



2017

advent

Advent 2017

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*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

Isaiah 9:2-7

Isaiah's beautiful prophecy foretold a promise 700 years in the making. Though the world was dark, light was coming. Though life was hard and toilsome, rest was coming. Though sin had enslaved, a rescuer was coming. A child, like no other, would be born. A Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace was coming. A Savior was on His way. This is the promise of Advent.

INTRODUCTION

Advent comes from a Latin word meaning ‘coming’ or ‘arrival’. For centuries Christians have reflected upon the 1st Advent – Jesus’ arrival as Messiah and also the 2nd Advent when Jesus will come as King.

Traditionally, the Advent season occurs in the weeks leading up to Christmas. There are a variety of ways in which people have celebrated the season. Some have lit candles on a wreath or stand, reflecting on the imagery of Jesus as the *Light of the World*. (John 1:4-9; 8-12) Others have used a window calendar, usually made with 24 “windows” you open. Each window contains a scripture or story used to reflect on the promise of a Savior who is coming, Jesus.

No matter how you celebrate the season, what is important is the opportunity to reflect on the Savior who came to fulfil God’s promise of rescue and redemption.

INSTRUCTIONS

This guide contains 4 weeks of Advent material to be used for personal and family reflections. The goal of this guide is to stir your heart and mind as you reflect on our Savior. Additionally, the family reflections require very little preparation, but are good tools for discipling your children and sharing the Gospel.

One of the most important things this guide can do is cause us to slow down, pause and reflect on the birth of Jesus. The Christmas season can be so busy and hectic, the most important aspects of the season get lost. Take a few minutes and make a plan to spend time personally and corporately reflecting on Jesus and the promise of a Savior who came to overcome sin and death forever.

Each family reflection includes a scripture, song, activity and prayer. The songs can be found on the Fellowship Pellissippi Advent Spotify playlist. (open Spotify and search “Fellowship Pellissippi”) These are intended to be suggestions to help get your family involved, not a to-do list. Be creative and find what works for your family.

WEEK 1
ADVENT | THE PURPOSE

ADVENT | THE PURPOSE

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).*

Matthew 1:18-23

When we read Matthew's account of Jesus' birth we usually skip the first 17 verses. After all, when you see a lengthy genealogy, a biblical record of ancestry, it might seem a bit boring and less than useful. Ancient cultural nuances get lost on those of us living in today's modern age. However, when displayed in their proper context, they are quite fascinating – even beautiful.

In ancient times your lineage was incredibly important. It determined much about your prospects for success in life. In many cases it determined privilege and opportunities. Your family history was everything. This is what makes the family history of Jesus so significant. In Matthew's recording of Jesus' family tree the names of four women are listed. Their placement in the record of birth is anything but incidental.

Tamar. You can read her sordid, R-rated story in Genesis 38. In short, this Gentile woman is deceived and left as an outcast by one of Jacob's sons – Judah. Wounded and hurt, she disguises herself as a prostitute and sleeps with Judah – becoming pregnant with Perez, one of Jesus' ancient forefathers.

Rahab. Unlike Tamar, Rahab was a prostitute by profession. This Gentile woman lied to the authorities in Jericho to protect the Israelite spies. As a result, God graciously spares her life and she becomes the mother to a Godly man named Boaz.

Ruth. She was another gentile woman born in the pagan nation of Moab which was founded through the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters. Ruth was a widowed foreigner with no right to marry an Israelite – much less a noble Israelite. However, by God’s grace she became Boaz’s wife and eventually the grandmother of King David.

Bathsheba. Although not mentioned by name in Matthew, we recognize her by the description “wife of Uriah”. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband. David took Bathsheba as his wife, but she lost her child in birth. Eventually, they had a son named Solomon and Bathsheba became an ancestor to the Messiah.

