



I think I can finally admit that Advent is my favorite time of year, but probably not for the reason you think. Yes, Advent is a season of preparation for the birth of Jesus at Christmas and the anticipation of his coming again, but Advent is also a unique time that makes space for our own hopes and longings, our own anticipation for the restoration of the world within and around us. As we wait for Hope to arrive we can't help but look at where Hope is needed most. Advent is a time of year built into our churchly rhythms that acknowledges everything is not okay. Advent can be a time to hold all of our unanswered prayers and doubts and lingering questions together while daring to hope that the Christ who has come will come again. It is a season that allows us to examine our collective longing for the redemption of pain, sorrow, and brokenness, but this is hard work.

Daring to hope is hard work – and this is why I love Advent. Advent reminds me to hope when I have forgotten how.

Advent is my favorite time of year because it dares me to hope. During Advent I dare to hope that even though things are not "okay" that they will be, one way or another, because of God's love. During Advent I dare to hope that my unanswered prayers will not go unheard by God and so I will say them again and again. During Advent I dare to hope that Hope will come to restore what needs mending.

Will you do the hard work of Advent this year? Will you dare to hope alongside me?

For centuries, the people of God have dared to hope. It's just what we do, and while the voices of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John are distinct as they take an account of Jesus' life, their words are witness to the hope that is found in Jesus Christ. This year the Spiritual Life staff has written the Advent Devotions as we journey through Advent with the gospel writers and explore themes of wilderness, messiness, hospitality, and darkness.

My prayer is that you will dare to hope this Advent season.

Love, Louisa

Louisa Ward
Campus Minister



December 1, 2019

Mark 1:9-13

"The wilderness isn't a zip code. It's a spiritual condition." – Thomas Are

Mark's gospel is different than you might expect to be reading during the Advent season. There is no birth narrative, no story of Jesus being swaddled in cloth lying in a manger, no Christmas. But if you read it a few times and look just beneath the surface you begin to see a glimpse of why we celebrate Christmas.

In Mark we meet Jesus at his baptism as he is coming up out of the water. In that moment God is lavishing Jesus with praises; "you are cherished, you are chosen, you are my delight, in you I am well pleased." Then, Jesus is immediately sent out into the wilderness. Normally when I think of the Advent season I think of joy and hope, not wilderness. I want to celebrate the birth of Jesus, not the dry, desolate wasteland, but I just can't bypass Jesus in the wilderness.

During Christmas we celebrate Jesus because he is the love of God come to us in the flesh. What this means for Mark is that the love of God has come to walk through the wilderness of life with us – in the flesh. I know what the "wilderness" has looked like in my life and because Jesus went into the wilderness there is cause for celebration, even if the only thing worth celebrating is the hope of knowing that Jesus is with us in our wilderness too.

Often it takes intentionality to find Jesus in the places of wilderness. His presence is not always as obvious as we would hope. Take a few moments to sit and reflect. When have you have felt Jesus walking with you in the wilderness? Do you know what the "wilderness" looks like in your life?

For all who are walking in the wilderness, I pray during this Advent season that you find moments of celebration and hope, and that Jesus will draw near to you and make his presence known.

Caitlyn Rogers
Associate Campus Minister for Missions and Ministry



December 8, 2019

Matthew 1:1-7, 15-16

"The secret to joy is to keep seeking God where we doubt he is." – Ann Voscamp

Genealogies are rarely thought to be exciting reading. Frankly, we usually gloss right over all of these names when reading the Christmas story. Perhaps we would approach it differently if we considered the question Matthew is seeking to answer, "Who is Jesus the Christ?" The very first verse gives us an outline. "Jesus the" Christ positions Jesus as the Messiah, God come to be with us. The second phrase, "son of David," positions Jesus as royalty from birth, as someone claiming undue power. The last phrase, "son of Abraham," takes Jesus lineage back 40 generations in the Jewish story with God. In other words, Jesus was a new beginning, from the covenant with Abraham through David to this humble story of birth.

To many first century Christians Jesus arrival was probably was less glorious than they expected. They had expected an earthly king, and instead got Jesus, one who never described himself as king. There was no great uprising. Instead, just a way of being that would turn the Jewish and Roman worlds upside down. There was no revolution of sword, but rather a redefining of what it means to love God and your neighbor.

I wonder if we miss this when we tell the story of Jesus birth without the genealogy. Here is the Savior of the world whose birth we celebrate in honoring a humble manger. The idea of finding the descendant of Abraham and David in such a place must have been stunning for the early church. Maybe it still is for the church today. What does it mean to find power in humility and service? What does it mean to find joy in "less than ideal" situations? What does it mean to find hope in one from a foreign land? What does it mean to find love in a child who would eventually find death in hatred?

And so, we wait with expectation for the Christ child. This year as you wait, look for God and God's blessings in unexpected places. Look for where your questions might find answers in humility, the less than ideal, the stranger, and where love trumps hate.

Dear God, from such humble begins you changed the world. Begin a season of change in my heart to seek peace, joy, hope and love rather than power as defined by the world. Thank you for a Savior that turned the world upside down. Amen.

Brian Foreman

Executive Director, Community Engagement and Leadership

Executive Director, Center for Church and Community



December 15, 2019

Luke 2:1-7

Do you have a nativity scene in your home? I have two—one handmade by my Mother and another I bought in Cape Town, South Africa. Both sets are precious and hold wonderful memories for me. When I put them out each year, I feel as though they are as personal and real to me as my own family. Luke 2:1-7 is where the nativity comes to life for us. It is the place where Jesus, the Christ child, is born. It is the place where the promise of the Messiah is fulfilled in the birth of a baby. It is not just a particular story of baby named Jesus born to Mary and Joseph in a less than ideal place; it is the story of us. The story of Emmanuel, God with us, come to live among us here on earth.

