



THE
Christmas
CONUNDRUM

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2024



he word “conundrum” is an interesting word. According to the dictionary, conundrum means a confusing and difficult problem or question. There is an underlying conundrum in Advent, which is best expressed with this simple question: Why did Jesus come to die for sinful, depraved people like you and me? This is a vexing question because no one is willing to admit that they are utterly and hopelessly lost in sin. It is in our very nature to think we can earn God’s favor and forgiveness. Each person thinks they are good enough for heaven. Yet, God the Father sent Jesus to explain Himself and to explain our need of a savior. Advent isn’t really a conundrum if you understand the Father’s plan was for Jesus to die for sinful people like you and me.

The answer to the conundrum is clearly seen in the four Sundays of Advent. Jesus came to give us hope for this life and the next. We were living hopelessly until the message of Jesus broke into our lives telling us of the living hope. Jesus offers real hope, not wishful thinking. Jesus came to give us peace with God. Without Jesus we were at odds with God; enemies with the creator of all things. Jesus’ death removed the enmity between us and God replacing it with peace. Now, because of our peace with God, we can find peace with one another. Jesus came to reveal God’s unconditional love. God is love, and He demonstrated that love by giving Jesus as a sacrifice. The nature of God’s love is defined in this way; love wants the best for another person. Understanding God’s love allows us to properly love those in our circle of influence. Finally, Jesus came to give sinful people true joy, not merely happy circumstances. Jesus’ coming to earth showed us a great and unfathomable joy.

The 1st Sunday of Advent December 1:

Hope

The conundrum of Jesus' birth is best expressed in the old hymn, "I wonder as I wander." Take a couple of moments during this first week of Advent to consider what this old hymn is saying. As a side note, the meaning of the word which is contracted "orn'ry" in line three, is hotly debated. Most people today read that as ornery or stubborn. However, if you take it in the context of its Appalachian roots, the word could possibly mean "plain or ordinary." Most scholars who study this type of thing, agree it could mean both stubborn and ordinary. I think both meanings work well in the song. Mankind is ordinary and stubborn compared to the extraordinariness of Jesus. This understanding of the word leads us to wonder why God would send His Son to die for ordinary, stubborn people like you and me. Enjoy the lyrics below.

*I wonder as I wander, out under the sky,
how Jesus the Savior did come for to die
for poor orn'ry people like you and like I;
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.*

*When Mary birthed Jesus, 'twas in a cow's stall
with wise men and farmers and shepherd and all,
but high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
and the promise of ages it did then recall.*

*If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
a star in the sky, or a bird on the wing,
or all of God's angels in heaven for to sing,
he surely could have it, 'cause he was the King.*

*I wonder as I wander, out under the sky,
how Jesus the Savior did come for to die
for poor ordinary people like you and like I;
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.*

The 1st Sunday of Advent December 1: ***Hope***

Advent is observed using a wreath as a centerpiece, with four candles representing the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Place the four candles in the wreath, one for each Sunday/week, and a fifth (the Christ candle) in the center which is lit on Christmas day. The four candles are typically red, and the Christ candle is typically white. The light of the candles reminds us that Jesus is the Light of the World and those who follow Him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life

(John 8:12). Light the first candle of the Advent wreath as you sit down to dinner each night of the first week. The sermon this week was taken from Titus 2:11-14. Make time to talk about how our hope is in God's promise of redemption. Each night during the week, begin to take some time to talk about and memorize Titus 2:11.

- * How would you define hope to someone who has none?**
- * How does the birth of the Savior give us hope?**
- * Do you find the incarnation a great conundrum? Why or why not?**

FAMILY ACTIVITY:

As a family make two Christmas wreaths out of evergreen pieces. Weave some red holly berries or some red ribbon in the evergreen. Remind yourself of the meaning behind the parts of the wreath. The wreath gives us hope for three reasons. First, the circle is picture of God's eternal nature, because a circle has no beginning and no end. Secondly, the red parts you add are reminders of the sacrifice Jesus made to pay for our sin. Third, the evergreens are a symbol of eternal life. Hang one wreath where it reminds you of the living hope we have in God. Give the second wreath to a neighbor and explain why the wreath is a reminder of hope.

