

Behold

An Uncommon Advent Guide

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Introduction

I grew up observing Advent in church and with my family.

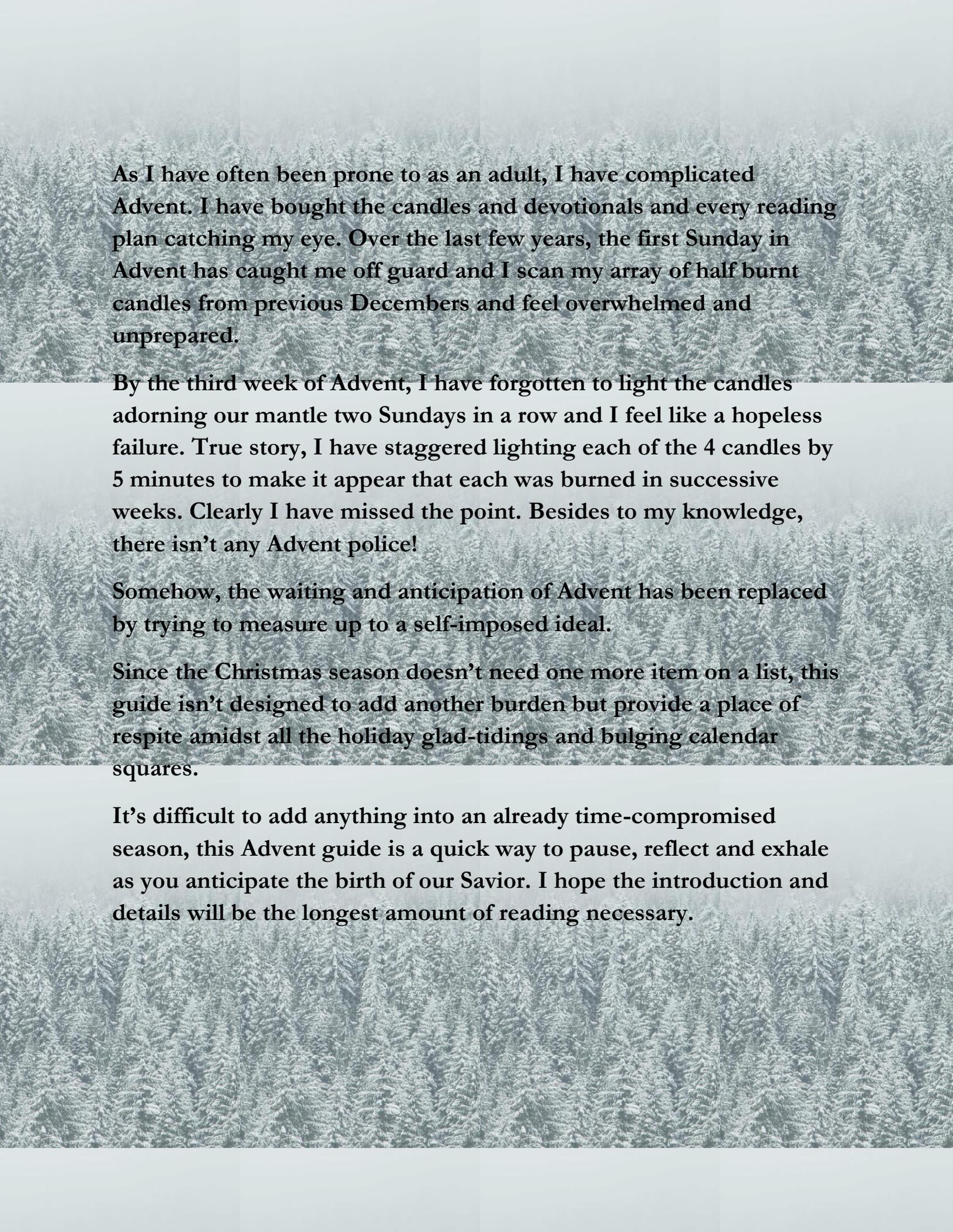
It was an integral part of our family's December expectation. It was not until adulthood, I discovered Advent wasn't a part of Christmas for many.

In the simplest terms, according to the liturgical church calendar, Advent begins the church year and is observed over the four Sundays leading to Christmas Day. Depending on the faith community, often there are words or themes associated with each week.

It was a big deal in the church I grew up in because a different family was chosen to read a scripture and light one of four candles each Sunday of Advent. A fifth candle was reserved for the candlelight Christmas Eve service, which was a service led by high school students, another big deal.

Reflecting on the Advent seasons of my youth, it was a time filled with anticipation and waiting.

