The Arrival

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

November 30th

Genesis 1-3 | John 1:1-3 | Rev. 21:1-4

There's a moment every Christmas when you wish you could make time stand still. The family is together, the lights are glowing, and laughter fills the room. For a moment, everything feels right. But eventually, the presents are opened, someone loses their patience, and an empty chair reminds us of someone we miss. Even in a season of joy, we feel the ache of a world where things aren't quite as they should be.

Most of us love Christmas, and we know that it is the celebration of Jesus's arrival. But why did Jesus come in the first place? ***What does a baby born in Bethlehem have to do with that ache that we feel when life isn't as it should be?*** The answer takes us back long before the manger - to the beginning of the human story. To understand why Christmas matters, we have to understand how we got here.

Before there was Bethlehem, there was Eden. Before there was brokenness, there was goodness. Genesis introduces us to a God who creates, blesses, and commissions. He creates humanity as His image-bearers, entrusting them with the care of His world. We were made to know Him, reflect His goodness, and enjoy life in His presence. ***"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."*** And that is where our story begins – with God's goodness. Unfortunately, humanity would soon rebel and sin would fracture that relationship, bringing suffering and death into the world. What God created as *good* was corrupted and turned toward destruction.

But God did not abandon us. John tells us that the Jesus who arrived at Christmas was there before creation began. The One through whom all things were made entered His own creation to rescue and restore it. Redemption was required. Restoration was necessary. Emmanuel ("*God with us*") wrapped Himself in flesh and came to earth to provide the bridge – the way – to restoration with God… to provide **HOPE**.

As Advent begins, remember where you stand in the human story – created for life with God, living in a world fractured by sin, yet invited through Jesus into His work of redemption and restoration. We still feel the ache of what is broken, but we look forward with hope to the day He makes all things new. This is why Christmas matters. God has come to dwell with us, and our story does not end in brokenness.

"Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. 19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. 20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay." - Romans 8:18-21

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December 1st

Genesis 1:26-31 | Genesis 3:1-24

Some of our favorite Christmas stories are the ones that take us back to cherished childhood memories or the hilarious, unforgettable moments that come with being part of a crazy family. There's something about this season that stirs up memories, traditions, and a sense of warmth unlike any other time of year.

But the best Christmas story of all starts at the very beginning of humanity. John 1 and Genesis 1–3 give us that beginning narrative. They also give us a glimpse into the heart of our Creator and His purpose in putting this world into motion. While His mind and purposes are far beyond our comprehension, one thing is clear: **He is a Creator who loves His creation.**

What God created was good. Mankind was created in His image, designed to live in relationship with Him. But the world we know today looks very different from the world God originally created. On the heels of the creation of the world comes the first bump in the road. Eve, the first woman, is approached by the serpent, who presents a false, half-truth of what was said by God just one chapter earlier. We know the story to end with Adam, the first man, and Eve choosing to take a bite of the fruit, disobeying God, and bringing sin into the world.

God explains the consequences of sin, which Paul reiterates in Romans 5:12 - *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned”*. A rift had occurred. Perfect union, as it stood, was no longer possible. That weight must have felt massive. The burden Adam and Eve must have carried coming out of the Garden would’ve felt insurmountable. But just as God does not abandon us now - He did not abandon us then. God provides Adam and Eve with provision and a promise.

In Genesis 3:10, when God calls to Adam in the Garden to see where he is, Adam responds by saying, *“I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”* He felt shame and wanted to hide. God did not let him stay hidden, and He did not further shame him. He showed compassion by clothing them, himself. Though sin was present, the heart of God was clear – God provided for their immediate need, and promised a **HOPE** that would reach far beyond the Garden.

In Genesis 3:15, God tells the serpent “*... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”* God is promising that He will destroy the Serpent and the effects of sin on the world.

As we move through the Scriptures, it is revealed through the Christmas Story that Jesus is this promised hope – the Savior that would one day defeat sin and death forever, “*crushing the head of the enemy.*” What began as a promise in the Garden would one day become a reality in Bethlehem.

In Christ, God has drawn near to us, just as He drew near to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Just as He clothed them in their shame, He has clothed us in the righteousness of His Son. Through Jesus, we have the eternal hope of being restored to Him forever.

December 2nd

Genesis 12 | Gal. 3:7-9

Have you ever made a pinky promise with a friend? There's just something about locking pinkies that makes a promise feel unbreakable, isn't there? After all, once those pinkies are locked, there's absolutely no chance that promise will ever be broken… right? Unlike the fragility of our pinky promises, God's promises and covenants are unbreakable. What He promises, He is faithful to fulfill.

God made a promise of redemption to Adam and Eve just after their disobedience in the Garden. **God's plan was and always has been to reunite all of creation to Himself**. But the way - and the timing - that God's promises unfold is often different from what we might expect. This is, of course, because God is superior to mankind, and His ways are high above our own. When we continue to trace the origins of humanity following Eden, we see many continued years of rebellion and sin, making it seem as if redemption would be an impossibility, despite the promise of God. But God's plan will not be denied. As we follow God's unfolding promise, the story shifts focus from all of humanity down to one particular covenant family – a family that begins with Abraham.

According to Genesis 12, God makes a covenant with Abraham, promising him land, descendants, protection, and ultimately blessing to all the families of the earth through Abraham. To receive this promise, Abraham was being called to leave the security of everything and everyone he knew, in order to follow God's direction. There was only one more slight problem – Abraham had no descendants, and his wife, Sarah, was 65 years old and barren! Imagine how impossible this promise must have seemed to them. A family of his own, despite their age and Sarah's barrenness?

