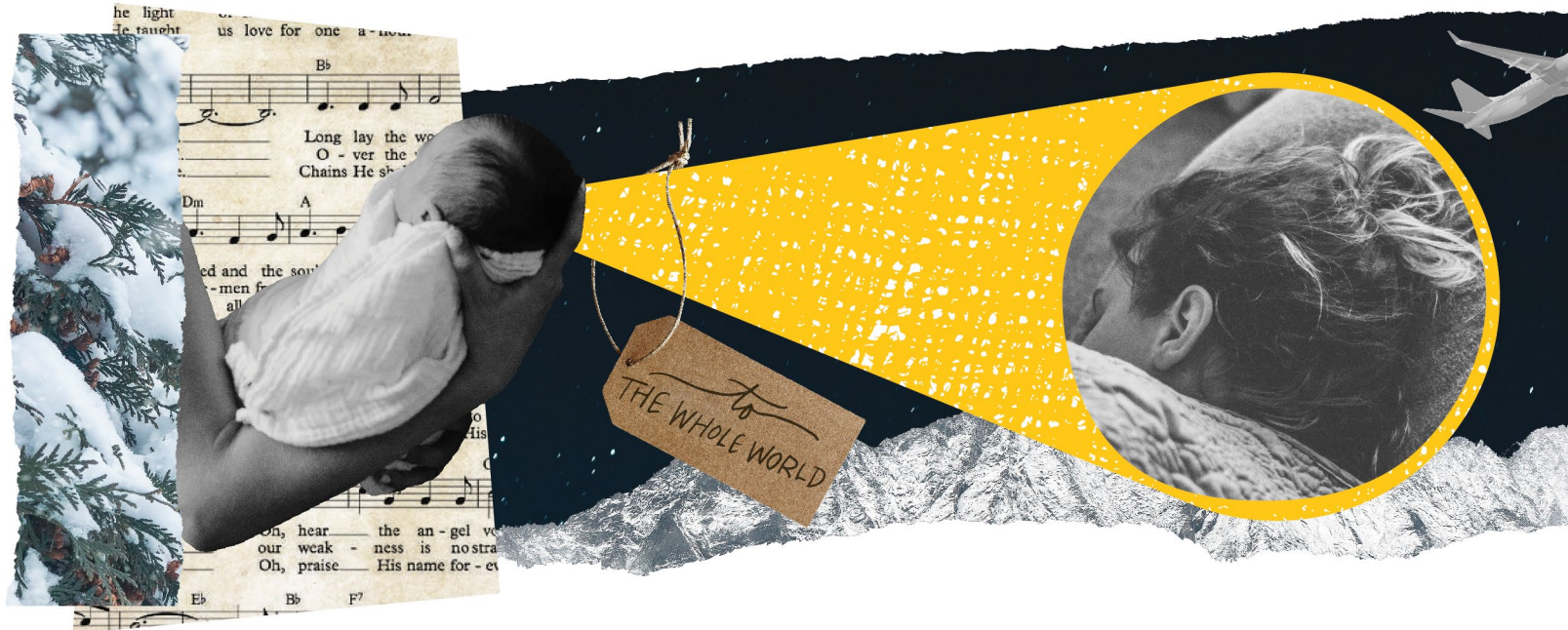




THE
WEARY WORLD
REJOICES



A 2020 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



A STRANGE SEASON

A famous Christmas carol, “O Holy Night,” has a lyric that might resonate with many of us this year: “A thrill of hope! The weary world rejoices.”

As we enter the Advent season, do you feel weary? You’re not alone.

You could even say that being weary and worn out is an acceptable place from which to approach this Advent season. Because Advent exists to remind us that, while darkness surrounds us and troubles exist, the hope of Christmas isn’t far away.

It may seem distant. It may even seem impossible this year for you to feel hopeful. You might have lost your job. Or maybe you’re feeling isolated from those you love. You may have even grieved the loss of a family member or friend.