Luke's gospel invites us to know Jesus as God living and breathing among us. In Luke, Jesus spends his time with lepers, the poor, women, Samaritans and so many others. The One for whom there was no room spent his life making room for the marginalized, for those who needed to feel compassion and love and to know the promise of hope. The stories told in Luke are of Jesus meeting people in the midst of their hurt and suffering, offering the assurance of his presence with them. They were people who needed to know they were loved and part of this Kingdom of God, a kingdom nothing like the chaos of the world in which they lived.

We too, are like those in the gospel of Luke who need to experience the profound love of God through Christ and know the promise of hope is real. But these days of Advent waiting invite us to wonder where or how we are making room for Jesus. Sometimes making space is challenging work. It calls us to sort through our own lives in order to discover what is necessary, what gives life to us and the people around us, and what leads us into God's presence. And even when believe we have made room for God, it sometimes feels as though his presence is lost in the burdens we carry. What does it look like for God's presence and love to fill the places of difficulty, doubt, and fear in you? What does it mean for the Christ child to be born anew in the chaos of the world in which we live today?

This is our story. One that begins with the empire bringing a young couple to Bethlehem for the census but makes a way for each one of us to participate in the coming of a child who will make room for us all. It is the story of God come in flesh to live in and with us. It is the story of Jesus who invites us to sit with him, be his companion, and welcome us to a grand story of God's love that makes a place for us all.

May our prayer be our song:

Joy to the world, the Lord is come, Let earth receive her King Let every heart prepare Him room, And Heaven and nature sing And Heaven and nature sing, And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Faithe Beam
Associate Vice President for Spiritual Life



December 22, 2019

John 1:1-5

The seed is in the ground.

Now may we rest in hope
While darkness does its work.

- Wendell Berry

By this point in December, even the most curmudgeonly among us have bowed to the pressure of the Christmas season and adorned their homes with festive, twinkling lights. It's the time of year to pack the family into the car and drive through local neighborhoods in search of the most beautiful, symbolic, and occasionally bizarre expressions of the Christmas spirit, blazing through the frigid nights with warm hues of red and green. As soon as the sun sets, millions of lights come on across the world to fend off darkness for just a few more hours.

I wonder what John would think about our Christmas lights. After he got past the shock of modern technology, I have to imagine he'd question our motives for such displays. "The lights are truly something," John whispers from the passenger seat on an evening drive, "but I feel like they'd be even more meaningful if they came on at midnight and ushered in the morning. That may get the point across better, don't you think?" It's an interesting concept: that Jesus didn't enter onto the scene in the last moments of light to hold back the darkness, but rather, Jesus arrives in the darkest hour. In the middle of the night, in the center of our tumultuous and often fearful lives, in the midst of questions and despair, a light comes into the world. And that Light shines. It doesn't push back darkness and hardship beyond our horizons, but it also isn't extinguished or hidden. The seed of God's Kingdom is planted in the darkest soil of our lives in Advent, but the promise of Christmas is that the seed is growing upwards towards us. Even though we can't see the seed beneath the soil, we nurture it, hope in it, and trust in God, because even now we witness the first leaves emerging from the earth.

God is with us, even in the dark, and nothing can threaten our hope for the morning.

Are you trying to hold onto a ray of sunshine? Is your faith like a Christmas light, desperately fighting against the sunset? This Advent, I want you to know that it's okay. If you need to hold onto that glimmer of light, of certainty, of security, I understand. Perhaps you feel like you lost your grip on hope a while back. Either way, my prayer for you is simple: May God remind you of where our hope is coming from. Do not search the horizon so ardently for light that you miss the sapling of resurrection growing in your midst. The light that came on Christmas is still shining. Amen.

Colin Kroll
Associate Campus Minister
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December 24, 2019

Imagine what it would be like if Mark, Matthew, Luke or John decorated your house for Christmas based on how they tell the story of Jesus' birth.

The Gospel of Mark begins with Jesus as an adult heading into the wilderness. Mark gets right down to business and I imagine his decorating is as efficient as his writing. Basic. Straightforward. A single Christmas tree – if he must.

A family reunion is how Matthew's gospel starts, so there are definitely photo albums out and ornaments with pictures of your kids on the tree. Matthew wants to remind you of the family Jesus comes from and that we are all children of God.

In the Gospel of Luke, Luke invites us into the manger itself. I imagine that he collects nativity sets and wants to fill every available space he can with a different depiction of the manger scene. It's important to Luke that there is space for you in the story of God.

John's gospel is decidedly different from the others and so are his decorations. No inflatable shepherds or magi or angels here. Instead he puts a candle in each window and set out luminaries along your driveway. There is light to be seen and John wants to make sure you don't miss it.

Each of the gospels introduces Jesus to the world in a distinct way, but they all offer hope. Regardless of how you have decorated your home for Christmas you also have the opportunity to introduce Jesus to the world in a distinct way. You can offer hope to others too. You can bring hope by telling about your own "wilderness" times, by reminding others that Christ can be found in the most unlikely of places, by creating space and welcoming those who seem to be pushed to the margin, or by learning to live in dark and knowing the Light of the World is in the dark with you.

May hope bring you into Christmas rejoicing that Emmanuel has come.

Louisa Ward Campus Minister



Spiritual Life