In the chapters following Genesis 12, Abraham (which means, "*The Father of Nations*") matures, learns, and encounters the miraculous, as he steps out in obedience to follow God. True to His word, God blessed Abraham in every way, and He gave him a son, Isaac, who would carry on God's promise to future generations. Abraham lived a life of immense provision and blessing from God, and he brought good to all those connected to him. *"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."* **-** *Hebrews 11:8*

Generations after Abraham and Sarah, their descendants were still waiting for the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise. As we journey through Advent, we will witness the yearning for the fulfillment of the blessing and the culmination of the promise, which would one day arrive in a manger in Bethlehem. In Galatians 3:7-9, the Apostle Paul reveals that the followers of Jesus Christ are the spiritual descendants of Abraham. The covenant (promise) that God made with Abraham, much like that of the promise made in Genesis 3, would see its fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

God's plan was and always has been to reunite all of creation to Himself, beginning with Abram and Sarai's miraculous child, culminating in Jesus, and lived by us. This tangible hope is ours to live in, today. A faith that in obedience says, "*Yes*" – even when we cannot see how it will all come to pass. When we put our trust in Jesus, we join the covenant story, as we, through the Gospel of Jesus, carry the blessings that God promised to the world through Abraham.

December 3rd

Genesis 22:1-18

Have you ever stood in a place rich with history? Maybe you've visited the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree in New York City, a tradition that began nearly 100 years ago. Or perhaps you've stood somewhere with centuries of history. Whatever that place may be, there's something about standing where generations have stood before you. It's almost as if you can feel the weight of the history that unfolded right where you're standing.

Such was the place where Abraham stood in Genesis 22. This place ; more specifically, this mountain ; would not only hold a pivotal moment in Abraham's life, but it would foreshadow a moment centuries later between God the Father and His Son. The location may not have been the exact same one, but the moment would echo through, and ultimately change, the course of human history.

The instruction that God gave to Abraham was very unique - sacrifice your only son Isaac ; the son that God promised, and delivered, to Abraham. It presented a test to the faith of Abraham, while also revealing something profound about the character of God. In that culture and time in history, human sacrifice was common among pagan religions. Just as Abraham prepared to follow God in obedience, God intervenes, sparing Isaac while also providing a substitute sacrifice. He is *Jehovah Jireh*, the God who provides. Abraham had been walking with God for years at this point, but was now fully convinced of God’s power and provision.

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.” - Hebrews 11:17-19

Abraham would become known as the father of our faith. He had faith that the power of God would reach far beyond his lifetime. His faith was anchored in the reality that God could even raise the dead.

Centuries later, another Son would carry a wooden cross on His back, walk up a mountain, and willingly lay down His life for us all. Our Heavenly Father willingly gave His Son, Jesus, and through this sacrifice would come salvation for all who believe. God is faithful to His promises. He provides what we cannot, and even on the most difficult pages of Scripture, the most broken of situations, He provides **HOPE**.

December 4th

Genesis 39-41

Can you imagine being betrayed by your own family? That type of betrayal is where our “redemption story” leads us to today.

Following Abraham and Isaac, we meet Isaac’s son, Jacob. Jacob, who was renamed by God to “*Israel”*, had twelve sons - one of whom was Joseph. Joseph was one of Jacob’s younger sons, and due to some parental favoritism, we learn that he was not well-liked by his brothers. That dislike was further amplified to a boiling point after Joseph shared with his brothers some of his dreams in which they would bow down to him. As a result, Joseph’s brothers beat him and sold him into slavery.

Joseph would spend years in really difficult situations where he was treated unfairly and sometimes forgotten or cast aside by those who were set to care for him. But even when he was forgotten by people, God was with him. He was placed as a servant in a foreign country, but Genesis 39:2 says, “*The LORD was with Joseph*.” Later, when he was falsely accused of a crime and thrown in jail, Genesis 39:20–21 says, “But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him…”

Did you catch that? His circumstances may have changed again, but God's presence never left him.

In many of Joseph’s lowest personal moments, he had an ever-present hope that God would never leave him or forsake him. This secure hope brought about a degree of faithful resolve that, regardless of what was being asked of him, he could stand in the truth that God was with him. As the story of Joseph unfolds, we continually see God working, despite Joseph’s circumstances. Eventually, God moved Joseph into a position that was not simply “a reward or honor” for a faithful life; it was a **calling** to save millions of lives from a famine that would soon come on the land.

Joseph truly had no idea what God was doing in and through him for all of those years, but **all of us** are blessed by God’s faithfulness through it all. Joseph’s suffering, faithfulness, and trust in God became the very avenue God used to preserve the line of Judah, through which humanity’s ultimate hope of redemption would one day be born.

This world is fallen – full of trials and moments when, from all outward appearances, it seems as though God is not present. Like Joseph, we can choose to live with a faithful resolve, anchored in the reality that God is with us. One of the names of Jesus is “*Immanuel*,” which means “*God with us*” *(Matthew 1:23)*. In every car ride, every meeting, every loss, every diagnosis, every bedtime routine, and even in the moments when His presence feels distant – He is there. When you cannot feel Him, cannot see how He is working, do not know how you will make it through ; in every circumstance, we can have this very present **HOPE – *God is with us***.