

CELEBRATION & REPENTANCE

DEVOTIONAL MEDITATIONS FOR ADVENT & LENT

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MIKE SUBLETT



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Introduction

I grew up in a Christian heritage that not only disallowed observance of Advent and Lent, but it even refused preaching on the birth of Christ during the Christmas season and the resurrection on Easter Sunday. So I would seem to be an unlikely candidate to write a book of devotionals on both Advent and Lent. God surely works in mysterious ways.

You see, I am what many would call a late bloomer. I didn't discover several of the treasured parts of my Christian faith until after I was 50. Prior to then I had little use for Advent and even less for Lent. It is so easy to be suspicious and critical of that of which we are ignorant.

It wasn't until I left my early church heritage that I attempted to listen to anything/everything God wanted to say to me. The results were marvelous. When I listened more closely, much to my amazement, God spoke more noticeably and more often. That is when God first pointed me to the 25 day celebration of Advent. Not just Christmas Day, and not some game with cotton balls on Santa's beard. God led me to an actual celebratory observance each day from December 1-25. Staying focused on Jesus was so much easier; suddenly the season's distractions were far less distracting.

After I had a few celebratory observances of Advent under my belt, Jesus nudged me toward Lent. I am forever indebted to my Savior for that prodding. Whereas Advent is a celebration with arms and spirit lifted high, Lent is a somber occasion with body and spirit prostrate before God; a time of brokenness,

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remorse, sorrow, conviction, confession, repentance. It proved to be 40 days of a humbling that I had not known before. Now I cannot envision my life as a disciple of Christ without Lent. What I had always viewed as a “Catholic” thing turned out to be a priceless blessing awaiting every disciple who will just pause to take a drink.

So my prayer is that this little book of devotionals will help you experience a new blessing from both Advent and Lent. One will fill you with exciting joy and focused appreciation for the coming of the Christ child to that tiny stable. The other will be much less comfortable because it will be your guide on a hike into repentance by intensifying your 40 day focus on the sufferings of Jesus. I am confident that God will reward you mightily for your commitment to the joy of Advent and the brokenness of Lent.

God bless. Mike



Acknowledgments

I first need to praise my Lord Jesus for not giving up on me and for overlooking my spiritual shallowness for too many years. Thank You, Jesus, for fulfilling Romans 2:4 in me: “God is kind, but he’s not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change.” (The Message) Thanks for the journey into the deeper end of the pool.

I also need to thank my family for helping me evaluate, correct and change my blunders during ever aspect of this project. Thanks to: Shari, Christina, Jeff, Chad, Adam, Kim and Kassy. I love each of you dearly.

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Finally I need to give a big “THANK YOU” to my Hi-Land Christian Church family here in Pampa, Texas. You have tolerated me for over 20 years as your pastor. And without your special financial gift, this book may never have been produced. I appreciate each of you for your love for the Lord and for your work for His glory. No pastor could ever serve at a harder working church of believers than you. I love each of you so very much.

ADVENT

25 Days of Celebration

Rejoicing, Praising, Celebrating, Jubilating, Exulting

Instructions: Each day, beginning December 1, read the devotional for that day and then slowly pray the prayer that follows. See for yourself what God will do in your life through Advent. Remember: the earlier in the day the better.



Nazareth

The greatest story ever told begins in a completely unexpected place—a tiny, obscure village west of the Sea of Galilee called Nazareth. Today nearly 70,000 people reside there, but in Jesus’ day its population was less than 500. Little was expected of its residents, certainly not greatness. That is why so many fellow Jews made fun of all who lived there by asking, “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*”

Nazareth had no famous citizens in all its history, no renowned buildings or temples, it wasn’t on any major road, it had no vital export. It basically just took up space. That is until the day came which is described in Luke 1:26-38. Everything for Nazareth changed that day.

Have you ever felt like you are just taking up space? Do you consider yourself insignificant, of no special value? If so, then ADVENT is most definitely for you. ADVENT is the story of the coming of Jesus Christ into this world to bring salvation to all who would surrender to Him. Just as Nazareth began a transformation that day, you can begin a transformation today. How? Surrender.

