

TRANSFORMATIVE
VISION
ADVENT 2013

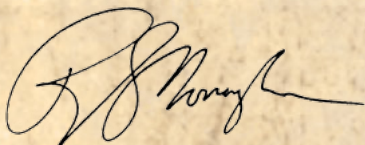
It's almost Christmas. Today, our lives can become rushed and tossed to and fro by the bustle of busyness our world enters into during the holiday season. There are parties to attend, family to see, gift giving to plan and memories to be shared. Christmas is not a mandated holiday in the Bible, and it is actually very unlikely that Jesus was born on December 25th. Yet God's people have always realized there was something to celebrate in the birth of Jesus. Historically, the churches of Jesus have observed a season of celebration leading up to Christmas day simply known as Advent. The word is from the Latin *adventus*, which means "arrival."

At Jacob's Well, we love the Advent season for two reasons. First, we look and marvel at the gracious birth and first coming of Jesus in the town of Bethlehem of Judea long ago. The expectation, hope and rejoicing associated with that event is something worshipful and transformative for our souls. Yet we do not only look back to Jesus' birth and first arrival during this season – we also look forward. The second reason we love advent is that it gives us an opportunity each year to prepare our lives for the arrival and second coming of our King and His Kingdom of Heaven. We look with great expectation and joy to what the Bible calls the blessed hope of his glorious appearing* (Titus 2:11-14) where he will both judge and renew all things.

During this Advent season at Jacob's Well we will be seeking God together in two ways. On Sunday mornings we will be teaching a sermon series entitled Transformative Vision where we will look at the nature of our God and how knowing Him shapes who we are. Second, we invite you to anticipate the Advent season in your family and missional community by following this devotional. Each week you will find a reflection on Advent for discussion around the dinner table as well as Scripture readings, songs, and even some suggested activities for holiday fun.

Seeing the arrival of Jesus and the glorious nature of God thrills and instills wonder in the soul. More than anything, we pray that this Advent season finds us living Kingdom lives of generosity amidst consumerism, and of worship rather than a self-consumed Christmas.

Blessings as we walk together with Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pastor Reid', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pastor Reid

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ADVENT WEEK 1

Expectation and Hope
December 1st - 7th

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-11

I remember as a kid having high expectations for Christmas. Usually there was some toy or item I had my eye on that I had been making clearly known to my parents. A new bike, a certain game or some sort of sporting goods or gear were often in my vision. Christmas had to be good – my hopes were set on getting up that morning and being thrilled by a great gift. Like many American households, we had a Christmas tree and a tradition of gift giving so I knew how to find that tree and go on a rabid search for treasure very early on Christmas morning. I had eager expectations and hopes for what I was to receive; it was quite the thrill.

It is quite interesting that the giving of gifts at Christmas loosely traces back to a group of men known as Magi who came to visit Jesus upon his birth. These men perhaps hailed from as far east as India and took great interest in seeking signs in the heavens to discern great things that were taking place in the world. They had great hopes and brought gifts to bless Jesus. Their expectation was not in what they were to receive, but in giving gifts of honor to a great King.

Hope is a constant theme for Christians at Christmastime. We do look in hope to a great gift, but one that is much greater than bikes, toys, power tools or electronic gadgetry (as fun as these may be). Our hope is in the gift of God, Jesus himself. Romans 5:2 teaches us that, “through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” In the gift of Jesus we have hope because we get to see the beauty of God in a person. We see God’s greatness, graciousness, goodness and glory in Jesus himself and this person changes our lives.

We hope to see something amazing when we come to the manger at Bethlehem. In the most humble of beginnings we find the person who can change us and change the world. We arrive like the Magi of old with our lives laid down in worship. As we find Jesus here and worship, we find our ultimate hopes fulfilled – to see God and know that things are forever changed now that He is here – that we are forever changed. What do we expect to receive this year for Christmas? It is our hope that we receive the grace of Jesus, and that we become more like him in every way.

