

Jesus's longing and goal is that we see his glory, and then that we be able to love what we see with the same love that the Father has for the Son. And he doesn't mean that we merely *imitate* the love of the Father for the Son. He means the Father's very love becomes our love for the Son—that we love the Son with the love of the Father for the Son. This is what the Spirit becomes and bestows in our lives: love for the Son by the Father through the Spirit.

What Jesus wants most for Christmas is that his elect be gathered in and then get what *they* want most—to *see* his glory and then *savor* it with the very savoring of the Father for the Son.

INTRODUCTION

What I want most for Christmas this year is to join you (and many others) in seeing Christ in all his fullness, and that we together be able to love what we see with a love far beyond our own half-hearted human capacities. This is our goal in these Advent devotionals. We want together to see and savor this Jesus whose first advent (coming) we celebrate, and whose second advent we anticipate.

This is what Jesus prays for us this Christmas: “Father, show them my glory and give them the very delight in me that you have in me.” Oh, may we *see* Christ with the eyes of God and *savor* Christ with the heart of God. That is the essence of heaven. That is the gift Christ came to purchase for sinners at the cost of his death in our place.

DAY I

Prepare the Way

What John the Baptist did for Israel, Advent can do for us. Don't let Christmas find you unprepared. I mean *spiritually* unprepared. Its joy and impact will be so much greater if you are ready!

So, that you might be *prepared* . . .

First, meditate on the fact that we need a *Savior*. Christmas is an indictment before it becomes a delight. "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a *Savior*, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). If you don't need a Savior, you don't need Christmas. Christmas will not have its intended effect until we feel desperately the need for a Savior. Let these short Advent meditations help awaken in you a bittersweet sense of need for the Savior.

Second, engage in sober self-examination. Advent is to Christmas what Lent is to Easter. "Search me, O God, and know my heart! / Try me and know my thoughts! / And

see if there be any grievous way in me, / and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23–24). Let every heart *prepare him room . . . by cleaning house.*

Third, build God-centered anticipation and expectancy and excitement into your home—especially for the children. If you are excited about Christ, they will be too. If you can make Christmas exciting only with material things, how will the children get a thirst for God? Bend the efforts of your imagination to make the wonder of the King's arrival visible for the children.

Fourth, be much in the Scriptures, and memorize the great passages! "Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD?" (Jeremiah 23:29)! Gather 'round that fire this Advent season. It is warm. It is sparkling with colors of grace. It is healing for a thousand hurts. It is light for dark nights.

Mary's Magnificent God

Mary sees clearly a most remarkable thing about God: he is about to change the course of all human history; the most important three decades in all of time are about to begin.

And where is God? Occupying himself with two obscure, humble women—one old and barren (Elizabeth), one young and virginal (Mary). And Mary is so moved by this vision of God, the lover of the lowly, that she breaks out in song—a song that has come to be known as “the Magnificat.”

Mary and Elizabeth are wonderful heroines in Luke's account. He loves the faith of these women. The thing that impresses him most, it appears, and the thing he wants to impress on Theophilus, the noble reader of his Gospel, is the lowliness and cheerful humility of Elizabeth and Mary as they submit to their magnificent God.

Elizabeth says (Luke 1:43), “And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” And Mary says (Luke 1:48), “He has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”

The only people whose soul can truly magnify the Lord are people like Elizabeth and Mary—people who acknowledge their lowly estate and are overwhelmed by the condescension of the magnificent God.

The Long-Awaited Visitation

Notice two remarkable things from the words of Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, in Luke 1:68–71.

First, nine months earlier, Zechariah had not believed that his wife would have a child. Now, filled with the Holy Spirit, he has become so confident of God's redeeming work in the coming Messiah that he puts it in the past tense: "He has visited and redeemed his people." For the mind of faith, a promised act of God is as good as done. Zechariah has learned to take God at his word and so has a remarkable assurance: God "has visited and redeemed!" (Luke 1:68).

Second, the coming of Jesus the Messiah is a visitation of God to our world: the *God of Israel* has visited and redeemed. For centuries, the Jewish people had languished under the conviction that God had withdrawn: the spirit of prophecy had ceased, and Israel had fallen into the hands of Rome. And all the godly in Israel were awaiting the

visitation of God. Luke tells us that another old man, the devout Simeon, was “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). Likewise, the prayerful Anna was “waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).

These were days of great expectation. Now the long-awaited visitation of God is about to happen—indeed, he is about to come in a way no one has expected.