***Prayer:** Father God, I want to become much more than I ever have been before; I want to be transformed like Nazareth was after Jesus came to live there. I want Jesus to come and live in me. I know He will want to make a lot of changes, and I want You to know that I look forward to the renovations He has planned. Amen.*



The betrothal

Even though life in Nazareth wasn't significant to anyone throughout the rest of Galilee, life did still go on for the citizens of the tiny town, even a few special moments. One of those extraordinary times flowed into the lives of a young woman named Mary and a man named Joseph. They were "betrothed."

Many try to translate this term into English with the word "engaged." But Jewish betrothal of the first century was not like our modern engagement at all.

Sadly in our times, most couples have had a long standing sexual relationship before they are even engaged. Then engagement only means, "I think I want to marry you one day." Modern engagement can be dissolved at any time with no legal repercussions. Not so with "betrothal" in the times of Jesus.

Betrothal was legally and morally just like being married, with the exception of living together. For the first year, the man and woman didn't live together, and yes, that meant no sexual contact for that year. Then, after the first year, the "home-taking" took place. The husband came and took his wife into his house and together they made it a home. Can you imagine that kind of commitment and faithfulness to another person?

Jesus came to make that exact degree of commitment to anyone/everyone who would choose Him as their Lord. He promises to be completely faithful to His followers and even calls them His bride. However, Jesus will not kick open the door of anyone's heart. Each person must personally open the

The betrothal

door to his or her heart so that He can enter. Have you opened your heart to Jesus and invited Him to enter and revamp you in any way He pleases? Think about it.

***Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want to be totally committed to You, not with half my heart, but with my whole heart. Please enter the door of my heart that I have opened for You. I am Yours. Do with me as You please. And Lord, thank You so very much for caring enough about me to enter this fallen world and offer Yourself as the necessary sacrifice. May my life bring You praise every day. Amen.*



The announcement

Today if someone wants to make a special announcement it will most likely show up on Facebook or Twitter or arrive via some electronic device (i.e. cell phone).

The very first earthly announcement of the ADVENT of Jesus burst on the scene through something much more spectacular than any of our modern technologies. It came directly from the mouth of Gabriel, one of Jehovah's archangels.

Think about that: one of God's generals brought the announcement in person. And his presence was so brilliant and impressive that he had to tell Mary not to be afraid. Just the sight of him made humans tremble.

Notice in Luke 1:30 that Mary's fears were put to rest when she was told, "*You have found favor with God.*" Before she actually received the message of the announcement, Gabriel calmed her fear with a dose of God's approval.

God wants to do the same with you too. He wants to calm your fears by letting you know that you too have found His favor. That is the whole reason behind this greatest of all announcements: THE RESCUE OF FALLEN HUMANS! YOUR RESCUE!

***Prayer:** Holy Father God, the majesty of this announcement of Jesus' ADVENT takes my breath away. You sent Your number one messenger to proclaim His coming so that I wouldn't miss its life-critical importance. I praise Your name that He came and that You loved me enough to make sure that I didn't miss it or Him. Amen.*



The message

Have you ever received a message that was almost unbelievable, something that just seemed too good to be true? One that was the last thing you ever thought you would hear?

One message that every first century Jew wanted to receive from God was that the long-promised Messiah was coming soon. Mary received that very message from the lips of Gabriel. Here is the message he proclaimed.

“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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

(Luke 1:31-33)

Hallelujah! Mary was the first to hear what every Jew since the days of Moses had yearned to hear. However, since Mary was confused about how a virgin could have a baby, she asked a question. Then she got a few more of the details of the message.

“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”

(Luke 1:35-37)

Celebration and Repentance

The ADVENT was at hand and Mary was about to be impregnated through the Holy Spirit and then become the earthly mother of God's Son. AMAZING!

Pay careful attention to how the message of the ADVENT ended. *“For no word from God will ever fail.”*

You need to remember that too. That was true of Gabriel's words to Mary and it is just as true to all of the amazing promises God has made to you in His Word. Nothing could be better news for you than that.

***Prayer:** Loving Father, I can't thank You enough for Your faithfulness and love. Your message to Mary concerning the ADVENT reassures me once again of the magnitude of Your grace and the security of my salvation. May Your holy name be praised throughout the earth. Amen.*