The 2nd Sunday of Advent December 8: *Peace*

Take some time this week to consider the conundrum of Jesus' birth; the Son of God condescending to put on human flesh. Read and re-read the following meditation by Stephen Charnock:

“What a wonder is it that two natures infinitely distant should be more intimately united than anything in the world, and yet without any confusion! That the same person should have both a glory and a grief; an infinite joy in the Deity, and an inexpressible sorrow in the humanity; that a God upon a throne should be an infant in a cradle; the thundering Creator be a weeping babe and a suffering man. These are such expressions of mighty power, as well as condescending love, that they astonish men upon earth and angels in heaven.”

Light the first candle and the second candle in the advent wreath as you sit down to dinner each night. The sermon Sunday was taken from Romans 5:1-5. Make sure to talk about the hope and the peace we have through Jesus. Each night during the week, review the previous week's memory verse and begin to memorize Romans 5:1.

- *List three things which rob us of peace. Now, give those things to God in prayer.
- *Does the fact that you have peace with God, through Jesus Christ, change how you look at life? Why or why not?
- *How does receiving the Holy Spirit give you peace?

FAMILY ACTIVITY:

Invite some friends to go Christmas Caroling up and down your street and look for opportunities to talk about the hope and peace we can have in Jesus.

The 3rd Sunday of Advent December 15: *Love*

Pause a couple of times during the rush of this week to consider the conundrum of Jesus' birth to Mary and Joseph, in the insignificant town of Bethlehem. The following meditation by Martin Luther will aid you in considering this conundrum.

“When they [Mary and Joseph] arrived at Bethlehem, they were the most insignificant and despised . . . No one noticed or was conscious of what God was doing in that stable. He lets the large houses and costly apartments remain empty, lets their inhabitants eat, drink, and be merry; but this comfort and treasure are hidden from them. O what a dark night this was for Bethlehem, that was not conscious of that glorious light! See how God shows that he utterly disregards what the world is, has, or desires; and furthermore, that the world shows how little it knows or notices what God is, has, and does.”

Each night, light the first two candles and then the third candle on the advent wreath. Use the candles to talk about God's hope, peace and love. The sermon Sunday was taken from 1 John 4:7-12. Make sure to talk about the hope, the peace, and the love God extends to us. Each night during the week, review the previous week's memory verses, and begin to memorize 1 John 4:9.

- *How was God's love revealed to us?
- *How does God's love for us change the way we should live?
- *Is it important to understand that Jesus was our propitiation? Why or why not?

FAMILY ACTIVITY:

Make Christmas Cards expressing God's love for the neighbors on your street.

The 4th Sunday of Advent December 22:

Joy

Pause several times this week and give some thought to John Chrysostom's mediation on the conundrum of Jesus' birth:

"This day He who is, is born; and He who is becomes what He was not."

Each night, light the first three candles and then the fourth candle on the advent wreath. Use the candles to talk about God's hope, peace, love, and joy. The sermon this week was taken from Luke 2:8-11. Make sure to talk about the hope, the peace, the love, and the joy we have after we trust in Jesus. Each night during the week, review the previous week's memory verses, and begin to memorize Luke 2:10&11.

***Make a list of all the things God has done for your family and rejoice because of God's goodness.**

***How is it possible to rejoice always?**

***Why was the birth of Jesus good news of great joy?**

FAMILY ACTIVITY:

Take a walk after dinner and enjoy the lights on your neighbor's houses.

Christmas Day

The first Advent of Christ changed everything. Jesus' coming is not a conundrum, but a blessing beyond what anyone could ever imagine. God, for reasons known only to Him, demonstrated His love for mankind, and while we were sinners, He sent Jesus Christ to die for us. When you understand the full import of God's actions, Christmas is no longer a conundrum. God, in the fullness of time, sent His Son to bring hope, peace, love, and joy to those who believe and put their faith in Jesus Christ. It is in Christ where we find release from our sins and rest from our fears. His coming was not early or late, but at the exact time God meant Him to arrive. Join the angels and rejoice this Advent season, a savior is born for all people!

The waiting is over, and Christmas Day has arrived. It is time to celebrate and rejoice as we remember God's perfect timing. Jesus was born in God's perfect timing, so that we might have a Savior. In our celebration, we also look to the future and wait on God's perfect timing for Jesus Christ to come again.

On Christmas morning, make room in your celebration to worship our Great God. Later, as you sit down to eat with family and friends, make sure to light all four candles and the Christ candle in the middle of your Advent Wreath. In the course of conversation, try to recall your memory verses from the previous four weeks of Advent.

Merry Christmas!

grace