Discussion Questions

1. What is an expectation? Are expectations good things or bad things? What is the difference between an expectation built on a promise and built upon a lie?
2. Discuss what it would have been like to be a disciple seeing the first coming of Messiah. Then read Luke 2:22-38. How did Simeon and Anna feel about seeing Jesus' first coming?
3. God promised to send a Savior and that expectation was fulfilled at Jesus' birth. How are we shaped today by the expectation and hope of Jesus' second coming?

A Prayer of Hope and Expectation

Lord, let us look to you with the deepest of hope. Our expectations about the future are based in your character and your promises we see so

clearly in Jesus Christ. Let us live today in light of your coming and glorious Kingdom so that we might love you, love our neighbors and share good news with all whom we interact. Thank you for this Christmas season where we can rejoice together that Jesus came into the world to save sinners and send them on mission as his saints. We are so thankful God to be in your family and have joy in You this Advent season.

Scripture Readings

- Monday – Isaiah 40:1-11, Micah 5:2
Tuesday – Proverbs 10:28, 11:7, 23
Wednesday – Luke 2:22-38
Thursday – Romans 15:12, 13
Friday – Romans 5:1-11
Saturday – Titus 2:11-14

Songs to Sing –

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus
O Come O Come Emmanuel

FUN ACTIVITIES
FOR THE
FAMILY

#1 Create an Advent Calendar – Explain the purpose of an Advent Calendar as preparing for the arrival of Jesus; if you have children, let them get excited just for the actual countdown. You can buy pre-made advent calendars, or be creative and make your own.

#2 Bake Christmas cookies and enjoy with friends or family, then choose a neighbor to share with as well.



ADVENT WEEK 2

Preparation and Peace
December 8th - 14th

Scripture: Luke 1:26-35, 46-55

Though each has its pluses and minuses, both kids and grown-ups are pretty happy with their roles. We all agree that kids should be kids, and grown-ups should be grown-ups. Kids: you'd rather not pay for your clothes, food, TV, bed, and house. Moms and Dads: you're happy to have outgrown your youth and prefer having some control over what your kids wear, watch, when they go to bed, and who their friends are. These roles seem to make sense and give us a right sense of control. We like them.

In Luke chapter 1, we find a kid named Mary whose life is anything but clear, orderly, and in control. In fact, we see that her world is turned upside down. She is no longer a kid. Actually, she is still a kid, but a kid who is about to have a baby! So, her days of just playing sports and games with friends or siblings, doing schoolwork, and leaving the rest to Mom and Dad are over. Now, she has to be somebody's Mom and feed, clean, and provide for a baby without really knowing how. In short, everything changes with the snap of a finger. So, if happiness comes from having everything in order and feeling in control, Mary has no chance of being happy.

Well then, why is she? Why does she say, "My spirit rejoices..."? I think that it has something to do with when she says, "My soul magnifies the Lord." What does a magnifying glass do? It takes something extremely small and makes it look much bigger so that you can look at it more closely, see everything that you'd been missing, and know it better than ever before. Here, Mary's joy comes from the fact that she now sees God for who he is – great, powerful, and in total control. But, how does she get a "magnifying glass" for God?

The answer is that God gives it to her. God

uses what happens in Mary's life to bring her true happiness by showing her how great he is and how in control he is. Not only of her life's story, but of his promise to create a family of kids from around the entire world. Mary's hard times and ultimately the child that comes through them become her magnifying glass for seeing God rightly, for understanding how truly great he is and how she – and we – don't have to fear being out of control. Whether we're kids or grown-ups and whether life is what we expect it to be or not, God will magnify himself through that child, both now and forever.

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of life do you want for yourself and those you love? Do they involve certain things or certain people? Take some time with your family to name them.
2. What are your "magnifying glasses" for seeing God? Why might these things help you to see his greatness in ways you never have before?
3. Why does God seem to work through messy, hard, and out-of-control times of life?

