



ADVENT DEVOTIONALS WEEK TWO

Advent Devotionals: Week Two

Giving Dignity

Sunday, December 9

Video of Jolene Johnson (<https://vimeo.com/295913415/4560doe073>)

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8–12 NLT)

The work of a shepherd is humble work that includes long hours in isolation and watching over something that will never tell of your care or leadership. In the days leading up to Christ's birth, shepherds were not typically seen as core cultural voices or influencers. Needless to say, the shepherds the angels told of Christ's birth were not considered influential or important figures in their day, which makes it all the more poignant that God chose them to be the first people on earth outside of the immediate family to learn of the birth of the Messiah.

Spending time with those of no position or influence is a trend to Jesus's life that became more readily apparent during His years preaching and healing, but it was on this night, when God granted shepherds the very first audience with the King, that this trend had its start.

This week's video tells the story of individuals who strive to extend dignity and honor to a group of people who aren't always treated with such respect. As you watch the video above, ask yourself what is revealed about you based on the people you spend time with. How can you invite people of low reputation into your life to better reflect the Son of God in your life?

Monday, December 10

“Oh, how can I give you up, Israel?
How can I let you go?
How can I destroy you like Admah
or demolish you like Zeboiim?
My heart is torn within me,
and my compassion overflows.
No, I will not unleash my fierce anger.
I will not completely destroy Israel,
for I am God and not a mere mortal.
I am the Holy One living among you,
and I will not come to destroy.
For someday the people will follow me.
I, the LORD, will roar like a lion.
And when I roar,
my people will return trembling from the west.
Like a flock of birds, they will come from Egypt.
Trembling like doves, they will return from Assyria.
And I will bring them home again,”
says the LORD. (Hosea 11:8–11 NLT)

For much of Israel’s history, the people were unfaithful to God. Through the prophet Hosea, God repeatedly refers to Israel as an unfaithful wife, even calling Hosea to marry a prostitute as a prophetic act to mirror Israel’s relationship with the Most High. Rather than remaining secure in the shadow of His wings, time and again the children of Abraham wandered and strayed, seeking shelter in other gods and failing to embrace the justice and mercy God called them to.

Even still, like Hosea buying back his wife when she returned to her old life, God seeks the welfare of His people, chasing after us when we stray. He continues to call us back into His embrace, even going so far as to send His Son to earth to draw us back into the fold. Jesus is “the Holy One living among [us]” who has “not come to destroy,” but to give life. When Jesus chose to dwell among us, show us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, and defeat death, He was like a roaring lion calling us back home. Look back over your life at the times you have strayed from God and remember how He worked to draw you back to Himself; worship God for His faithfulness in the midst of your unfaithfulness.

Tuesday, December 11

When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children." (Luke 1:23–25 NLT)

With few exceptions, the women we read about in the Scriptures were limited in their ability to achieve positions of authority outside the home. Often they were valued for their ability to birth and raise children more than for any other role they held in society. Psalm 127:3 says, "Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him." It would be natural for a woman in Elizabeth's position to consider such passages and reflect that her lack of children was some sort of punishment; she certainly viewed it as an affliction that caused suffering and disgrace.

From our vantage point two thousand years after the fact, it is easy to say she was not barren as a punishment but so that God's glory could shine all the brighter in John's arrival. Yet even we can feel the palpable joy Elizabeth felt over her pregnancy. God used her disgrace and subsequent blessing to great effect, letting the Israelites know that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—all of whom had wives that were barren until God opened their wombs—was on the move. When looking at the hardships in your own life, are you more prone to looking at the temporal view, only seeing things from a temporary, earthly perspective, or do you ask God to give you Spirit-filled eyes to see beyond your immediate circumstances?