What is the purpose of recording these women’s names and thereby their stories? It is to show us the genealogy of Jesus is so much more than just a list of names. Jesus’ ancestry is a testimony of grace. It is a message of redemption. It is proof that Jesus didn’t come to ‘call the righteous, but sinners.’ (Matt. 9:13) In recording the stories of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, Matthew reveals to us the purpose behind Advent: Grace. This is the Advent (the coming) of Grace:

“She will bear a son, and you shall call his names Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:21

The Advent season is oftentimes accompanied by Black Friday madness, seasonal business, materialism, bad attitudes and obnoxious family members. When you are tempted to self-righteously proclaim that the world is missing the reason for the season, remember this: The *purpose* for the season is sinners. This is what makes the Advent of Grace so extraordinary.

REFLECTION

Does Jesus' lineage surprise you? Reflect on the goodness and grace of God to not only rescue undeserving sinners, but restore them as part of His redemptive story.

How has God's grace been evident in your life?

The way Jesus was born reveals so much about God's character. What are some attributes you see in God from the Advent story?

RESPONSE

Who can you show unusual grace to this Advent season?

ADVENT | THE PURPOSE

SCRIPTURE

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

DISCUSSION

Briefly go around the room or table and ask everyone who their favorite super hero is and why they like him/her so much. Talk about what makes them heroic. Guide the conversation to show them what truly makes a super hero heroic is that they rescue people in grave danger.

Commentary: This is what makes Jesus the greatest hero in history. God saw that we were in danger. Our sinful hearts made it impossible for us to do good. Men and women were always worshipping idols and pridefully ignoring God. This put them in danger so many times.

But God still loved His creation. So, God sent His Son to be born here on earth so that He could rescue men, women, boys and girls like us from sin.

Do you know how Jesus rescued people from the danger of sin?
(Allow for answers)

He put His own life on the line, and even died on the cross so that we could be rescued. That's how much Jesus loved us.

SONG: As a family, sing or listen to "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Take a few moments to explain some of the words and themes of the song.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Christ, by highest heav'n adored:
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the favored one.
Veil'd in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, th'incarnate Deity:
Pleased, as man, with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Hail! the heav'n born Prince of Peace!
Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die:
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

ACTIVITY

Jesus showed us just how much He loved us by giving up His life for ours. Jesus' love for us is an example of how we should love others. Everyone in the family get a notecard, stationary or greeting card and write a special note to someone you love. Compliment them, encourage them and most of all, tell them how much you love them. (Ideas for younger kids: Paint or draw a picture and send it with a note from the parents)

PRAYER

Give thanks to your Heavenly Father for being a faithful hero and rescuer.

WEEK 2
ADVENT | THE POSTURE

ADVENT | THE POSTURE

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. 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!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:8-20

One of the fascinating aspects of the Advent narrative is the unlikely people God sovereignly picked to play a direct role in the incarnation story. He used lowly shepherds as messengers of the Messiah's arrival. He chose an utterly plain, little rural town to be the birthplace of Jesus.

Then there was Jesus' mother. Who would you have cast for this extraordinarily powerful and esteemed role? God chose Mary, a young virgin Hebrew girl, to be the mother of Jesus. What exactly made Mary the ideal candidate to be used in such an epic role? Even Mary didn't understand. Luke's account of Jesus' birth describes Mary as being "greatly troubled" at Gabriel's news that she would carry and give birth to the Son of God.

“How could this be?” she must have wondered.

“Who am I?”

“You’ve got the wrong gal!”

Yet Gabriel gently admonishes her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30) This was no accident. This wasn’t a lottery drawing. The wise and sovereign God of the universe hand selected Mary because He found her favorable.

What was it about Mary God found so favorable? Her visit to Elizabeth sheds significant light on just who Mary was.

And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is Mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

Luke 1:46-49 (emphasis added)

Mary had a heart of humility and she had a heart of worship. For centuries God would speak through the prophets to his people. Israel was repeatedly found to be prideful and idolatrous. Time after time God would warn against their manipulative sacrifices and hypocritical hearts. In Mary, Heaven had found what was favorable. Mary was a woman who was unassuming and thoughtful of others before herself. She was a woman whose heart was bent toward joyful expressions of adoration of Yahweh, her Heavenly Father. This was very favorable to God.

