

Advent 2 | December 6th, 2020 | Character: Joseph
Advent Wreath: Scott Family | Alternate Telling: Streed Family

Intro to our Advent Journey

Welcome to the second week in the season of Advent, our time of preparation and watchfulness as we wait for the coming of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. Needless to say, this Advent season will be a bit different than Advents past, but the preparing and waiting will happen nonetheless. Along with our “untraditional” worship-from-home, our journey through Advent will be a little “untraditional” as well. As we journey through these four weeks leading up to Christmas, we will journey with the different characters in the Christmas story as we take a closer look at Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, and the Shepherds, before spending time with God’s love incarnate on Christmas. May this journey inspire you in new and exciting ways as we journey creatively through this season. We pray, God, bless this journey.

If you have your Advent-in-a-Box (or if you have some candles lying around), I invite you to take a moment and set out your Advent Wreath. Although we are apart, we light this wreath together, led today by the Scott Family.

Lighting the Advent Wreath

Person 1: The Advent wreath is a circle with no beginning and no end. It is a symbol of God’s unending love and faithfulness.

Person 2: The light reminds us of Jesus, the Light of the world. “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Person 3: “Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of the light.” Jesus said, “Everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness.”

Person 4: We are children of the light, and so we light this candle and remember God’s gifts of light and life as we wait and watch for the coming of our Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Advent Wreath Response | *Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah* v.1-2 ELW 240

Light one candle to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.

He shall bring salvation to Israel, God fulfills the promise.

Light two candles to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.

He shall feed the flock like a shepherd, gently lead them homeward.

Confession + Forgiveness

Because it is so hard to wait, it is not easy to live through Advent's days. But watch what God does during this time. God waits for us to turn from our old ways to find the right paths; God waits for us to admit what we have done, and failed to do, so we might be forgiven and graced with new life. Let us approach the One who waits for us.

(Silence)

Waiting God, it is never easy for us to confess our sins. There are the hurts we have caused to our families and friends, which we would like to forget. There are those we believe are impossible to love, and so we don't try. There are people who live on the edge of our society, and we ignore their cries for help. Forgive us, God who comes near to us. When we have lost our way, show us yours. Lead us in humility down the streets of your kingdom. Teach us your truth, so we might be able to keep your Word, revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

God does not remember our sins, but does remember the promises which have been made to us. God does not shame us, but lifts us to new life. Lead us in your hope, O God, and teach us your love. You are the God of our days, we wait for you to come to us. **Amen.**

Children's Message

Opening Hymn | *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* v.1, 2, 4 ELW 257

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

*O Come, O Wisdom from on high, embracing all things far and nigh:
In strength and beauty come and stay; teach us your will and guide our way.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

*O come, O Branch of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save, and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

Gospel Reading | Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph, her husband to be, was a righteous man, and because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her privately. When he had contemplated this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: “Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will name him Emmanuel,” which means “God with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord told him. He took his wife, but did not have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son, whom he named Jesus.

Alternate Telling | *by the Streed Family*

Reflection

Last week we journeyed with Mary through her experience of the annunciation, her visit to Elizabeth, and her famous song, the *Magnificat*. That journey happened alongside the Gospel of Luke, who detailed the encounter with the angel Gabriel and all that happened afterward. Did you notice in that telling, Mary’s fiance was missing? What about Joseph? What was his reaction to all this? For his perspective, we turn to the Gospel of Matthew.

After a lengthy genealogy, Matthew’s gospel continues like this: *Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.* Notice that Matthew simply states the facts of what his readers already knew:

1. Mary and Joseph were engaged
2. They had not “come together” ... which is a less offensive way of saying that hadn’t yet had sex with each other (pardon my use of the “s” word)
3. Despite number 2, Mary was found to be pregnant
4. The conception was through the Holy Spirit, not man

We knew these things and, apart from number 4, so did Joseph. Yet through this account in Matthew’s Gospel, we learn how Joseph came to know and understand the significance of this pregnancy and his role as co-caretaker of the Son of God.

So, who is this Joseph fellow? We honestly don't know all that much about him. We know his name is *Joseph*, which is a throwback to Genesis, as he's named after the man who had a many-colored coat and saved Israel from death by famine. We know that Joseph was a carpenter by trade; however, because the town of Nazareth was small, carpentry wouldn't have been all that he did. He probably also kept a garden and a couple animals, maybe did some subsistence farming to eke out a living in the agricultural society of rural Galilee. Needless to say, he and his betrothed weren't wealthy.