There was anticipation of who would be chosen for the highly prized Advent duties, waiting your turn either to arrive or to be old enough to lead the church in illuminating the final hours leading to the celebration of Christ's birth.



As I have often been prone to as an adult, I have complicated Advent. I have bought the candles and devotionals and every reading plan catching my eye. Over the last few years, the first Sunday in Advent has caught me off guard and I scan my array of half burnt candles from previous Decembers and feel overwhelmed and unprepared.

By the third week of Advent, I have forgotten to light the candles adorning our mantle two Sundays in a row and I feel like a hopeless failure. True story, I have staggered lighting each of the 4 candles by 5 minutes to make it appear that each was burned in successive weeks. Clearly I have missed the point. Besides to my knowledge, there isn't any Advent police!

Somehow, the waiting and anticipation of Advent has been replaced by trying to measure up to a self-imposed ideal.

Since the Christmas season doesn't need one more item on a list, this guide isn't designed to add another burden but provide a place of respite amidst all the holiday glad-tidings and bulging calendar squares.

It's difficult to add anything into an already time-compromised season, this Advent guide is a quick way to pause, reflect and exhale as you anticipate the birth of our Savior. I hope the introduction and details will be the longest amount of reading necessary.

The Details

Why this Advent Guide is called Behold?

As I began reading different scriptures tied to the birth of Jesus, the word behold seemed to lift off the page as if in bold print.

Behold means to:

