

I admit my own reticence to proclaim his victory day after day to those who don't believe. I fear they'll scoff and make fun of me, or worse, decide I'm "pushing my religion on them."

Nothing in the chapter indicates we should be concerned with how people and nations react, however. It's out of our hands, regardless. Only God's Spirit can move the heart and soul; every person must make the choice for themselves just like we did. What should concern us is what will happen to those longing for God but never hear about him, because we refused to sing.

*Andra Marquardt*

### **Day 5 – Read Luke 2: 1-20**

Our idea of worship and spreading God's word today is a little different than it was with those shepherds when Jesus was born. Or, at least, my idea is different. I sometimes think I could be like the shepherds. They were told first about Jesus. Every week at church I am told about Jesus, although the scene is a little different at church. I don't know exactly what it was like when the angel appeared to the shepherds, but I expect it was a little different than when Pastor Brandon preaches.

The shepherds discussed what they had just heard with each other. Likewise, I teach my daughters about God and help at Legacy Kids to teach fellow church members' kids. I'll even participate in life groups and Bible studies. After the shepherds discussed what they had heard, they did something that does not come as easily for me. "They spread the word concerning what had been told them" (Luke 2:17 New International Version). I tend to stick to those comfortable, non-threatening areas where I know that others would expect to hear about God. It is quite hard for me to be like those shepherds and go tell others outside of the church about God. If you are like me, let's pray that God can help us share His word like those shepherds did without fear.

*Jeremy Skoglund*



## **2018 Advent Devotional - Week One**

### **Day 1 - Read Matthew 1**

Advent should be a time of reflection, preparation, prayer and worship. Instead, do we find it is a stressful time, running all over town trying to find the perfect present for each person? Is our focus on the miracle of Christmas or fulfilling lengthy Christmas lists?

This Advent, who/what will you worship? Will it be your money, job, possessions, Christmas presents, or yourself? Or will you worship your Savior? Many still struggle that Jesus was both fully human and fully God. Some 700 years before Jesus was even born, Isaiah prophesied:

**“The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’)” (Isaiah 7:14 New Living Translation).**

God is with us. That is our promise and our hope this Advent. Jesus came to earth to save us because we can't save ourselves from sin and its consequences. Some 2,000 years later, God is still with us. He is with us during our daily struggles and concerns, marriage problems, job problems, finance problems, health problems, etc. He is also with us during a beautiful sunset, the birth of a child, a family celebration, during a worship service, etc. Can you hear Him gently tapping at your door of your heart? Open the door wide, let Him in and let Him change your life and your family. This Advent, prepare yourself and your family for Jesus, the true meaning of Christmas, not the materialism the world wants you to seek.

*Bruce Walth*

## **Day 2 – Read Isaiah 12:2-6**

“I will trust and won’t be afraid.” This phrase is easy to say, but hard to truly live out. Through the many challenges of life, I have found myself living in fear. Fear that I am alone. Fear that I will not have what I need to live a happy and successful life. Fear that my hard work will go unrewarded. Fear that things will not work out the way I had planned. When I look back, however, I am always able to see the way that God had helped me through the challenges, and threads of what his plan had been for me all along. In this, I know that he is always with me, much like the poem “Footprints in the Sand” that hung on our walls when I was a child.

The question then becomes, what will we do with that information? If you have seen God’s work in your life, do you trust him going forward, or do you continue to live in fear? Do you keep these moments to yourself, or do you share them with others? Do you “shout and sing for joy?”

We will always have moments of fear in our life. If we want to move past those fears, we need to find our trust in God, who walks with us and guides us through the difficult times. And more than that, he asks us to help others grow closer to him by letting them know about the good he has done in our lives. When we bring others closer to God, we can all be together in the end - when our days of fear and struggles have passed. I have struggled a lot with this part of my faith, but I will continue to work on it, because in the end, the thing that matters above all else is having our friends and family with us in Heaven. Who will you help to develop a closer relationship with God?

*Aaron Van Ningen*

## **Day 3 – Read Luke 1:68-69**

I was very young when my Uncle Al sent us an Advent calendar as an early Christmas present. Each day, a small cardboard window was opened revealing small colorful pictures of the events leading up to Christ’s birth and a bible verse.

Dad normally read a book to us before bed, but now we added the Advent calendar to our nightly routine. One of us would open the window, then Dad read the passage and describe what was happening. It began with the foretelling of a promised Messiah and ended with the birth of Jesus. My parents carefully guided us through the nativity passages, telling us it was ok to be excited for Santa, but the real excitement was that God sent his only son to us as the BEST Christmas present of all!

After the excitement of opening gifts on Christmas morning, Mom took us to church where a wonderland greeted us. The church was dark except for the glow of blue lights on multiple freshly cut trees. Shiny glass ornaments hung interspersed with tinsel.

There was a beautiful nativity scene, full of delicate figures and a blinking star above. The wise men were approaching from the back of the church. It was captivating. I could physically feel God’s presence. Even at that young age, I knew this is how we should be celebrating Jesus birth every day – by praising, loving, and thanking God for His son, the best present ever.

*Patty VerDouw*

## **Day 4: Read Psalm 96**

**“Sing to the Lord, bless His name, proclaim His victory day after day. Tell of His glory among the nations, His wondrous deeds, among the people” Psalm 96:2-3 (TNK).**

Worship and praise is hard. Between the daily distractions of work, family, fun, leisure and any number of problems that come our way, God is often thrust into the back seat. Sure, we can set aside times in the morning and evening for devotion and prayer, but is that enough?

The entire chapter of Psalms 96 is dedicated to the idea that no matter where we are, what we’re doing, we sing and bless his name day after day, not one day a week or an hour or two at church. Nor are we supposed to do so in our homes and with other believers alone. We are to proclaim his deeds to everyone.