Which brings us back to his betrothed and the dilemma Joseph found himself in: the pregnancy of his fiancée. You can bet the rumor mill of this small town was up and running with this scandalous news: Mary is pregnant! Couldn't Mary and Joseph wait? They know better! Joseph would have been deeply embarrassed by the whole thing. But only he and Mary know that *he* is not the father. The logical conclusion is that Mary has been unfaithful, which has placed her at considerable risk in this ancient society.

- Her fiancée would reject her. Her pregnancy would embarrass him and reflect on his character.
- At worst, she could be stoned, which took place in 1st century Palestine for adulterers...
- At best, her family would allow her to live at home, though the family's status in society would be hurt.
- No one would ever marry her due to her "reputation"

Mary's prospects were grim; however, the grace of God now comes into play.

At this point, Joseph had decided to divorce Mary quietly, in a way that would protect her as much as he could, given the situation. As a righteous man, Joseph carefully observed the law and valued his own reputation. By marrying her, Joseph would compromise himself in the eyes of the law. But his righteousness went deeper than this mere righteousness before Jewish law. Joseph was honorable and wanted to do the right thing, which would be to divorce Mary quietly rather than expose Mary to public disgrace. Here we see in Joseph a gentleness and maturity. A righteous man, but not a man full of himself. But then...

But then God changed Joseph's mind. We often forget that Joseph had an annunciation as well, that an angel also appeared to him to prepare him for the significant role he would play in God's saving plan for the whole human race.

From antiquity, Christians have reflected upon Joseph as a model of genuine virtue. His response to the angel teaches us how we are to respond to God's invitations in our own lives. Just as Joseph was a person of faith and courage, we too are called to be people of faith and courage -- in good times and bad, and even scandalous times, too. Just as Joseph poured himself out in love for Love (with a capital "L"), we too are called to pour out ourselves in love for Love (capital "L"). Just as Joseph humbled himself, we too are called to humble ourselves for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of love incarnate.

For as little as we know about Joseph, may we look to him as an example of faith, especially during these Advent times. As he prepared and waited for the coming of Jesus, may we too prepare and wait. May we be of faith and courage during these times and may we pour out ourselves in love for one another and for Emmanuel, God with us.

Amen.

Special Music | *Joseph's Song* sung by Austyn Menk

Advent Creed

We believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth. The one who is full of patience, who is not afraid of silence, who does not need to fill each moment with activity and noise. The one who is beyond bluster and flurry, and who does not jostle for attention.

We believe in God the Son, Savior of creation, who slipped into Bethlehem one night, mostly unnoticed, who lived thirty years without headlines or hurry, who frequently took time alone with his patient Father, who waited for the right time to become the suffering servant, who stood quietly before the noise of his accusers, whose silence overpowered their words, who died, then rose again on a quiet Sunday morning.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens, empowers, renews and refreshes, sometimes arriving with obvious power, sometimes with the quiet breath of a whisper.

We believe in one God who patiently waits for us, and who longs for us to do the same.

Amen.

Prayer of the Day + Lord's Prayer

Lord, let your goodness appear to us, that we, made in your image, conform ourselves to it. In our own strength we cannot imitate your majesty, power, and wonder; nor is it fitting for us to try. But your mercy reaches from the heavens, through the clouds, to the earth below. You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal love that we receive through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray: **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Sending Hymn | *Love Has Come*

ELW 292

Love has come -- a light in the darkness! Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.

See, all heaven has come to proclaim it; hear how their song of joy arises:

Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior! Love! Love! Glory to God on high.

Love is born! Come, share in the wonder. Love is God now asleep in the hay.

See the glow in the eyes of his mother; what is the name her heart is saying?

Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers; Love! Love! Jesus, Immanuel.

Love has come and never will leave us! Love is life everlasting and free.

Love is Jesus within and among us. Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.

Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas. Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!

Blessing + Dismissal

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. Go with us now into the world. We can begin again!

Everything is about to change. So make everything new. Make us new. Reveal your glory in our lives and in the rhythms of our lives, so that nothing will get in the way of your coming. **Amen.**

Go in peace to prepare the way of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**