see

observe

view

look at

watch

survey

witness

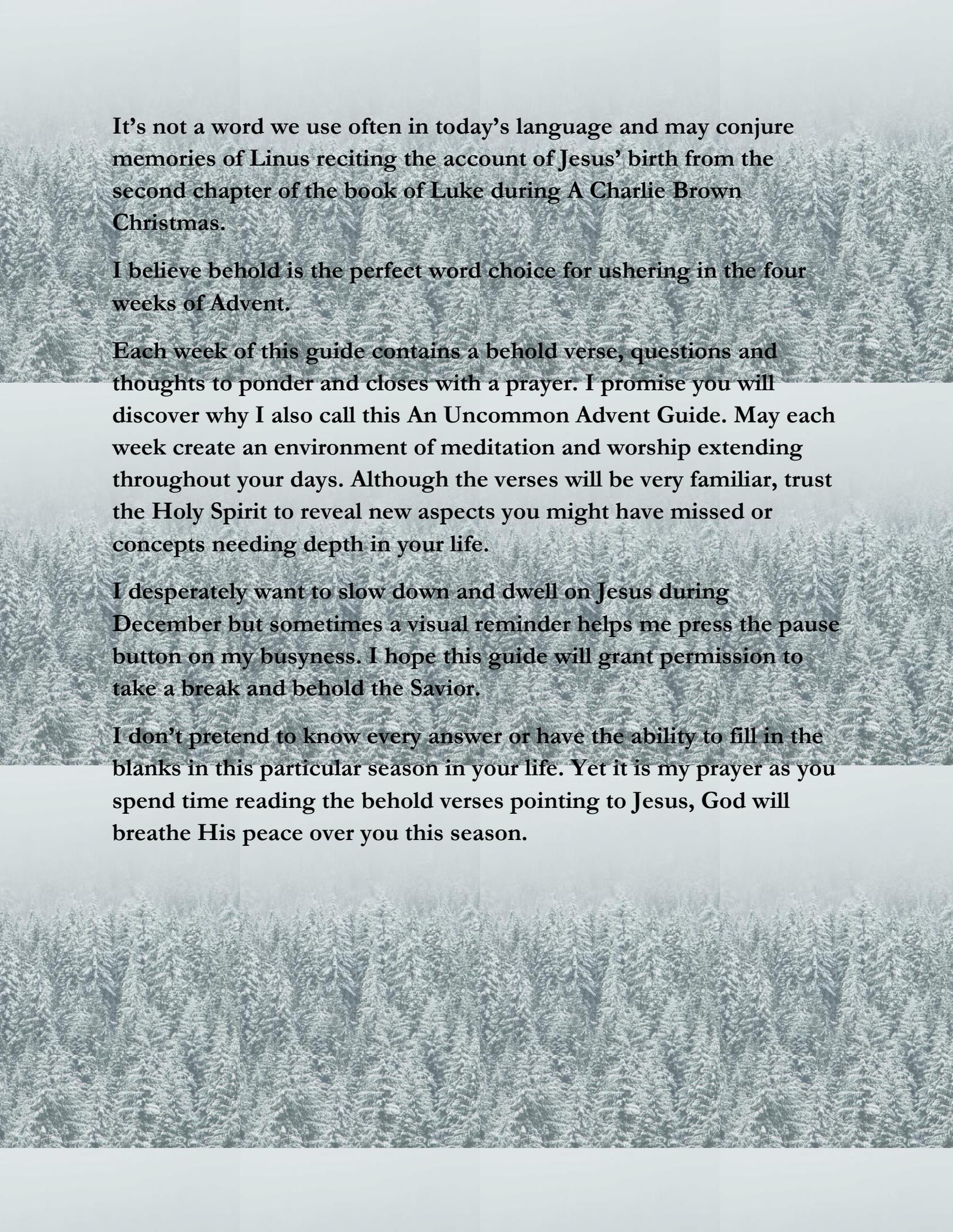
gaze at or upon

regard

contemplate

inspect

eye



It's not a word we use often in today's language and may conjure memories of Linus reciting the account of Jesus' birth from the second chapter of the book of Luke during A Charlie Brown Christmas.

I believe behold is the perfect word choice for ushering in the four weeks of Advent.

Each week of this guide contains a behold verse, questions and thoughts to ponder and closes with a prayer. I promise you will discover why I also call this An Uncommon Advent Guide. May each week create an environment of meditation and worship extending throughout your days. Although the verses will be very familiar, trust the Holy Spirit to reveal new aspects you might have missed or concepts needing depth in your life.

I desperately want to slow down and dwell on Jesus during December but sometimes a visual reminder helps me press the pause button on my busyness. I hope this guide will grant permission to take a break and behold the Savior.

I don't pretend to know every answer or have the ability to fill in the blanks in this particular season in your life. Yet it is my prayer as you spend time reading the behold verses pointing to Jesus, God will breathe His peace over you this season.

This is your Advent guide to use as you please. There are no rules.

- Read the entire week in one sitting on Sunday or a day of your choosing.
- Read the week's verses every day for a week.
- Reflect on one question a day or choose a few to think about over the week.
- Write your thoughts in a journal.
- Chat with God in prayer.
- If time allows, dig deeper. Pull out a commentary or look up cross-references in your Bible.

When we observe Advent, we reflect on the first advent, when Jesus Christ was born. We also look towards a future advent when Jesus Christ will come again. We are in the middle place of these two realities yet advent is for us in the present. In each advent, longing for Christ to be revealed is a consistent and constant theme.

Welcome to the Advent season and behold Jesus, the Son of God.

Week One

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

Relax your shoulders.

Spend a few moments reading the passage.

Read the verses aloud.

Say the verses quietly.

Read the passage how *you* believe the angel might have spoken to Mary.

Read the passage and listen as Mary would have.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1: 26-38 (ESV)

The angel of the Lord, Gabriel appears to Mary and his first words tell her who she is and the Lord is with her. He follows this greeting by telling her not to be afraid. Based on the verses to come, this is a valid instruction.

If God called you by name today, do you believe He would call you favored?

What in your life is causing fear? Speak those fears to God.

Is there anything about Mary you have never considered?

Circle the names and descriptors of Jesus.

Focus on the three places the word behold is spoken.

PAST ADVENT

Notice Mary's submission to God in her body, life, present and future.

Consider Elizabeth and Mary, old and young women, God achieved the miraculous in both of their lives. Two people who surrendered to their lives to God, allowing it to look radically different than their companions.

FUTURE ADVENT

How can you live a submitted life to God today?

Where in your life do you need to say like Mary, behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

What in your life seem impossible, even for God to touch?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank You for this season of pausing to remember your first advent on earth. We are grateful how you have always involved people in Your plan of salvation. May we believe You for the impossible, especially in scenarios which make no sense to us. Will You meet us in our fears and the deepest places of our need? Help us be submitted like Mary and surrender to the purposes stretched out over our lives.

Lord as we marvel over Your Word and consider the stirrings of our hearts, may we be swept up in the awe of Your coming and meet you in a profound way.

Amen.

Week Two

Breathe in. Breathe out. Rub your neck.

Read the passage several times despite its familiarity.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:18-22 (ESV)

How are the angel’s words to Joseph similar to those spoken to Mary?

How often do we see people taking actions which will discredit themselves?

Do you know of any modern-day examples?

Have you ever been called to be misunderstood?

Is there anyone in your life whom you cannot fathom the reasons for their actions or motives?

Might they need your grace instead of criticism?

PAST ADVENT

After reading this passage, do you have any new impressions of the account surrounding Jesus's birth?

PRESENT ADVENT

What in your life seems inconceivable yet God tells you to be unafraid?

PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for coming to this world to save us from our sins. Apart from You, we can do nothing and everything is impossible to us without You. Once again Your Word tells us to not be afraid, but it is ingrained in our nature. Help us to shed our old patterns and take on Your ways and walk fearlessly. God, You may not speak to us in the way You spoke to Mary and Joseph but You do speak. The call on our lives may cause us to look differently than we envisioned or even dreamed, we pray for strength to follow You and not be tethered by public opinion. May we hear and find You this week in the midst of the bright and shiny trappings of what we have made Christmas. May You help us to steal away time to ponder the mystery and blessing of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Week Three

The scripture reading in Week One told us Mary's relative Elizabeth is pregnant. Elizabeth will give birth to John in her old age. John will become a witness and a persistent voice telling of the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. This week let's press fast forward past Jesus' birth.

Let's focus on John, Jesus' cousin, another person who God called to live differently among his own people. We sing during this season for "every heart to prepare Him room", this was John's clarion call.

I admire John, he was a bit strange in dress and diet but he knew his purpose. He knew to fulfill his calling, he would lose followers and his position to Jesus. He embodied humility in his willingness to take a balcony seat while Jesus became center stage.

(See John 3:25-30.)

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

Stretch your arms to the ceiling and feel tension release from your body.

Read both passages slowly and if times allows two or three times.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said,
“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This
is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me,
because he was before me.’”

John 1:29 (ESV)

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and
he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of
God!” The two disciples heard him say this,
and they followed Jesus.

John 1: 35-37 (ESV)

Ponder the life of John, born to elderly parent and with a calling
to announce the coming King.

What name does John call Jesus?

How are you called to walk differently in the midst of your
world
because of Jesus?

What must decrease in your life for Christ to increase?

How can you prepare room for Jesus today?

PAST ADVENT

John lived a life pointed towards Christ.
He lived in humility and directed towards his calling.

PRESENT ADVENT

Spend a few moments thinking about this question: Does my life point others to Christ?

What are the most common topics in my conversations?

We live in a follower driven world, do you want others to follow and esteem you *or* to follow and esteem Jesus in you?

It has been evident in the lives of Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph and John, the call from God involved a surrendered life, only fitting in view of a surrendered Savior. Their lives looked radically different than those of their friends and neighbors, they lived uncommon lives.

His love has taken over our lives.

Psalm 117: 2 (MSG)

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for how a life touched by You will never look like the world. Thank You for touching us before we were born, giving us purpose. May we live a life which points others to Christ and not in our direction. May we always endeavor to allow Jesus to increase in our lives and be willing to decrease. We praise You for Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. We worship You and may we continue to prepare our hearts to be open and available to You.

Amen.

Week Four

Even if the past few weeks haven't been as you planned, you have arrived at the final week of Advent.

Well done!

If I am honest, I hope these past few weeks haven't been about perfection but embracing the Savior's presence. Jesus came to rescue us from our feeble way of living. He came to be with us.

The Message translation of the book of John says:

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

John 1: 14

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

Light a candle as a reminder, the Light is coming.

Read the passage below many times, each time emphasizing a different word.

**“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”**

Matthew 1: 23 (ESV)

**Wrap your arms around yourself and give yourself a hug.
Think of one other person who could use a hug today or a text
message of encouragement.
What is your favorite or most preferred name for Jesus? For
God?**

PAST ADVENT

**Jesus came to live on earth, to be with us.
He desired relationship, communion and communication.**

PRESENT ADVENT

Do I believe Jesus is with me?

What does it mean to be with someone?

How does this change my idea of Jesus being with me?

Where do I need Him to be with me today? This week? Next year?

Who needs me to be with them during this holiday season?

PRAYER

Thank You, Father for sending Your Son into this world to be with us. Thank You Jesus for desiring to be with us yesterday, today and forever. We welcome You Jesus to live in our hearts and lives. May we feel Your presence strongly this week and not be overcome with the parts of life which have little value and drain us of the abundant life You died to give us. May we feel renewed awe in the accounts of Your birth and worship and adore You as you deserve. Bless us during this season, bring comfort if we mourn or have illnesses and refresh us if we are weary. We love You and we pray in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Dearest Readers,

Thank you for spending the last four weeks meditating on the verses which beckon us to behold the Lamb of God.

I pray this has been an uncommon experience as you have pondered the uncommon people of the Bible and seen afresh the supremely uncommon God we are blessed to have dwell among us.

May the year ahead cause you to read His Word looking for all He intends for you to behold.

Grace and peace to you,

Helen

****Thanks for the editing help Felicia Gaskins*

~Notes~