Looking around, all you might be able to see right now is darkness. If you try to adjust your eyes, blinking into the night, there seems to be no light. The weight of sickness, death, injustice and pain seems too heavy.

Or maybe you’re just tired. Numb. Ready to pull the covers over your head and try this whole Christmas cheer thing again next year. Don’t feel guilty. Instead, acknowledge the very real darkness of this world and you’ll have eyes to see Advent through the same lens as the people waiting for a Messiah thousands of years ago.

For 500 years from their last prophet, Malachi, the people of Israel hadn’t heard anything from God about their redeemer. God’s chosen people must have cried out to him, asking how long it would be before their hope, their salvation, would arrive. It was too dark, and God seemed to be silent. Has he felt that way to you this year?

Though he may have felt far away to them, God was so much closer than his people knew — gently planning Jesus’ entrance into the world in the most unexpected way.

Over the next four weeks of Advent, we’ll reflect on four perspectives of those present at the nativity scene.



Throughout the devotional, you’ll also get to uncover some hidden surprises. Click on this star whenever you see it to uncover gems like a curated Christmas Spotify playlist, colorable ornaments and more!



BLESSED

MARY

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him."

— Luke 1:46-50 (NLT)

WEEK ONE

Mary had every right to be scared.

She was young, betrothed and now told she was pregnant. And to top it all off, the news was delivered by an angel — you know, spiritual beings that tend to terrify people.

As Mary processed the news, I can only imagine what was going through her head. Would her family disown her? Would people in town make assumptions and gossip?

Would Joseph believe any of this? Would she be rejected? Disparaged? Or worse?

But the thought Mary chose to settle on wasn't one of fear but of faith: "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true" (Luke 1:38, NLT). Later on, when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, the latter said of Mary: "You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said" (v. 45).

It would be nice to say that our typical response to fear is always Mary's response: a song of praise and hopeful expectation. But let's be real. Fear creeps into our minds and souls like the slow roll of a dark cloud before a storm. How do you respond? Retreat? Isolate? Hold your fear close to your chest and spiral into endless "what-ifs"?

Let's look at Mary's response. After Mary visited Elizabeth, she turned her attention to God in a song known as the Magnificat (which means "my soul glorifies the Lord"). There are a few things in this song that are helpful as you seek to ground yourself in hope when fear swirls around:

Mary began with praise. The whole song is about singing God's glory, and though I'm sure Mary had so many questions about what it meant to give birth to the savior of the world, she opened with rejoicing instead of concern.

Mary remembered her part in God's story. In verse 48, Mary said: "For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed" (NLT). Mary knew that God was in control; he was the one who created and empowered her. She was his creation, and that

reminder allowed Mary to focus on the truth of who she was and who he is. She was reminded that her part of the story was not the end of the story.

*Mary dispelled
fear with praise.*

Mary remembered God's goodness and justice.

Mary didn't just reflect on the blessings God bestowed or the promises he made to Israel; she reflected on how God would also set wrong things back to right (vv. 51-53).

Mary dispelled fear with praise. She put aside insecurity with the truth of who God was, remembering her role in his story. And she looked past concerns of rejection or gossip, recalling that she served a God of justice.

And because of that, Mary could hope. And so can you.

QUESTIONS

- » When have you felt overwhelmed by fear? How did you respond?
- » What emotions do you think Mary felt when the angel delivered the news?
- » How can Mary's response to God's news encourage you this Christmas?



JOSEPH

Joseph, to whom [Mary] was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ... When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

— Matthew 1:19-21, 24 (NLT)



WEEK TWO

Out of all the characters in the nativity, there is one we don't know much about: Joseph. The most we hear about him comes from Matthew's account of Jesus' birth; there, we learn that Joseph was greeted by an angel of the Lord in a dream and was told that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Joseph woke up and believed the angel.