A Prayer of Preparation and Peace

Lord, we take some time to name the areas of life that we try to control (success, school, work, family, etc.). We admit that it scares us to think that we don't actually have the final say in how these things turn out and confess that we think too little of your greatness, how you show your power and control over our lives in unexpected ways. Simply put, we confess that we think and see too little of your greatness in Jesus.

This Advent season, please help us to see

him. Help us to love the small child who shows us how a far-off God has come so near and how your greatness and control over all things comes through a "helpless" babe. Like you did with Mary, cause our spirits to rejoice and souls to magnify you. So, may we see you – and ourselves – more clearly through the coming of a humble child...and one day, a warrior king, both of whom give us rest knowing that even when we're not in control...you are.

Scripture Readings

- Monday - Exodus 2:23-25
- Tuesday - Exodus 15
- Wednesday - 1 Samuel 2:1-11
- Thursday - Psalms 13
- Friday - Psalms 22-23
- Saturday - Psalms 146-150

Songs to Sing –

- What Child Is This?
- O Holy Night

FUN ACTIVITIES FOR THE FAMILY

- #1 Create special Advent ornaments. You can walk outside to collect pine cones, evergreen branches or leaves for your ornaments.
- #2 Sing your favorite Christmas songs together with friends and/or family. If someone is musically gifted, have them play an instrument; if not, sing with a CD or even acapella.



ADVENT WEEK 3

Repentance and Joy
December 15th - 21st

Scripture: Luke 1:68-79

Have you ever done something mean to a friend or one of your siblings and immediately wanted to disappear? Sometimes our imperfections are so embarrassing that all we want to do is hide. Sometimes we feel like we have to be perfect and we get so frustrated when we fall short. God knows this very well and sent His Son to help us in our imperfections.

In this passage, a man who knew how messed up people like us can be talks about what Jesus came into the world to do. He says that Jesus will bring salvation by forgiving our sins. Jesus came into the world to take the punishment that we deserve for the mean things we've done and will likely do again.

This is the most amazing thing about Jesus and why we talk so much about joy around Christmas. Jesus came into the world so that imperfect boys, girls, mothers and fathers could be forgiven and no longer feel the need to be perfect all the time. If we ask Jesus for forgiveness when we do something embarrassing, sneaky or mean, he will accept us because of what Jesus did. This is what the Bible calls repentance. We don't have to be perfect all the time; God wants us to be happy and live without the fear of making mistakes. He wants us to, as this passage says, "serve him without fear."

If you've ever been in a recital or played sports in front of a lot of people, you know that it's often much harder to play well in front of lots of people because we're now worried about what others might think of us. But remember a time you've played your instrument in your living room for your parents or played sports in the backyard with your best friends. I bet

you aren't as worried about making a mistake, right? Why is that? Because you know those people love you so much that even if you make a little mistake, they won't care and will keep on cheering for you as you play. That's a little like how God views us because of Jesus. Jesus came into the world to help us in our imperfections and that's news worth celebrating!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to apologize when we do something mean to someone else? Why might it be important to apologize to God as well?
2. Why is Jesus' coming into the world good news? What are some of the things you can do to celebrate that good news?
3. When do you most feel the need to be perfect? When do you least feel the need to be perfect? What makes the difference?

A Prayer of Joy and Repentance

Lord, we thank you that you know all of our failures and shortcomings and you love us anyway. In fact, it's exactly because we don't measure up that you came into the world. You came to save sinners - so allow us to be quick to admit our shortcomings to you, knowing that you will always forgive us. Give us strength to forgive one another, especially during this season when we are reminded of your grace to us. May we serve you without fear and find joy as we follow our Savior.

Scripture Readings

Monday: Isaiah 44:22
Tuesday: Matthew 9:13
Wednesday: Mark 1:14-15
Thursday: Ephesians 2:8
Friday: 1 Peter 2:24-25
Saturday: 1 John 1:9

Songs to Sing –
Joy to the World!
This Is The Christ

FUN ACTIVITIES FOR THE FAMILY

#1

Make Christmas cards with construction paper, crayons or whatever else you have. Pick three friends, family members, or neighbors to give them to.