God uses and magnifies the truly humble because they will glory in Jesus – not themselves. It was Mary’s soul that glorified the Lord – not just her lips. Deep down in the wellspring of her heart was a genuine love for God that superseded everything. When you behold the beauty and majesty of God the way Mary did, you can’t help but be humbled by His presence.

REFLECTION

Do you find the people and places God used to usher in the Incarnation surprising? Why or why not?

Lowly shepherds found Jesus in a borrowed stable in humble Bethlehem proclaiming what the angels had told them. God chose the humblest of scenarios for the Messiah to arrive. What can we learn about God and His character from this?

How does our world around us seem to value humility and service?

Read Mark 10:44-45. How does Jesus' birth and ministry relate?

If we want to be used by God in unique and powerful ways we start by examining our hearts. What are our motivations? Where do our affections lie? Do we see pride and idolatry or humility and worship?

RESPONSE

As you make your list of people to buy gifts for, include someone who would never expect to receive a gift from you. As you do this, consider the joy you feel in blessing them and consider the love and grace in God's heart as He sent His Son to die for sinners.

ADVENT | THE POSTURE

SCRIPTURE

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."*

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he 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 2:1-12

DISCUSSION

God announced His birth to ordinary people and extraordinary people alike. God first revealed the news of Jesus' birth to a group of shepherds out watching their sheep at night. God also revealed the news about His Son to a group of kings known as the Magi. These were very smart and educated men. They were rich and powerful,

and came from far away to meet the young boy Jesus.

It took the Magi a long time to find Jesus, but they kept on looking for Him. When they finally found Jesus, they entered His home and worshipped Him, even presenting to him very expensive gifts.

Why do you think the shepherds and the Magi were so determined to find Jesus?

Why do you think the Magi presented Jesus such extraordinary gifts?

Commentary: All the way through the Advent story we see God is so kind. He wants everyone to know about the Messiah – the Rescuer! He wants everyone to know Jesus and He appears to all different kinds of people. Regular, ordinary people like shepherds. Very wealthy and powerful leaders like the Magi.

God wants them to know Jesus and love, trust and obey Him. One day everyone will worship Jesus – whether they want to or not. But God wants us to see how amazing Jesus is and worship him with our hearts today. God is so generous that He would give us such an amazing Savior and Rescuer!

SONG: As a family, sing or listen to “We Three Kings”. Take a few moments to explain some of the words and themes of the song.

We Three Kings

*We three kings of Orient are;
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star*

*O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
Over us all to reign.*

*Frankincense to offer have I;
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, voices raising,
Worshipping God on high.*

*Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone cold tomb.*

*Glorious now behold Him arise;
King and God and sacrifice;
Alleluia!, Alleluia!,
Rings through the earth and skies.*

ACTIVITY

Just as the Magi brought nice gifts to Jesus an act of worship, we too can give gifts as an act of worship. Gather a few of your nice toys (ones gently used) and donate them to a local charity to repurpose them for kids in need. Also, consider using some of your allowance or piggy bank money to purchase a new toy for someone in need.

PRAYER

As a family, pray for someone(s) who you want to hear the Good News that Jesus loves them and desires to be their Savior. Pray for them to trust, love and obey Jesus!

WEEK 3
ADVENT | THE PROMISE

ADVENT | THE PROMISE

So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Hebrews 9:28

The Christmas trick works just about every time. The commercials, the carols, the Christmas TV specials and the gingerbread lattes all promise that this year will be different. This year will finally be perfect. Your family will finally get along. The kids will be so grateful for their Christmas presents – never tiring of playing with them. You won't run out of Egg Nog at the party this year. You'll finally find the perfect gift for that perfect person who will make Christmas ever so perfect.

