

1.1 Hope Devotion

Hope

SAY Jesus called himself the Light of the World, and at Advent, we light candles to remind ourselves of the light of hope he brought into a world filled with the darkness of sin.

ASK What is hope?

EXPLAIN Hope is looking forward to something wonderful. It's expecting something good to happen. It's light in the darkness.

LIGHT the first candle of your wreath.

SAY This candle represents hope. When Jesus came, he brought hope for people lost in sin.

READ & DISCUSS Isaiah 9:2 and Matthew 1:18-25

PRAY O Lord, our God, thank you for not leaving us in darkness but for sending your light into the world instead. Help us to shine your light in the dark and dreary corners of the world. May your light and love radiate from us and give hope where it seems that all hope is lost. Help us to be yours as we wait for you to come again. We love you. Amen.

FURTHER DISCUSSION What are some things you hope for? What are some ways our family can give hope to others? What's so hopeful about Jesus coming into the world?

1.2 Advent Conspiracy

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Righteousness. It's one of those words in church that is difficult for some to define, and for all of us to embody. If righteousness really is God's own perfection in every word, thought and action, it's a standard that none of us can reach. It's also one that appears painfully absent in the world around us.

Yet God is a promise keeper! "A righteous Branch will spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." He will be called, "The Lord is our righteousness." This is an incredible message of hope for everyone lost in brokenness and sin. God will have the last and final word. He will enact justice and righteousness not only on our behalf, but on the behalf of everyone and everywhere that we see pain, sin and suffering. Just as Isaiah 25 prophesied, "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."

As Pastor Tim Keller observes, "While other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life's joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world's sorrows, tasting the coming joy." Advent reminds us that through Jesus Christ, joy is coming.

Reflect

Take time to reflect on your own words, thoughts and actions. Do they reflect a Christ-like sort of righteousness? The four tenants of the "Advent Conspiracy" are Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More, and Love All. Reflecting on these tenants, how might you reorder your priorities this Advent season so that you can show hope to those in your life? Write down some concrete actions steps you can take to be a blessing to others. Ask someone to hold you accountable and possibly join you this Advent season.

Pray

Dear Jesus,

You are our Righteous Branch. To you and you alone do we cling for our righteousness. Thank you for never letting us go, and for convicting us, comforting us and then commanding us to reflect your hope in our world. Help us to dwell in your loving presence so that we can be ambassadors of your love, justice, and righteousness everywhere you send us by your strength Lord.

Amen!

1.3 Wycliff (Mary)

MARY

“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.”

Luke 1:46-50 (NLT)

Mary had every right to be scared. She was young, betrothed and now told she was pregnant. And to top it all off, the news was delivered by an angel — you know, spiritual beings that tend to terrify people. As Mary processed the news, I can only imagine what was going through her head. Would her family disown her? Would people in town make assumptions and gossip? Would Joseph believe any of this? Would she be rejected? Disparaged? Or worse?

But the thought Mary chose to settle on wasn't one of fear but of faith: “I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true” (Luke 1:38, NLT). Later on, when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, the latter said of Mary: “You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said” (v. 45).

It would be nice to say that our typical response to fear is always Mary's response: a song of praise and hopeful expectation. But let's be real. Fear creeps into our minds and souls like the slow roll of a dark cloud before a storm. How do you respond? Retreat? Isolate? Hold your fear close to your chest and spiral into endless “what-ifs”?

Let's look at Mary's response. After Mary visited Elizabeth, she turned her attention to God in a song known as the Magnificat (which means “my soul glorifies the Lord”). There are a few things in this song that are helpful as you seek to ground yourself in hope when fear swirls around:

Mary began with praise. The whole song is about singing God's glory, and though I'm sure Mary had so many questions about what it meant to give birth to the savior of the world, she opened with rejoicing instead of concern.

Mary remembered her part in God's story. Inverse 48, Mary said: “For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed” (NLT). Mary knew that God was in control; he was the one who created and empowered her. She was his creation, and that reminder allowed Mary to focus on the truth of who she was and who he is. She was reminded that her part of the story was not the end of the story.