We learn some important things about Joseph in this short passage:

Joseph was a "righteous man."

Not a lot of characters in Scripture are noted especially for their righteousness. Joseph is. When he could have made a public spectacle about Mary's perceived infidelity, Joseph showed kindness by choosing privacy. He had plans to honor Mary as a person by divorcing her secretly. Instead of shame for Mary, Joseph was willing to take the path of dignity.

Joseph was also fearful. Normally, angels scare people so much that they tell people not to fear them; however, the angel of the Lord tells Joseph to not be afraid of something different: to take Mary as his wife. Joseph was likely worried about public disgrace, humiliation and maybe even being cut off from his family. God knew that and met Joseph in the middle of that fear.

Joseph chose to believe the unbelievable. It was an unbelievable circumstance, but Joseph chose faith in God's direction over trusting the voices of his family and community. What do you think that cost him?

Joseph was willing to lose a lot in order to follow God's direction — he likely risked his reputation and relationships with friends and family.

When we look around at our world, it's tempting to think about all we risk losing if we follow what God tells us to do. And Joseph most likely had doubts and questions; he was human after all. But his questions and doubts led him back to the truth that God is in control. He was Joseph's ultimate source of truth and assurance.

God's words spoken through the angel were the only reason why Joseph was willing to take such a huge risk. God's words to you through Scripture are the reason you can step out boldly to obey him.

*God met Joseph
in the middle
of his fear.*

QUESTIONS

- » What did you know about Joseph before this study? Have your perceptions about him changed? Why or why not?
- » What can Joseph's response to his dream teach us about trusting God?
- » What is one thing God's prompting you to do but might require a risk?



The SHEPHERDS

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ... And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

— Luke 2:15-18, 20 (ESV)



WEEK THREE

Imagine being on a remote beach in the middle of the night.

Walking along the soft, cool sand of the beach, your eyes might need time to adjust to the darkness around you. There are no streetlights, no lamps, no flashlights around. But then you look at the sky and stand in awe, mesmerized by the beauty and clarity of the numerous stars. Because there's no artificial light to detract from them, these stars seem brighter and clearer than you've ever seen them.

Sometimes it takes being in total darkness to see the light that's been around us the whole time. What had been distant is now startlingly clear.

Now imagine the shepherds standing in total darkness the night that the angel came to them. They were probably yawning, scanning the dark horizon for predators that could attack their flocks. Their eyes, too, had adjusted to pitch blackness with only the night sky as their source of light.

Scripture says that when an angel appeared, "the glory of the Lord shone around [the shepherds]" (Luke 2:9b, NIV). Instantly, the shepherds were terrified. Between the angels themselves and the brilliant light of God's glory, it's understandable.

Typically these "unclean" outcasts were kept away from society, but now they were suddenly in the spotlight. They were seen. They probably never expected the news of the Messiah's birth to

come to them or that God would use shepherds to declare the arrival of the Lamb of God.

God spoke to unlikely people: to a lowly virgin girl, to her tradesman betrothed, to untouchable shepherds. These unlikely people were to become his messengers in the most unexpected ways.

Years later, more unlikely people — women — were chosen to deliver the news that Jesus had been resurrected. You might feel like an unlikely candidate, but God can use you to declare the Savior this Christmas season! He can use you to bring light that breaks through a weary, dark world.

God speaks to unlikely people.

QUESTIONS

- » When was the last time you received good news? Who delivered the news to you?
- » If you were a townspeople and received the news of Jesus' birth from a shepherd, how would you have responded?
- » God uses unlikely people to bring about his kingdom on earth. How can that fact encourage you this week?





PROMISES

OF

JOY

Angels We Have Heard!

The ANGELS

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others — the armies of heaven — praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

— Luke 2:13-14 (NLT)

WEEK FOUR

Angels are terrifying.

It's not hard to imagine since the first words angels say to humans are usually: "Don't be afraid" (Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10, etc.). Clearly, they're startling enough to warrant a physical response from humans.