Many of us fall for it every year – only to be disappointed. The post-holiday blues set in and we wonder, "Will things ever work out the way I hope and dream?"

Yes. Maybe not this Christmas, but yes.

The Advent season is not just about reflecting on the first coming of Jesus when he arrived as an infant boy in a stable. Advent is also about looking in hopeful anticipation to the second coming when Jesus will arrive on a white horse as King of Kings.

When Jesus comes the second time it will be to make all things right and just. It will be to renew and restore that which is broken and marred. Evil will be judged and banished and the bride of Christ rescued and presented "without spot, wrinkle or blemish." (Ephesians 5:27)

Take a moment and think on this with me: No spot. No wrinkle. No Blemish.

How can this possibly be? Our sins are prevalent. Christmas often reveals the truly wicked condition of our hearts. No ‘spot, wrinkle or blemish’? What of our pride, faults and failures? We would find it joyous if the scripture simply said Jesus would present me without a heinous scar or disfigurement. We would celebrate for all eternity if we were presented with our mess appropriately covered. How wonderful it would be, just to be presentable. Yet, that is not the *promise* of the Second Advent. Jesus will present us in perfect and complete righteousness – without spot, wrinkle or blemish.

No spots from our shameful past.
No wrinkles from our disobedience.
No blemishes from our failures.
Perfect.

Soak it in. Savor the good news. Rejoice with a joy truly unspeakable. There is coming a day when all will be as it should be. Another Advent has been promised, one where our King will return and will find us altogether lovely.

REFLECTION

Consider the words of C.S. Lewis: “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.” Does this resonate with you? What would it mean for our day-to-day faith journey if we lived daily in light of the promise of the Second Advent?

Gifts are an important aspect of Christmas celebrations. Often we like to piously remark that, “it’s not about the presents.” Yet, Christmas in itself is the gracious gift of Salvation from God through Jesus Christ. Think about the size and scope of this gift – what kind of Thank you card would you write to Heaven in light of this?

Does “without spot, wrinkle or blemish” seem impossible to you? If so, why does Paul – a man who claimed to be “chief among sinners” believe it to be so?

RESPONSE

Take some time to pray, thanking God for His goodness and grace in sending a Savior. Confess the areas where your confidence in His faithfulness is weak and ask Him to build up your trust, belief and hope.

ADVENT | THE PROMISE

SCRIPTURE

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

2 Peter 1:3-4

Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you – your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust.

2 Peter 1:3-4 (MSG)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

John 14:27

DISCUSSION

Have you ever made a promise and broken it? (Give an example of how you have.)

Commentary: One of the amazing things about Advent is that it reminds us that God NEVER breaks His promises. The Bible is full of promises, sometimes called prophecies, which God made. He has kept every one of them and proved himself to be true to His Word. Let's examine a few of them.

Promise

Genesis 3:15

Isaiah 9:2

Micah 5:2

Promise Kept

Romans 5:6-8

John 1:4-5; John 12:46

Matthew 2:1

For centuries, God's people waited for Him to keep His promises. He kept every single one. Let's look at one more promise God made:

Promise

Isaiah 53:10-11

Promise Kept

Romans 5:1-11

How amazing are the promises of God AND that He keeps all of them!

SONG: As a family, sing or listen to "Joy to The World" Take a few moments to explain some of the words and themes of the song.

Joy to the World

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
 Let earth receive her King;
 Let every heart prepare Him room,
 And heav'n and nature sing,
 And heav'n and nature sing,
 And heav'n, and heav'n, and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
 Let men their songs employ;
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
 Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.*

*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,
 Far as the curse is found,
 Far as, far as, the curse is found.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

ACTIVITY

Parents: Make a promise to your kids you are going to do something special together to celebrate Advent – something they will love – but don't tell them what or when. As the days go by, remind them of your promise and give them hints as to what it might be. Let their expectation and excitement grow throughout the week. Use this opportunity to remind them of God's promise to send a Rescuer and the anticipation God's people felt as they waited.