Mary remembered God's goodness and justice. Mary didn't just reflect on the blessings God bestowed or the promises he made to Israel; she reflected on how God would also set wrong things back to right (vv. 51-53).

Mary dispelled fear with praise. She put aside insecurity with the truth of who God was, remembering her role in his story. And she looked past concerns of rejection or gossip, recalling that she served a God of justice. And because of that, Mary could hope. And so can you.

Questions

- » When have you felt overwhelmed by fear? How did you respond?
- » What emotions do you think Mary felt when the angel delivered the news?
- » How can Mary's response to God's news encourage you this Christmas

1.4 Frontier Fellowship

TASTE

“Call me no longer Naomi [Sweetness], call me Mara [Bitter]....”

Ruth 1:20

We call on you, God! Help us set our own expectations aside and remember your plans are so much better.

Have you ever bitten into an orange expecting that sweet, juicy sensation, only to be disappointed by a bland or bitter fruit? Many of our disappointments are much more profound, requiring us to resist bitter hearts, not just a bitter taste.

Naomi was blunt about her disappointment and had given in to bitterness. She returned to her hometown of Bethlehem a grieving widow who had also lost both sons. But as her also-widowed daughter-in-law Ruth's story unfolded, Naomi cast aside her bitterness and embraced God's blessing on their family. We have the privilege of knowing much more of the story, as the promises and prophecies are fulfilled in the lineage of Ruth and Boaz, leading to King David and ultimately to King Jesus. God had a wonderful plan!

Women around the world need the encouragement found in the story of Ruth and Naomi and in God's provision. Frontier Fellowship's two Women's Shelter partners (Mountain and City) faithfully care for vulnerable Central Asian women and children. Pray for Shelter workers and those to whom they minister, especially at this time of year. Pray that these at-risk women and children will find peace, comfort, and hope in the sweetness of God's promises.

Across the world, we see wars, strife and unrest. In despair and disappointment, we cry, “How long, O Lord?” We are tempted to allow bitterness to rob us of the joys of the Christmas season. And we are prone to guilt when we do celebrate. But God lifts us up and points us to great joy. Savor the sweetness of His promises.

1.5 Advent Conspiracy Family (Worship Fully)

WORSHIP FULLY

CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT JESUS. WE'LL WORSHIP HIM
WITH OUR HEARTS, MINDS, AND ACTIONS!

There are many ways that we can worship Jesus, through prayer, dance, songs, doing good things to help others, and by showing gratitude. There is no limit to how we can honor, praise, and worship Jesus. Remember, Christmas is Jesus' birthday. As a way to say thank you to God for sending Jesus into the world, we sing, pray, and worship!

SCRIPTURE:

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!" — Psalm 150:6

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." — Ephesians 5:19-20

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank you for loving me. Help me to worship you with my whole heart and to remember how much you love me. Amen.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *What's your favorite thing about Jesus?
- *Why do we celebrate Christmas?
- *What's your favorite worship song to sing?
- *What is one thing we can pray for this week?
- *What's your favorite way to worship Jesus?
- *What is one thing that you love about Christmas?
- *How can you worship Jesus fully this week?

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Worship Dance Party. Put on some fun worship music and have a dance party as a family. Grab some instruments or make some of your own. Sing, dance, and boldly express your love for Jesus.

Nature Walk. Notice the beauty of God's creation. Talk about all the things you see and hear. Giving thanks to Jesus for all the beauty in the world is a great way to worship fully this week.

Worship Game. In a jar or bowl put together different colored items (you can use candy, marbles, pieces of paper, toy blocks, etc.). Using the color key below, have everyone go around and pull out one item and answer the question that matches their color. Keep going around until all of them are used up.

- *Purple: What's your favorite story in the Bible?
- *Yellow: What's your favorite Christmas song?
- *Red: What is one thing you're thankful for?
- *Blue: Who is someone you can pray for this week?
- *Green: What's your favorite thing about Jesus?