Wednesday, December 12

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are only a small village among all the people of Judah.
Yet a ruler of Israel,
whose origins are in the distant past,
will come from you on my behalf. (Micah 5:2 NLT)

The religious leaders during the days of Galileo accepted a heliocentric model of the solar system to be heretical. Their mistaken understanding of Scripture placed Earth, and mankind, at the center of God's creation. However, scientists in the centuries since have proven time and again that Galileo was correct; not only is the Earth not the center of the solar system, but the position of our solar system places it closer to the outer edge of the Milky Way than the center. In fact, the more astronomers discover, the more our planet appears to be inconsequential in the celestial grand scheme. The only thing that makes Earth special is the ongoing presence of life, especially humanity. And yet, Earth and its inhabitants do indeed sit right at the center of the redeeming work of God.

In much the same way, Bethlehem was not viewed as an important place in the first century. It was a small village with no economic, military, or political value. Before Christ's birth, it was most well known as the burial place of Jacob's wife Rachel. Yet God chose it with purpose. In his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey talks about this idea of God placing importance on the overlooked and underappreciated. "Underdog. I wince even as I write the word, especially in connection with Jesus. . . . Yet as I read the birth stories about Jesus I cannot help but conclude that though the world may be tilted toward the rich and powerful, God is tilted toward the underdog." Spend your day in worship to the God who tilts toward the underdogs.

Thursday, December 13

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God. (Luke 2:25–28 NLT)

Every breath we take is a gift from the Lord; there is no guarantee that we will live another day, unless, as in Simeon's case, God reveals to you His plan for your life. However, God did not promise Simeon that he would live for a set number of days or years but rather that he would live to see the Messiah arriving to rescue Israel; even then, he was not promised he would see the Messiah fulfill His role as savior. Simeon was blessed to not only see the Messiah, but hold Him in his arms – to experience His presence in a deeply intimate way. In turn, he was able to bless Mary and Joseph (v. 34–36).

Simeon could have taken this blessing of seeing the promised Messiah as the gift that it was and gone no further with it. The Holy Spirit did not place any stipulations on His promise to reveal the Lord's Messiah to Simeon; Simeon was under no obligation to bless Mary and Joseph in return, but because of his joy at seeing the Messiah, Simeon multiplied his blessing onto Mary and Joseph. When you receive a gift or a blessing, do you accept it for what it is and move on, or do you use it as an opportunity to multiply the blessing in the lives of others?

Friday, December 14

All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them. (Luke 2:18–20 NLT)

The shepherds were given the task of acting as witnesses to the birth of the Messiah. Even though they were not instructed to share this good news with others, they could not help themselves; there was no way they would remain silent about the night God granted them a small glimpse of His glorious plan.

Among those the shepherds told about the angels, there were two responses. When Mary heard the tale, she held onto everything so she could continue to think it over in the weeks and years to come. She understood better than anyone else who this child truly was, and storing up events like this in her heart was an act of worship. The other response—from those the shepherds told, likely as they searched for a baby who met the description given to them by the angels—was amazement, but with no indication that it led to any sort of action. After all, there is no indication that anyone beyond the shepherds sought out the newborn Messiah that night.

When we share the good news of Christ as the shepherds did, we, like them, have no control over how others respond. Instead, we should be living our lives “glorifying and praising God for all [we] have heard and seen” concerning God’s glorious plan of salvation for all people. Do you let the ways in which others respond to the Gospel temper your worship? If you’ve lost some of your worshipful zeal for who God is and what God has done, what can you do to get it back?

Saturday, December 15

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. (Luke 2:18–19 NLT)

Because Mary was betrothed when she became pregnant, Mosaic Law would likely call for her death, depending on the exact circumstances that led her to pregnancy. Joseph did not want this, so he figured that he could break the engagement quietly, which would allow for the other man to take Mary as his wife instead, restoring a bit of honor to all involved. But since there was no other man involved, this honorable act would have turned Mary into a single mother forever ostracized from her family and community.

Instead, because of the intervention of God through an angel in a dream, Joseph continued with the marriage, knowing full well that according to the village gossip he would be raising an illegitimate child, either his own or, worse, that of another man. This would then taint his reputation along with Mary's, yet he persisted and followed God's leading. Like Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, many times the godly acts result in a loss of reputation among certain groups. In what ways have you let your reputation guide your actions rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to direct you to deep levels of trust in His ways, similar to the deep level of trust that Joseph held?