PRAYER

Everyone give thanks to God that He keeps all of His promises. Ask God to give you strong faith to trust Him.

WEEK 4
CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS | SIMPLY NO ROOM

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2:1-7

In almost every depiction of the Nativity, the Inn Keeper is portrayed as a burly, inhumane grump who denies poor little Mary and Joseph a place to lodge. In reality the Inn Keeper is probably undeserving of such a bad rap. The Christmas story doesn't begin like a fairy tale. There is no "Once upon a time." The story of Jesus begins with:

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria."

Luke 2:1-2

Luke, the physician *and* historian reminds us that the birth of Jesus is a historical reality, not a mythical legend. The events are connected to geography, historical figures and events. Caesar Augustus is the original Caesar. As leader of the Roman Empire, it was important for him to fortify the financial backings of his empirical conquests. There is no better way to accomplish this than to issue a new census so taxes can be properly administered and collected.

The lyrics of the famous Christmas carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem, are very accurate in describing the small town. It was little. The population around Jesus' birth would have likely numbered less than

1,000. Can you imagine the impact of a mandated census? Mary and Joseph wouldn't have been alone in their journey to Bethlehem. There would have been 100's, maybe more than 1,000 additional visitors to the tiny rural town. Additionally, most of those making the 70-mile journey would not have been pregnant like Mary.

When Joseph and Mary finally arrive there simply is no room for them. Everyone's home is maxed out. The inn is booked up. The Inn Keeper was probably a nice guy who just didn't have any space for Jesus.

2,000 years later many of us are facing the same dilemma as the Inn Keeper. It's not that we're hostile to Jesus – we simply don't have room for Him. Our schedules, commitments, Netflix cues and 1,000 other things have filled up all the space in our lives and even our hearts.

During this Christmas week, amid the hustle and bustle, make room for Jesus. Give Jesus some prime real estate and some prime time during this Holiday season. Not because you ought too, but because you want too.

What makes this detail in the Christmas story so significant is God *knew* the Inn would be full. This was no surprise at all to Heaven. The Messiah came, just as He was promised, without regard for the deserving and hospitable nature of mankind. He came knowing the world He entered would be so crowded, distracted and preoccupied that few would realize the King of Kings was in their presence. After all, these are exactly the people Jesus was coming for. He was coming to save them from themselves. He was coming to redeem and rescue people who needed Him. He came for us.

REFLECTION

Imagine what it was like for Mary and Joseph to hear news they would have to travel 70 miles over difficult terrain to Bethlehem for a census. How would you have felt? Would you have questioned God? How can you see God's sovereign hand at work in this detail?

Mary is carrying the long-awaited Messiah. Do you think it was confusing to her that Jesus would be born in such humble conditions?

How crowded is your heart this season? Has there been ample space to worship and celebrate Jesus, Savior and King?

RESPOND

Set aside some time this week to reflect on the Advent season. Consider the areas of your life where you have seen the grace of God at work. Give thanks for these acts of Heavenly kindness.

CHRISTMAS | SIMPLY NO ROOM

SCRIPTURE

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2:1-7

DISCUSSION

Can you imagine what the journey to Bethlehem was like for Mary and Joseph? Consider this: A comparable trip would be for your parents to hike from Knoxville to the middle of the Smoky Mountains at Clingmans Dome by foot with a donkey. Pull up a Google map to see what this would look like.

SONG: As a family, sing or listen to “O Little Town of Bethlehem” Take a few moments to explain some of the words and themes of the song.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

*O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight*

*For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King
And Peace to men on earth*

*How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still,
The dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel*

ACTIVITY

Take your family for a walk in the neighborhood. Ask the kids what they think Mary and Joseph talked about on the way to Bethlehem. Bring a few Candy Canes and tape with you. Tape some to your neighbor's mailboxes as you walk.

PRAYER

Take turns thanking God for something special you've experienced this Advent season.