#2

Forts are always fun to make in the wintertime as it becomes colder outside. Make a fort with blankets and chairs, and go inside to read books together.



ADVENT WEEK 4

Love and Rejoicing

December 22nd – 28th

Scripture: Luke 2:8-21

As we get closer and closer to Christmas, we remember the greatest gift that God could give to mankind to connect us back to Him... Himself. After Jesus was born, angels appeared to shepherds in the fields and said that there was “good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” A good God provided a way for humans, the created, to be reconnected again with God, the creator – because He loves us. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Even though sin has left its scar on all of God’s creation, there is much in this world that is still good. And so it’s a good thing to enjoy the good things that God created along with many good things that people have created. However, if we look for the good things on this earth to satisfy us – people around us, places where we live or love to visit, or things that we have (or hope to have) – then we will be deeply disappointed. There’s a part of each one of us that can only be satisfied by a good and loving God.

God gives us Himself so that we don’t have to look for anything else to satisfy us. As you spend time with family and friends and when you give and receive gifts this Christmas, take a few minutes to thank God for the greatest gift of all – Jesus the Christ. The angels rejoiced that first Christmas season at God’s amazing goodness to people, and we can join their song. One songwriter described the angels’ chorus in this way:

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 the angelic host proclaim: "Christ is born in
Bethlehem." Hark! The herald angels sing: "Glory
to the newborn King!"*

Discussion Questions

1. List some things that are good. Are they things that God created or things that people created? What makes each of them good?
2. Think through the past year – in 2013, how has God shown His goodness to you and your family?
3. Rejoice together. When you see how God has been good in your life and the good things that you enjoy, the appropriate response is to rejoice as the angels did and thank God. Take a few minutes to say "Thanks!" to God together.

A Prayer of Rejoicing in God's Goodness

Lord, we thank you for your goodness to us each and every day. Help us to live today and every day with a thankful heart for the many good things you provide us. As we enjoy the many good things in this world, keep us from making these things more important than you. Please keep our hearts and minds focused on you, the creator and giver. We thank you this Christmas season that we can rejoice as the angels did so long ago about the great gift that you have given to us in Jesus. Help us to be more like Jesus so that we can be good, generous, and loving to the people that you put in our lives. We love you!

Scripture Readings

- Monday - Genesis 1
- Tuesday - Psalm 53:1-3
- Wednesday - Psalm 25:6-10
- Thursday - Psalm 86:5
- Friday - Micah 6:8
- Saturday - Luke 2:8-20, 3 John 1:11

Songs to Sing –
Hark The Herald Angels Sing
Go Tell It On The Mountain!

FUN ACTIVITIES FOR THE FAMILY

#1 Look through the Christmas cards that you or your family have received over the last few weeks. Spend some time praying for these people and families. Pray that they would rejoice in Jesus during this season.

#2 Spend a night with the lights off or dimmed and candles lit. Drink hot chocolate and talk with each other about whatever comes to mind – spend some quality, quiet time together.



ADVENT WEEK 5

Expectation and Hope
December 29th - January 4th

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-11

For many centuries, Christians across the world have observed the Feast of Epiphany. Traditionally celebrated on January 6th, this feast celebrates the coming of the Son of God in human form as Jesus of Nazareth. Most often, this feast is associated with the visit of the three wise men, which marks the first recognition of Jesus as king by a group of non-Jewish Gentiles. Sometimes we forget that Jesus is not only our Savior - He's our King as well. In fact, the Bible makes it very clear that Jesus is the King of the entire world.

You can think about it this way: normally someone becomes king by defeating the ruler of a given place. Whenever a battle takes place, the winner earns the right to rule that kingdom. In coming to Earth, Jesus knew that a battle would occur. Jesus' battle was with nothing less than evil itself and its greatest weapon, death. When Jesus died on the cross and rose again to life, He defeated death. In so doing, Jesus became King of this world.

