

WEEK FOUR

Advent Devotional

Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas



RH

Joy is Here

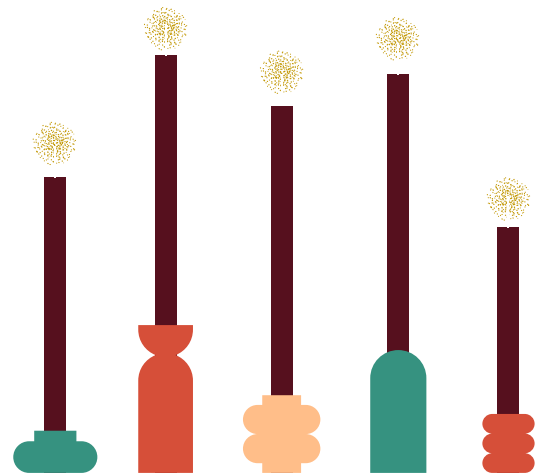
DECEMBER 24, 2023

“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



PERSONAL REFLECTION

From Christmas parties and gift exchanges to visits with Santa and sneaky elves, Christmas is full of moments of joy and celebration. However, these moments are fleeting, and far too soon we return to the reality of our everyday lives as we live in the tension between the first Advent of Christ and the second. Yet the Advent season reminds us that our response to the arrival of Christ should be more than fleeting moments of joy. Instead, our response should be a deep sense of lasting joy as we celebrate all that Jesus came to do.

In the Bible, the accounts of Jesus' birth are full of responses of joy and celebration. The angels declared that they had come with a message of "good news of great joy" (Luke 2:10), and the shepherds responded by "glorifying and praising God" (Luke 2:20).

However, a closer examination of the Biblical accounts reveals that not everyone responded with joy to the birth of Christ.

After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph remained in Bethlehem, building a new life for their family. Months later, Mary welcomed a surprising group of visitors as wise men from the East came to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Upon finding him, Matthew 2:10 says that the wise men "rejoiced with exceedingly great joy" as they worshiped the long-awaited king.

While the story of the wise men emphasizes their joy, it is also meant to contrast their response against others they encountered on their journey to Bethlehem.

When the wise men first arrived in Jerusalem with news of the new king, Herod responded with open hostility to the perceived threat to his power and authority. But another more shocking response came from the chief priests and scribes, who displayed ambivalence and indifference to

the news of the long-awaited Messiah.

Ironically, the ones who demonstrated the least interest in Jesus' birth were the ones who should have eagerly anticipated his arrival. These men had waited for hundreds of years for the promise of a savior to be fulfilled. Yet it was a group of men from a distant land who celebrated and rejoiced at the birth of Christ.

The journey of the wise men began long before Jesus' birth, with years of faithful study and preparation. Despite limited knowledge, they embarked on a journey that led them to an infant king, born into simplicity and poverty.

But this wasn't just any king. They knew that Jesus had been born "king of the Jews". And years, later, Jesus would again be given this same title as it hung over his head on a wooden sign during his crucifixion.

From his first breath to his last, Jesus is the long-awaited king. And today, he continues to rule and reign as our Lord and Savior.

As we come to the end of the Advent season, the story of the wise men calls us to consider our response to Jesus. Will we, like Herod, respond with hostility and refuse to submit to the authority of our king? Will we respond like the chief priests and scribes and remain indifferent to his coming by pursuing our interests and desires above God's? Or, like the wise men, will we respond with great and lasting joy in the presence of our savior?

Jesus is the long-awaited king, who has revealed his love to us and invited us to abide in his love. He has given us hope even in the darkness and brought peace regardless of our circumstances. And today, he invites us to experience lasting joy in his presence.

Take time to respond by considering the following questions.

How have your past actions reflected either hostility, indifference, or joy and gratitude to Jesus for what he has done?

The wise men's journey required action and perseverance to faithfully pursue Jesus. What action is God calling you to take as you pursue Him and the lasting joy He freely offers?



Family Experience

CANDLE LIGHTING

Light the **love**, **hope**, and **peace** candles from the previous weeks.

As you read the following scripture, light the fourth candle in your Advent wreath to represent the **joy** we have in Christ.

Read: “But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor as with a shield.” **Psalm 5:11-12**

Pray: Thank you, God, for sending Your Son, Jesus. Thank you for your everlasting love and faithfulness. Today, I choose joy! I choose the joy that comes from knowing Jesus. I choose the joy that comes from being Your child. I choose joy when things go wrong and when things go right. I commit to faithfully pursue the lasting joy that comes from You alone. I pray this in the holy name of Jesus. Amen.

Listen: Joy to the World

[Click Here to Listen](#)





Family Experience

READ

Read Matthew 2:1-12 together as a family.

DISCUSS

Take time to discuss the following questions.

Younger Kids

- 1** How did the wise men find Jesus? When they found Jesus what did they do?
- 2** If you saw baby Jesus, what would you do?

Older Kids

- 1** The wise men chose to make the journey to find the long-awaited King of the Jews, Jesus. Upon finding Jesus they were overjoyed and presented Him with fine gifts. What fine gift of your time, or talent can you offer to Jesus? How can you do that?
- 2** Read Psalm 5:11 again. Why should you be glad and rejoice in the birth of Jesus? What can you do to show you are glad and rejoicing in His Jesus? Try to be specific.

PRAY

If celebrating advent with children, pray the following scripture over each child you are celebrating with. Feel free to add to this prayer or pray other specific requests over your child as you feel led.

May _____ take refuge in you and rejoice; let him/her ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over him/her, that _____ may love your name and may exult in you. **(from Psalm 5:11)**



Celebrate

On a clear night, bundle up and go outside to look at the stars. Take time to talk about what it would have been like to be in a field at night, and have the angels surprise you with the news of Jesus' birth. Try to find the brightest star and imagine you are going on a journey to follow the star like the wise men to find Jesus.

Discussion Prompts for Kids:

- ★ Joy is a choice we can make every moment and in every situation. What is one thing in your life right now that you can or have chosen to be joyful about rather than allow it to bother you?
- ★ How can we as a family create a memory or Christmas tradition of joy this year to be carried on in future years?
- ★ As a family what can we make or create rather than buy to give to someone to bring the joy of Jesus to them?