We know little for sure about angels apart from the fact that they're spiritual beings. They seem to serve a variety of roles, from warriors to guardians to heralds used by God to deliver his messages. They're messengers in the Christmas story. An angel appeared to Zechariah.

And then a named angel, Gabriel, appeared to Mary to tell her that she would give birth to God's son. An angel then appeared to Joseph in a dream to let him know about this news too.

The next time an angel appeared in this story, it was to shepherds in a field. We spent time talking about shepherds and how we can learn from their example, but what about the angels? What do they have to teach us about joy in the midst of uncertainty?

The angels were joyful because they had an advantage: they knew the king arriving that night and the hope he would bring mankind. They knew what the weary world did not yet know: hope was coming.

This was a pivotal moment in human history, and this group of angels came together to declare the best news the shepherds would ever hear.

The "vast host" was a vast number of the Lord's spiritual servants. You might even call it a

heavenly community reflective of the community of believers who will one day be praising God before his throne together (Revelation 7:9).

We know the rest of the story because we have the Bible. We know that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah (Acts 4:10-12) and that he died for our sins and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:4). We know he's sitting at God's right hand (Romans

8:34) and will return for us again (John 14:3). We can rejoice in this truth!

The vast host of angels rejoiced together. The shepherds received that joy and spread it to others. Light was spreading, illuminating

the darkness. In the midst of your own dark times, you might think that you can't find words of joy and hope within yourself to lift to God. In those times, you can reach out to others in God's community so they can encourage you by declaring his promises over you.

*Light was
spreading,
illuminating
the darkness.*

QUESTIONS

- » What were you taught about angels growing up? How has your understanding of angels changed as you've studied the Bible more?
- » Who are people you've reached out to in dark or uncertain times in your life? What was their response?
- » Who is someone you can "sing God's promises over" this week?



A THRILL OF HOPE

Mary, Joseph and the shepherds couldn't have known the roles they'd play in a story that's foundational to our faith as Christians. But when nothing around them seemed to make sense, when the world felt weary and hopeless, they clung to the promises of God and trusted in his goodness. Then they shared about that goodness with others. Little by little, hope spread.

We've all been hit by hard times. Weariness weighs us down. But one of the best things we

can do to lift our spirits this Advent season is to do what the characters in the nativity did and spread Christmas hope and joy to those around us. Thanks to technology, we can do that even when we're apart!

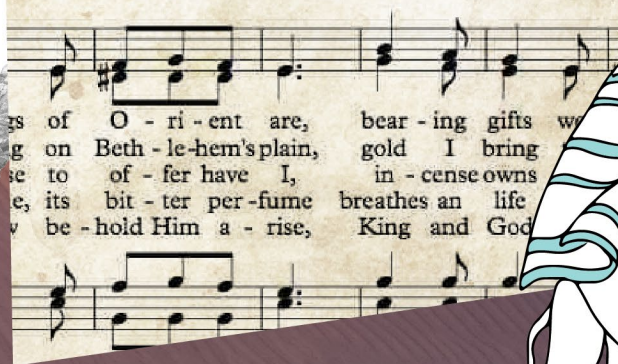
Spread some love and encouragement this Christmas season to your friends, family and even missionaries serving around the world at wycliffe.org/encouragement.





however many magi

We ~~Three~~ Kings



gs of O - ri - ent are, bear - ing gifts w
g on Beth - le - hem's plain, gold I bring
se to of - fer have I, in - cense owns
e, its bit - ter per - fume breathes an life
v be - hold Him a - rise, King and God

FUN FACT!

Nativities usually include three “wise men,” but they actually weren’t present at the birth of Jesus and likely didn’t meet him for a few years (Matthew 2:11). Also, we don’t know how many magi (who were not kings, FYI) there were. So ... sorry, you guys. We didn’t include you in this devo.