Have you ever had a really great teacher? I bet it made going to school so much more enjoyable. Have you ever had a teacher you didn't like? I bet it made going to school really difficult some days. Having a good leader makes all the difference. Jesus is the best kind of leader we could hope for. He is kind, loving and wants us to succeed. He is patient when we mess up and helps us with our mistakes. He is stronger than anything we might be scared of and knows more than even the smartest person we've ever known.

Knowing Jesus is King means that we don't have to worry because He is greater than all of our problems. Knowing Jesus is King means we can obey Him and always know that it

is the best possible way to live. Good leaders are worth following, so how much more excited should we be to follow the greatest leader that's ever lived?

Discussion Questions

1. Who is the best leader you've ever followed? What made them such a great leader?
2. What does it look like to follow Jesus as King? What are some things you could do this week to show Jesus that He's your King?
3. What are you most worried about right now? Pray to Jesus, your King, that he would take care of those problems and help you follow him while you wait.

A Prayer of Confidence

Jesus, we thank you that you won the victory over sin and death. You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Allow us to worship you and give you our allegiance, knowing that you are a kind and merciful King. Cause us to find delight in the way you ask us to live, knowing that you always have our best interests at heart. Allow us to look to you as both our Savior and our Lord. Thank you for the Advent season when we remember that you humbled yourself and now reign as King of this world.

Scripture Readings

- Monday: John 18:36
Tuesday: Colossians 1:13-14
Wednesday: Colossians 1:15-16
Thursday: Colossians 1:17-18
Friday: Philippians 3:20
Saturday: 1 Peter 1:20-21

Songs to Sing –

King of Glory
Agnus Dei

FUN ACTIVITIES FOR THE FAMILY

#1

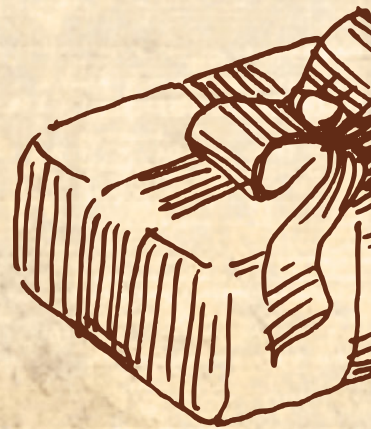
Make a list (or say a list if you cannot write yet) of all of the things you did on Christmas that were fun and you were thankful to do. Read them with your family.

#2

Take a drive around at night to count how many houses you see that still have Christmas lights up.



JACOB'S WELL
a generous christmas



LAST YEAR Jacob's Well began a simple tradition we called "A Generous Christmas." The goals were fairly simple. We wanted to teach one another the value of generosity in a world that reels with covetousness and greed. We also wanted to give tools to our community to teach the children among us our core identity of Joy and Generosity in Mission.

Our kids are growing up in a world where they are constantly bombarded with images, messages and ads seeking to sell them something. Their identity as a consumer will be a given in modern western society. They will be sold stuff and they will buy stuff. Yet our duty as a community is to also teach them the joy, blessing, and grace of giving.

The elders of our church have decided to make "A Generous Christmas" a yearly tradition of generosity at Jacob's Well. We may suggest different opportunities for our holiday giving from year to year, but "A Generous Christmas" will always be designed with the following aims:

- Providing fun tools for families in order to practically teach generosity to their kids.
- Providing clear information to our church family about where our year end giving is being allocated so we have a direct avenue to practice joyful generosity.
- Providing a bit of Christmas candy...because everyone needs a little candy sometimes.

Last year we gave to many of our local, global, and church planting ministry partners. This year the elders have decided to focus our generosity towards finalizing the build out of the 27.

Pick up your Generous Christmas Gift Bag on either Sunday December 8th or 15th. We will be collecting the Generous Christmas offering on Sundays December 22nd and 29th.



Merry Christmas

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